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The symbolism of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*: an inductive approach

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THE SYMBOLISM OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*: AN
INDUCTIVE APPROACH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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*For My Beloved Grandparents,
Guy and Mary Johnson*

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UC Santa Barbara, which has digitized many public-domain popular songs of the early twentieth century—many of which appear in Williams’ plays—and published them online, and I am also grateful for Indiana University’s online sheet music collection. I must also thank the staff members at Microsoft who, with the constantly evolving features of Word, have changed the way we write.

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Truth [. . .] came once into the world with her divine master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who as that story goes of the Ægyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as dare appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, [. . .] nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mold them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.

My professors' contention was that Truth has been scattered broadcast throughout the cosmos and in every field in this very manner, and that it is our joy and privilege to recover the pieces of this priceless trust. I have found so much of it in Williams.

I wish to thank my friends at Park Cities Baptist Church and Lake Pointe Church for their loving support and encouragement. I also wish to thank Mike and Sylvia Johnson, my uncle and aunt, for their hospitality, for providing me with such great working accommodations, and most crucially, for their love and friendship. As for my parents and siblings—what can I say? They are the ones who taught me to analyze and think critically about everything. More importantly,

they have loved me deeply all my life, and introduced me to Jesus, who has redeemed me and adopted me into his kingdom, the genesis of the single most important relationship in my life.

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More than anyone else, I wish to acknowledge my Savior, Friend and King, the Lord God Almighty.

Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν

In him we live and move and have our being.

(Acts 17.28)

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ABSTRACT

Williams expressed himself in the language of symbols. They were not ornaments to his work, but were to his mind the only satisfactory means of expressing himself as an artist, and predate almost every other consideration in the process of composition. Characterization, dialogue, plot and setting were all selected based on their potential to represent symbolically his identity and experience, and more specifically, the conflict between spirit and flesh which he felt had come to define him. However, before transforming his life into symbols, he attempted to abstract the world of his experience into something pure, something elemental and universal, as he insisted all artists should.

The imagery of stasis is his primary symbol for spirituality and innocence, whereas the imagery of flux, particularly of rivers flowing into oceans, is his symbol for carnality. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Laura and her glass figures represent spirit, while her brother Tom, who abandons her and becomes a sailor, represents flesh. Laura also represents things Williams considered related to spirituality: the Old South, romantic idealists, and what he calls those “small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive,” entities which time, industrialism, and the modern world ultimately destroy. Virtually every element of the play serves as a symbol which amplifies the struggle between Laura and all she signifies and the forces ranged in opposition to her. In his discussion, Barnard analyzes each character in turn, explicating those symbols which pertain to him or her; thereafter, he shows how these symbols interact as the play draws to a close.

INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Williams is one of America's most celebrated playwrights, and he is certainly America's greatest dramatic symbolist. His work is suffused with symbolism, which he himself avers: In *Where I Live*, he describes his plays as relying on "metaphorical ways of expression" (146). He also says that "symbols are nothing but the natural speech of drama [. . .] the purest language of plays" (66). In 1950, he even wrote that "[a]rt is made out of symbols the way your body is made out of vital tissue" (45). This is true of his plays on the minutest level. Virtually every line contains its symbol, and typically, each of these is the component of a larger symbolic theme, part of an overarching symbolic motif. It is precisely this symbolic system which I wish to describe.

The Glass Menagerie is one of Williams' greatest plays and one of the most intense in terms of symbolism. The very title of the play is a symbol, and symbols occupy almost every sentence. However, despite the clear presence of symbols, no one has ever explicated the play's symbolism in its entirety. One particularly large critical gap is the absence of a full-scale inductive approach. One of the best analyses of Williams' symbolism to date is Judith Thompson's *Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol*. Her section on *The Glass Menagerie* is particularly illuminating, and I refer to her work often. However, to a great extent, her approach is deductive, in that it proceeds from Jungian assumptions. Whereas she begins with a set of myths and archetypes which she searches for within the play, I start with the play itself, and discuss those symbols which make themselves apparent.

I attempt to pursue—roughly—the induction of the sciences. Just as scientists begin with the physical world and attempt to formulate theories which account for its existence and order, I begin with the text, particularly with its imagery, and attempt to formulate theories which

account for its appearance and order, particularly the appearance and order of various symbols. Although admittedly the designation of an instance of imagery as a symbol is somewhat subjective, I attempt to adduce enough evidence to remove the greater measure of doubt. I use a similar approach in speaking of symbols both as they remain constant in time and as they change over time, over the course of the narrative. It is perhaps clear by now that my approach is based on a close reading of the text, that it is squarely in the tradition of New Criticism. It has been said that an analyst applying New Criticism to a text needs only the text itself and a dictionary as a tool. I have used this approach, using Williams' entire oeuvre as my text, and a variety of reference sources as my tools.

In establishing my main points, I do at times make use of critics' assertions about Williams' work. This certainly would not be consistent with induction if I relied heavily on these statements, but I try always to use the text from Williams' narratives and poems as evidence while using their statements about them merely as complements. I use Williams' own statements about his work similarly. He states facts which I discovered independently, but naturally, he expresses these facts much more eloquently and concisely than I could, and because he was certainly knowledgeable about his work, his comments are not without weight.

The Transformation of Experience into Art

One important reason why the symbolism of *The Glass Menagerie* has been neglected for the most part is the play's being so famously autobiographical. There are innumerable parallels between it and Williams' own life. For instance, "Tom," the name of one of the characters, is Williams' legal name. Williams was a writer employed in a shoe warehouse, a job he hated, much like Tom (Leverich 129). Williams had a friend named Jim Connor, just as Tom has a friend named Jim O'Connor. Williams also went to the movies incessantly, as Tom does, where

there were organ concerts and vaudeville acts, as there are at the beginning of scene 4 (Leverich 143, *Theatre* 1: 166-67). At one point, Edwina refused to believe Williams was going to the movies, and this caused him to explode, parallel to the situation at the end of scene 3 (Leverich 145, *Theatre* 1: 164-65). Leverich even suggests that the entire last act of GM was based on fact, though he does not provide his sources or explain why he thinks so (142). Finally, as we have seen, Williams left home and become a wanderer, as Tom does. Regarding the Williamses generally, both they and the Wingfields lived in an apartment in St. Louis. Rose, Williams' sister, went to Rubicam's Business College, just as Laura does. In addition to all of this, many of the objects of the play derive from Williams' life, including the glass menagerie itself. Interviewer Jean Evans learned that in the Williams family apartment, Williams' "sister's sunless little room overlooked an alley and Williams helped her paint the walls and furniture white, and install her collection of glass animals, making a place of white and crystal in the midst of squalor" (*Conversations* 17).

Williams, however, was a master of his craft precisely because of his almost instinctive disposition to transform the world of his experience into art. Lyle Leverich, his foremost biographer, speaks of this. Referring to the opening night of the production of *The Glass Menagerie* (hereafter GM), he writes:

What [Williams' mother] Edwina was witnessing was in no real sense an autobiographical account of Tom's family life in St. Louis. It was a transmutation created by the artist who had taken refuge in the identity of Tennessee Williams—for it is true, as critic Frank Rich has said, that "anyone can write an autobiography, but only an artist knows how to remake his past so completely, by refracting it through a different aesthetic lens." (560)

Williams himself speaks of this transmutation of biographical elements. In his essay "Prelude to a Comedy," he declares the importance of a writer's "transposing the contents of his life into a

creative synthesis of it. Only in this way can a writer justify his life and work and I think all serious writers know this and their serious audience has a sense of it too” (*Where I Live* 126).

Williams even had a habit of transposing his life into art while ostensibly writing autobiography. In other words, he often stretched the truth. In 1943, before the production of *GM*, he wrote:

[W]hen I [. . .] had employment in the warehouse of a wholesale shoe corporation, I formed the habit of retiring to a closet of the lavatory and spending unconscionably long periods of time working out rhyme schemes. When such unbusinesslike practices were exposed to the boss, I was slated for early dismissal and have never regained any standing in the commercial world for more than a few weeks’ time. (*Where I Live* 2).

This is actually Tom’s story in *GM*. Williams’ superiors were, in fact, unable to fire him because they had secured their jobs via his father. Williams was not fired; he resigned his post on doctor’s orders because of a nervous breakdown he had suffered. He could say with Blanche, the protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, “I don’t tell truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!” (*Theatre* 1: 385).

In a later essay, he speaks of the transformation into art of objects and events in his life relative to symbolism in particular: “Some critics resent my symbols, but let me ask, what would I do without them? Without my symbols I might still be employed by the International Shoe Co. in St. Louis. Let me go further and say that unless the events of a life are translated into significant meanings, then life holds no more revelation than death, and possibly even less” (*Where I Live* 142). His disposition to transform the world of his experience into symbols can be found throughout his writing: For instance, in his *Memoirs*, he transforms the quality of a photograph of his into a symbol. Speaking of a crease in a picture of his paternal grandfather, a man who never became an especially prominent public figure, he says, “[T]he crack across the face in the photograph is a touch of accidental symbolism, as it was not till this handsome but

improvident descendant of the Williams-Sevier-Lanier line that things began to go wrong” (illus. 14). This disposition of his to convert experience into art—here the conversion of a crack into a symbol—can be found in *The Glass Menagerie* as well. Earlier in his *Memoirs*, he speaks of his old neighborhood in St. Louis as being an “ugly region of hive-like apartment buildings [. . .] and fire escapes” (16). In GM, these “vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units” feature fire escapes which are a “touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation” (*Theatre* 1: 143). Clearly, the tendency to transform the world of his experience into symbols was pronounced in him.

My analysis suggests that he pursued the following course in crafting his symbols: First he introspected to find those forces which are central to the human experience, to what it means to be human. The search for universal truth, particularly insight into human nature (the “revelation” he speaks of above), is what drives him, so this is the most crucial step. Experience is also important, because he tends to follow the narrative of these forces as they lose or gain prominence during the course of his life: In 1981, he described his work as being “*emotionally autobiographical*. It has no relationship to the actual events of my life, but it reflects the emotional currents of my life” (*Conversations* 342). He describes this search for what is deepest in his nature a “distillation”; in 1958 he wrote, “If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man who wrote it. It isn’t so much his mirror as it is the distillation, the essence, of what is strongest and purest in his nature, whether that be gentleness or anger, serenity or torment, light or dark. This makes it deeper than the surface likeness of a mirror and that much more truthful” (*Where I Live* 100). Two years later, he wrote, “Deny the art of our time its only spring, which is the true expression of its passionately personal problems and their purification

through work, and you will be left with a soil of such aridity that not even a cactus plant could flower upon it” (*Where I Live* 120).

Having distilled these forces within himself, he takes objects from the outer world of his experience and uses them as signifiers for these forces, as with his sister’s glass menagerie, which becomes a symbol of the spirituality and innocence of his past, as we shall see. The process whereby these internal forces are allied with material objects was actually a natural one for Williams. He speaks of this process in a 1961 essay:

Symbols and their meanings must be arrived at through a period of time which is often a long one, requiring much patience, but if you wait out this period of time, if you permit it to clear as naturally as a sky after a storm, it will reward you, finally, with a puzzle which is still puzzling but which whether you fathom it or not, still has the beautifully disturbing sense of truth, as much of that ambiguous quality as we are permitted to know in all our seasons and travels and places of short stay on this risky planet. (*Where I Live* 146)

From this, one can see why most of his symbols are metaphors—because material objects from the outside world suggest themselves to him as he becomes familiar with the nature of the deepest forces within him, so that there is a natural rather than an arbitrary link between signifier and signified.

Williams thus expressed himself in the language of symbols. They were not ornaments to his work, but were to his mind the only satisfactory means of expressing himself as an artist, and predate almost every other consideration in the process of composition. Characterization, dialogue, plot and setting were all selected based on their potential to represent symbolically his identity and experience. However, before transforming his life into symbols, he attempted to abstract the world of his experience into something pure, something elemental and universal, as he insisted all artists should.

Symbolism and Realism

Williams' work is so dominated by symbolism, and it forms such an integral part of the structures of his plays, that some have called them allegories. Williams himself does so, at one point saying that the struggle between virtue and corruption is the "basic, allegorical theme" of his plays as a whole (*Where I Live* 91). Yet if GM and his other plays are allegories, they are not *merely* allegories. Though some characters are more complex than others, he rarely creates stock characters for the purposes of symbolism. He is, in fact, steadfast in his determination to depict the complexity of human nature, which is precisely what drives his artistry generally, including his creation of symbols. Paradoxically, then, there are two sides to his characters. They are both wholly symbols and wholly realistic, a tension best illustrated in the character of Jim. Tom says that he is a "symbol," the "long-delayed but always expected something that we live for," yet he is also flesh-and-blood, as he jokes with Laura and reveals himself to be both narcissistic and supportive. Williams even calls him "the most realistic character in the play" (*Theatre* 1: 145).

Often Williams' characters are a challenge to critics because of this very duality, a difficulty which director/critic Geoffrey Borny addresses:

There seems to be little problem for critics and directors when dealing with either overtly realistic or overtly symbolic dramas. It is only in plays like *The Glass Menagerie* where realism and nonrealism are mixed, where, as Wimsatt puts it, "the order of images follows or apparently follows the lines of representational necessity . . . or probability, though at the same time a symbolic significance is managed" that problems of interpretation seem to occur. (107)

He concludes that critics and producers should emphasize both the plays' realism and their symbolism. This is what he attempted in his production of GM:

In directing *The Glass Menagerie* Reading Edition I did not undervalue the realistic characterization because any attempt to make symbolic puppets of characters like Amanda, Tom or Laura would be to make a travesty of the play. However, by equally emphasizing the nonrealistic and metafictional elements, I hoped to avoid the trap noted by Juneja when he accurately pointed out that "in

The Glass Menagerie it is the warm flesh and blood humanity of three-dimensional characters that tends to mask the philosophic import of the play.” (107-08)

Borny points out that this dual emphasis is in keeping with the objectives of Williams, who concentrates so much of his efforts on a play’s “philosophic import”: “Williams does not see his function as an artist simply in terms of putting life on stage. He follows Aristotle’s view that ‘poetry [art] is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts’” (Borny’s brackets, 106-107). Again, Williams does not necessarily convey historical truth, but with what *ought* to be the truth.

Preliminary Notes

Before proceeding to the main body of this work, a few general remarks are in order. When Williams wrote of himself and his thoughts about his work in essays and letters, his statements often varied somewhat, at times becoming almost contradictory. However, I try to choose those statements of his which are most representative of the sentiments he expressed over time and in varied contexts. Regarding symbolism, my working definition of “symbol” is a fairly broad one: something, typically an instance of imagery (the signifier), which represents something else, typically a concept (the signified). As to the choice of GM texts, I primarily use the “reading edition”—the edition which Williams himself preferred, which he personally ushered into print. Many have argued for the merits of the “acting edition” that he created in response to the demands of production. However, because it is unlikely that the symbolic sophistication of the play would have been enhanced by the demands of actors and directors, I have chosen to base my research on the reading version, though where differences between the two versions speak to the play’s symbolism overall, those differences are discussed. I do use the

acting edition's nomenclature in referring to the two sections of the play as "act 1" and "act 2"—the reading edition refers to them simply as "part 1" and "part 2." In either edition, the first section of the play is comprised of the events leading up to Jim's arrival, whereas the second section contains the events which occur during his visit, and in the reading edition, is composed of scenes 6 and 7.

The particular publication of Williams' plays that I use is New Directions' *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, the standard edition. Several plays cannot be found there, so I also rely on the two-volume Library of America edition for *Spring Storm*, *Not About Nightingales*, etc. However, *Theatre* was published under his direction and is the edition to which I default. Anytime I excerpt a line from GM, it is taken from volume 1 of this source, unless I specify that I am taking the excerpt from the acting edition. As to parenthetical documentation, when I take a quote from GM, I often simply give the page number without specifying that it is from volume 1 of *Theatre*—e.g., "(182)"—though if the quote occurs in the midst of quotes from other sources, I often give more information to avoid confusion—"*Theatre* 1: 182" or "(1: 182)." If I am taking a quote from another Williams play and provide merely a volume and page number—e.g., "(6: 45)"—the reader is to understand that I am referring to *Theatre*, though I do not mention it, to keep the references as brief as possible. References to the Library of America edition begin with a shortened form of the title and the volume number: e.g., "*Tennessee* 1: 174." *Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham* is shortened to *Windham*: e.g., "*Windham* 37)," while *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*, edited by Albert Devlin, is shortened to *Conversations*.

In describing Williams' symbolism, I often discuss earlier manuscript and typescript versions of the play, in addition to the published reading edition (which I refer to as "GM proper"). In addition to analyzing GM itself, I also discuss unpublished plays which he would

later adapt into what would become GM, plays with such titles as “The Spring Offensive,” “The Gentleman Caller,” “The Pretty Trap,” “Front-Porch Girl,” and “If You Breathe, It Breaks.” Because Williams uses the same symbols in the same way in virtually all of these narratives, they are invaluable to an understanding of his symbolism in its entirety. Often a symbol which appears only fleetingly in the final version of GM is given greater amplification in an earlier version, shedding light on its significance overall. For the same reason, I have analyzed many of the published plays Williams wrote, particularly those composed early in his career, during the 1940s and 1950s, especially those written before and during his composition of GM, plays such as *Spring Storm*, *Not About Nightingales*, *Stairs to the Roof*, and *Battle of Angels*; in addition to short stories such as “Accent of a Coming Foot,” and a story which parallels GM more closely than any other published narrative: “Portrait of a Girl in Glass.”

It is striking that Williams essentially uses the same symbolic system throughout his life and across various genres. When considered as a whole, his oeuvre, with its network of symbols, constitutes a world unto itself, primarily because he bases new work on old work. Critic Richard Vowles, in “Tennessee Williams, The World of His Imagery,” mentions this as early as 1957:

One can speak of the “world” of Williams’ art with special justice, because the entire corpus of his art has a quality of wholeness, is indeed an artistic world in a rare and unusual sense. Williams is constantly revising. He may write a situation or an idea as a short story, turn it into a one-act play, expand the one-act play into a full evening of theatre, and then keep revising the long play for many months, adding and subtracting characters, shaping and reshaping with great flexibility, whether it is in production or not. He does not have that revulsion or satisfaction that some writers experience at the sight of their offspring, that sense of something completed or aborted, in any case, inevitably *there*. He may return to a work after the interval of several years [. . .] In other words, there is more than continuity to Williams’ writing. There is interaction, a re-use of situations and ideas, frequent variations on a favorite theme, that impart to his writing a unique homogeneity. (51-52)

For my analysis of unpublished drafts of Williams' short stories and plays, I am indebted to the Historic New Orleans Collection (hereafter HNOC) which houses a number of Williams typescripts. Above all, I am indebted to the University of Texas' Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (hereafter HRC), the world's largest repository of Williams typescripts and manuscripts. Regarding my excerpting text from these sources, note that where Williams has underlined a word, this formatting has been italicized, to keep the style consistent. For the same reason, words in all caps have been regularized and italicized, and en dashes have been changed to em dashes. Stage directions are italicized and put in brackets. Mistakes in spelling and punctuation have been silently corrected. However, the editors of Williams' letters (other than Windham) typically do not correct spelling mistakes, they preserve his en dashes, his underlining, etc. I have preserved their practice when I excerpt passages from his letters.

Regarding quotes generally, those which are italicized but not in brackets reflect Williams' and others' emphases, not mine, except where otherwise noted. Regarding the drafts, I excerpt text whether or not it has been struck through: Discarded drafts are by their very nature struck through, but they often help one understand Williams' symbolism all the same. All translations are mine except where otherwise noted. For my sources on Williams' life, I rely primarily on Leverich's landmark biography *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*. I also use Williams' letters and many of his autobiographical short stories, including "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair" and "Grand" from his *Collected Stories*. Finally, a note should be made regarding symbolism in drama in particular. Most symbols occur within the dialogue, yet one of the most important sources is the set. When symbols occur there, as with the physical presence of the glass menagerie on stage, they are automatically more central than an isolated symbol in

the dialogue because of the continuity of their presence on stage over time, analogous, perhaps, to the repetition of symbols within the dialogue.

Because the reader is almost certainly unfamiliar with Williams' unpublished materials, it may be helpful if I were to describe those to which I refer most often:

- “The Gentleman Caller” is essentially GM as it existed immediately prior to its being produced; the play was not re-named “The Glass Menagerie” until September 1944, a mere three months before opening night. For this reason, the drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” are the drafts of GM itself at an early stage. Williams’ description of the play can be found in HRC folder 16.9, while drafts of the play and an outline of the screenplay can be found in HRC folders 16.10–17.5, and at the HNOC.
- “The Pretty Trap” is a shorter version of GM with a happy ending—Jim and Laura leave the apartment together, arm in arm. It is found in HRC folder 17.8.
- “The Front Porch Girl” and “If You Breathe, It Breaks” roughly follow the narrative of GM, at least from the perspective of Laura, except that the setting is a Mississippi boarding house which a woman who is essentially Amanda runs. The Jim character is named Mr. Walland, a boarder, though unlike Jim, he does not break the glass unicorn when he is finally entrusted with it. In the end, he walks off arm in arm with the Laura figure (variously “Miriam” or “Rosemary”) as the curtains descend, so that the ending is a happy one, as with “The Pretty Trap.” Drafts of “Front-Porch Girl” are found in HRC 16.8, and “If You Breathe, It Breaks” is found in HRC 17.6.

- “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” is the prose version of GM. Williams wrote it at roughly the same time he was composing “The Gentleman Caller,” though he worked on the latter for more than a year after he had completed the short story. The editors of his short stories write that “Portrait” was begun in Key West in February 1941 and completed in June 1943 in Santa Monica, while Williams was under contract to MGM (*Collected Stories* 573).

PART 1. CHARACTERS AND SET

The symbolism of GM is essentially the culmination of a system Williams had begun creating early in his career. By the time the composition of GM had begun, he had already identified his major concerns and most of the symbols he would use to represent them. Every major character in GM (and all major plays thereafter) can be linked in some way to these concerns and their signifiers. However, because each of his characters is an individual, he alters his classic symbols slightly in each case. Because of this, I will be discussing the symbols associated with each character (and one element of the set) in turn. A diachronic section will follow, in which the symbols will be discussed as they interact and are transformed over the course of the narrative, particularly during the last act.

1. LAURA: GIRL IN GLASS

Introduction

In many respects, Laura is the focal point of the play. The production notes, the final scene, and the final lines of the play are all oriented around her. Moreover, though her mother Amanda is probably the most memorable character, Laura is the most important where the symbolism is concerned. The very title of the play, the play's dominant symbol, is associated with her, an association which the titles of earlier versions reinforce: "If You Breathe, It Breaks" (referring both to the menagerie and to her) and "Portrait of a Girl in Glass." There is, then, a clear symbolic link made between her and her menagerie, which is further established by passages in both the play proper and the didascalia: In Williams' preliminary description of the characters, he says that the distance between Laura and reality increases "till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf" (129). In Williams' "Production Notes," he speaks of the musical theme of the "Glass Menagerie" as being "primarily Laura's music" which "comes out most clearly when the play focuses upon her and the lovely fragility of glass which is her image" (133).

This same paragraph hints at Laura and her glass figures' dark fate: "When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken. Both of those ideas should be woven into the recurring tune." This fate is further reflected in the stage directions in the last act, which describe her as being "like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting" (191). A glass figure adumbrates her fate in scene 3. As Tom is storming out of the apartment, he heaves his overcoat across the room in his frustration. "It strikes against the shelf of Laura's glass collection, and there is a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura cries out as if wounded" (164). This

essentially recurs at the end of the play; as Tom is leaving his mother and sister, he “smashes his glass on the floor” and then “plunges out on the fire escape, slamming the door. Laura screams in fright” (236). Then, of course, there is Laura’s glass unicorn, which is broken. These links between Laura and brokenness are reinforced in drafts of “The Spring Offensive”; Jim and Tom approach the Wingfield apartment through a hall described as having “cracked imitation marble floors” (HRC 17.9; see also “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” *Collected Stories* 115). When Laura hears them coming, “her rigidity becomes almost catatonic.” Laura is described as being virtually statuesque in the context of the imagery of *cracked* marble. In the course of GM’s composition, Williams used several different techniques to depict Laura’s fragility and her dark fate. Williams often describes his Laura figures as being like a statue—see Williams’ “Sonnet for Pygmalion,” reproduced on page [97](#).

The Influence of Experience

Like so many elements in GM, the glass imagery derives from objects Williams actually knew during his childhood. He recalls his and his sister’s being “gloriously happy” as they “baked mud pies in the sun upon the front walk,” “climbed up and slid down the big wood pile,” and “collected from neighboring alleys and trash-piles bits of colored glass that were diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds” (qtd. in E. Williams 43). Elsewhere, he speaks of the glass menagerie of his sister Rose which we have discussed. In so doing, he alludes again to the process whereby physical and emotional elements in his life are transformed into symbols:

[O]n the shelves around [Rose’s] room she collected a large assortment of little glass articles, of which she was particularly fond. Eventually, the room took on a light and delicate appearance, in spite of the lack of outside illumination, and it became the only room in the house that I found pleasant to enter.

When I left home a number of years later, it was this room that I recalled most vividly and poignantly when looking back on our home life in St. Louis. Particularly the little glass ornaments on the shelves. They were mostly little

glass animals. By poetic association they came to represent, in my memory, all the softest emotions that belong to recollection of things past. They stood for all the small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive. (“The Author Tells Why It Is Called ‘The Glass Menagerie’” 68)

The symbolism of GM is largely consistent with Williams’ assertion here that the glass menagerie signifies the “small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life,” and I cite this line throughout my work. It actually helps clarify the significance of GM’s epigraph by E. E. Cummings, which also speaks of “small and tender things”: “Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands.” Williams includes this line in an early version of the play (HRC folder 16.5), where he has a member of the audience rise and ask Tom: “Why did you write this play? What was the idea of it?” He replies, “I suppose the idea was my sister.—mostly...”

LIGHT MAN. Why? What about her? What has she got that’s important?

TOM. —Nothing. That’s the point.

“Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands...”

Williams is specifically mourning the passing of such “small” things, those small and tender things which “relieve the austere pattern of life,” which the modern world has destroyed. Thus it can be seen that while the glass figures signify Laura, they operate together to signify something broader and more universal.

A Shattered Rainbow

Before the symbolism of Laura and the menagerie can be recognized and understood in its totality, a greater familiarity with the imagery typically associated with them is essential. Both Laura and the menagerie are linked to the imagery of fragility, as we have seen, but there are other characteristics which are significant. First of all, in the context of the play, they are often set in darkness, yet illumined by beams of light. In the last act, Laura and Jim stand together on a darkened stage in the spotlight, and she passes her favorite glass figure to him,

exclaiming, “Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?” (223). Laura herself is depicted similarly throughout the play, set in darkness, yet illuminated by beams of light; after all, as we have seen, she is “like a piece of translucent glass touched by light.” This is realized by the stage directions: Williams asks that throughout the play, though the stage be dim “[i]n keeping with the atmosphere of memory,” that the “clearest pool of light” be trained on her figure (133).

This imagery recurs in Jim and Laura’s relationship; he is the beam of light in her life, illuminating (briefly) her soul. In “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” the narrator says that Jim speaks “in a voice so hearty that it shot like beams of sunlight through the vapors of self-consciousness engulfing my sister and me” (*Collected Stories* 117). In GM, he accomplishes Laura’s illumination with altar candles—he “lights her inwardly with altar candles” (219). Similar imagery can be found in a Williams poem published in 1946, less than two years after the production of GM, entitled “The Paper Lantern,” under the collective poetry title “Recuerdo.” The speaker says that his sister “was quicker at everything than I” (*Collected Poems* 49).

At eight she could play
Idillio and The Scarf Dance
 While I was chopping at scales and exercises.

Then, still ahead of him, she “plunged headlong / into the discovery, Love!”

Then vanished completely—
 for love’s explosion, defined as early madness,
 consumingly shone in her transparent heart for a season
 and burned it out, a tissue-paper lantern!

—torn from a string!
 —tumbled across a pavilion!

flickering three times, almost seeming to cry . . .
 My sister was quicker at everything than I. (49-50)

Again, she is illumined, with her “transparent heart” shining with light and love, which “consumingly shone” within her—ultimately burning her heart out, “a tissue-paper lantern!”

Another characteristic of both the glass figures and Laura is their typically being set in a musical context, often music evocative of nostalgia. Williams himself is usually the source of this music, specifically asking directors for a “single recurring tune, ‘The Glass Menagerie,’” which is especially prominent “when the play focuses upon [Laura] and the lovely fragility of glass which is her image” (133). Between each episode of GM, the music is to return as a “reference to the emotion, nostalgia, which is the first condition of the play.” At times, Laura provides the context of musical nostalgia, with her continually playing the records her father left her as a “reminder of him” (156).

A final noteworthy characteristic is the glass figures’ probable polychromy. Above, we read of Williams’ “bits of colored glass that were diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds.” It is likely that these same colors tint the glass menagerie. Though the play never mentions the polychromy of the menagerie, polychromy clearly characterizes other glass objects thus, objects which are parallel to the menagerie as symbols. In Tom’s final speech, just before he is confronted with the specter of Laura herself, he recounts seeing “pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow” (237). “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” helps to establish the polychromy of the menagerie; the narrator says of his sister, “She loved colored glass and had covered the walls with shelves of little glass articles, all of them light and delicate in color. [. . .] When you entered the room there was always this soft, transparent radiance in it which came from the glass absorbing whatever faint light came through the shades” (*Collected Stories* 111-12). The drafts also confirm the menagerie’s polychromy, some going so far as to establish the particular color of the glass image she is most associated

with. In HRC 16.8, (drafts of “The Front Porch Girl”) the unicorn is pink, whereas in HRC 17.7 (drafts of “Portrait”) it is blue: Tom as narrator recalls that when Jim was handed the unicorn, he “held it up toward the light and the little glass creature became a pale blue gem.” Later, Tom observes that his sister in her turn takes on “[t]he quality of a delicate piece of glass, the unicorn of sapphire who lived with the horses after his kind were vanished.” Surprisingly, in another draft, Williams is able to extend the similarities between Laura and the menagerie to the point where Laura herself becomes polychromatic. In drafts of “The Front Porch Girl,” a character tells a neighbor of the appearance of Miriam, the Laura figure, when she becomes embarrassed: “I thought her face would turn a *thousand colors!*” (HRC 16.8).

The prismatic quality of the glass is another characteristic which links it to polychromy, particularly with its exposure to the beams of light discussed above. Again, this is made explicit in the drafts. In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Laura says to Jim:

I’ve hundreds of pieces of delicate things made of glass
These are only a few that we put on display in the parlor.
The windows and shelves of my bedroom are covered with glass!
On sunny days I—live inside a—rainbow!
A rainbow that’s—broke into pieces. (HRC 17.3)

This both establishes the polychromy of the glass and anticipates its tragic fate and the fate of Laura, as does a line in HRC 17.2, which reads: “All about the walls are the shelves of the glass, the little glass articles giving off a faint and sorrowful radiance, like bits of a broken rainbow” (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”). This broken polychromy can be found in GM proper, in the final lines of the play which we have examined briefly above—the “bits of a shattered rainbow.” In fact, all of the characteristics we have observed as being typical of Laura and her glass figures are present in this speech of Tom’s: After speaking of the cities which swept about him “like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches,” he says,

Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! (237)

Here, all the typical characteristics of Laura and her menagerie can be found. There is vitreous polychromy, with the “tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors” (imagery paralleled by the “brightly colored” leaves). These bottles are set in darkness, yet illumined by light; Tom’s wanderings take place “along a street at night,” yet the “tiny transparent bottles” are found in “the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold.” There is music evocative of nostalgia—the “familiar bit of music.” Finally, of course, these things are mentioned in the context of tragedy, for Tom speaks these lines immediately after Laura has been devastated by Jim’s confession.

Otherworlds and the “Laurine Type”

Laura and the glass menagerie represent, as we have seen, those things which “relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive”—an extremely important concept for Williams. In virtually every one of his narratives, at least one of the protagonists relies on something which relieves the “austere pattern of life.” Often this is an inner world to which the character escapes, one which exists only in the character’s mind, a world based either on imagination or recollection. I call this an “otherworld,” which the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines as a “world or existence beyond earthly reality.” In Williams, it is an escape, a refuge, an imaginative location that transcends reality, an atemporal remove that relieves its inhabitants from the sordidness of their dreary lives.

At times, both Amanda and Tom inhabit otherworlds. The former turns in her fancy from the Wingfield tenement to her girlhood home in Blue Mountain. In her memory, servants wait on her still, and gentlemen callers perpetually knock on her door. Tom too has created an atemporal otherworld, one which promises to relieve the sordidness of his life, though his paradise lies before him, in the future, rather than lying behind him in the past. He seems to believe that if he were to abandon his family and follow his instincts, he would come to experience the same timeless tranquility his father enjoys, who—at least in his photo—is “gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say, ‘I will be smiling forever’” (144).

Occasionally, Williams evokes otherworlds through the use of symbols, and when he does so, he often uses the very imagery we have examined in relation to Laura and the glass menagerie. It is as though the inhabitants of otherworlds had entered a polychromatic glass sphere, set in darkness, yet illumined by light, set in a musical context evocative of nostalgia. The sphere is the ultimate evocation of the reassuring seclusion of otherworlds. I call

otherworlds associated with this type of imagery instances of the “Laurine type.” Laura relies on such an otherworld. Simultaneously—though this is difficult to conceptualize—she signifies such otherworlds. It may help to recall her dual status as both a character and a symbol. As a character, she turns to an otherworld to escape from reality, while as a symbol she *represents* such escapes from reality, alternate worlds which relieve one from the “austere pattern of life.” Thus she and the glass menagerie both signify otherworlds, among other things.

It could almost be said that Laura’s otherworld is the ultimate example of the Laurine type, because most of the imagery associated with her and her figures, discussed above, is associated with her otherworld. First of all, it is associated with glass and music—Tom tells Amanda that Laura lives “in a world of her own—a world of—little glass ornaments, Mother. . . . [. . .] She plays old phonograph records and—that’s about all—” (188). In “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” he says more concisely that she lives “in a world of glass and also a world of music” (*Collected Stories* 112). In the drafts, we can see how she lives in a glass sphere of sorts, the classic image of the Laurine type. The walls of her room are covered by shelves holding her collection of glass, evoking the lines from “The Gentleman Caller” above, where she says, “The windows and shelves of my bedroom are covered with glass! / On sunny days I—live inside a—rainbow!” Because of this, her room is described in Williams’ letters as a “sanctuary of glass” (qtd. in Leavitt 52). The title of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” alludes to this also. It could be describing a girl’s portrait which is made out of glass, another parallel between her and her glass figures; however, in addition to this, there is probably the sense that she is a girl in glass—a girl living sealed off from the world, encased in glass. It is interesting to note that the original for Laura’s room—Rose’s room, which also had shelves of glass—was, as we have seen, something

of an otherworld for Williams, a refuge from the traumatic experience of living in the Williams household—the “only room in the house that I found pleasant to enter.”

Laura’s glass-enclosed otherworld is also polychromatic—“On sunny days I—live inside a—rainbow!”—and it is associated with the imagery of music, as we have seen, and with glass illuminated by beams of light, at least in the drafts with their reference to the beams of light shining through the window on “sunny days.” This imagery is reflected in the otherworlds Williams describes in a poem published in 1944, shortly before GM’s production: “The Beanstalk Country,” in which he speaks of visiting the insane, including his sister, in their asylums:

They see not us, nor any Sunday caller
among the geraniums and wicker chairs,
for they are Jacks who climb the beanstalk country,
a place of hammers and tremendous beams,
compared to which the glassed solarium
in which we rise to greet them has no light. (*Collected Poems* 12-13)

The Laurine type is often a glass sphere which is pendant, perhaps the best evocation of the transcendence and fragile seclusion the otherworld affords its inhabitants, who seem to have escaped earth, escaped reality, and found their way into a refuge, suspended above the world, and protected—for a time—from the mutability inherent in temporal existence. The ephemerality of the retreat is suggested by the characteristics of the menagerie; there is often a distinct sense of doom associated with the figures, and this is also true of Williams’ otherworlds and their inhabitants. Otherworlds are crystalline—and frangible. Inevitably, they are destroyed, and the characters who inhabit them are literally and/or figuratively slain. In a 1971 interview, Williams says that Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire* “lives in a fairyland. That’s why she goes mad. There is no sure refuge in a fairyland. Not for long, in any case” (*Conversations* 211). In summary, then, the Laurine type is characteristically:

- associated with glass imagery, often a glass sphere, which is
- polychromatic,
- set in darkness, yet
- illuminated by beams of light,
- set in a musical context which is evocative of nostalgia, and
- associated with a sense of doom, all of which, most importantly,
- signifies an otherworld.

Paradise Dance Hall, located across the alley from the Wingfields, is an otherworld of sorts, a place to which people turn in order to escape the “austere pattern” of their lives.

Appropriately enough, it is also a Laurine type. The most prominent feature of the dance hall is a “large glass sphere” which fills the room with “delicate rainbow colors.” All the hallmarks of the type are associated with it. Tom says to the audience,

Across the alley from us was the Paradise Dance Hall. On evenings in spring the windows and doors were open and the music came outdoors. Sometimes the lights were turned out except for a large glass sphere that hung from the ceiling. It would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbow colors. Then the orchestra played a waltz or a tango, something that had a slow and sensuous rhythm. Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash pits and telephone poles. This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure. Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain’s umbrella. In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows. . . . All the world was waiting for bombardments! (179)

True to type, the glass sphere is suspended in darkness—when the “lights were turned out”—yet it is associated with polychromatic beams of light, as it “filter[s] the dusk with delicate rainbow colors.” It is obviously placed in a musical setting and is associated with imminent tragedy.

Most importantly, it is set in the context of the Laurine-type signified: an otherworld.

This figure is unusual, for it is uncommon to find all the characteristics of the Laurine type in a single image. Ordinarily, only a few of the characteristics are present. For instance, movies, which feature prominently in GM, are a species of Laurine type, but polychromy is not emphasized (understandably—color movies were rare in the late 1930s). The rest of the characteristics are, however, basically present: movies are set in darkness, they are obviously associated with shafts of light (they essentially *are* shafts of light), and they occur in a musical—or at least an aural—context; they are light and sound. In GM, they are associated with fragility and tragedy: In the passage above, Tom associates them with the “brief, deceptive rainbows” which will be shattered when “bombardments” arrive. Most importantly, they are essentially otherworlds. The characters of GM repeatedly turn to the movies as they turn to all otherworlds—as an escape from the “austere pattern” of their lives. They are even an atemporal escape of sorts, for time often seems suspended when one is truly engrossed in a movie, similar to the timelessness Williams speaks of relative to plays in his essay “The Timeless World of a Play” (*Where I Live* 49-54).

Both Laura and her brother rely on the movies as otherworlds. In scene 2, she confesses to watching them (155), and he is constantly berated for going to see them (163, 173, 235). Their apartment is actually located adjacent to the movie theaters, just as it is located across from the Paradise Dance Hall. In scene 6, while Tom is speaking to Jim on the fire escape, “[t]he incandescent marquees and signs of the first-run movie houses light his face from across the alley” (200-01). Essentially, Tom is surrounded by otherworlds. However, he is torn where movies are concerned. He is thankful for the escape they provide, yet he is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with vicarious escapes, particularly those typified by such static experiences as sitting in the dark. He wants to escape physically, to leave his sordid tenement

existence behind and inhabit the paradise he believes waits for him in the future, in motion. Later in scene 6, he expresses his frustration regarding the movies to Jim: “You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! [. . .] I am tired of the *movies* and I am *about to move!*” (201). Tragically, the paradisiacal otherworld he envisions proves to be as illusory as the movies he leaves behind.

Williams seems to believe strongly in the virtue of truly transcendent otherworlds, those which aid the romantic in surviving and rising above the sordidness of the modern world, but in his work one can also find dark otherworlds, those which merely anesthetize. A catalog of these can be found in Tom’s speech above, when he speaks of “hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows,” while death draws ever nearer, in the form of physical and metaphorical “bombardments!” Williams speaks of such unsatisfactory otherworlds again in an essay published in 1951: “Time rushes toward us with its hospital tray of infinitely varied narcotics, even while it is preparing us for its inevitably fatal operation” (*Where I Live* 53). In Tom’s speech regarding movies, then, Williams seems to be expressing—at least in part—his own aversions.

This aversion is further reflected in a moment shared between Laura and Tom at the beginning of scene 4, which in the acting edition is a scene unto itself. It features both movies and another dark otherworld to which Tom alludes: inebriation, which will go on to play such a major role in Blanche’s life (*A Streetcar Named Desire*) and Brick’s (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*). As far as is known, this scene is the only portion of GM which Williams created in response to

the demands of others, a scene he referred to as the “drunk scene” (*Selected Letters* 1: 555), in which Tom recounts to Laura the events of his trip to the movies the previous night. Eddie Dowling, one of the directors, and George Jean Nathan, an influential critic, insisted that Williams create this scene in order to establish the intimacy of the siblings’ relationship. Williams seems to have used the opportunity to express, in compressed form, several of the major ideas he presents symbolically in GM relative to Tom, and the imagery establishes this particular evening as an otherworld for him: There is music—the organ solo he mentions; luminescence in darkness, provided by the movies themselves; and polychromy, with the “shimmering rainbow-colored scarf” Tom is given by Malvolio the Magician, in the latter’s performance after the screening (perhaps related to “The Scarf Dance” in “The Paper Lantern” above). Finally, this imagery appears in the context of the Laurine-type signified: The movies themselves, as well as the performance of the magician, are an otherworld. There is even a figurative allusion to Tom’s desire to break away from such illusory otherworlds. Malvolio takes goldfish in a bowl—essentially a Laurine glass sphere—and causes them to become canaries; they “fly away canaries” (167). Their actions are obviously an expression of Tom’s own desires.

Laura inhabits her otherworld with greater determination than any other character in GM. Moreover, the locales with which she is associated function as parallels—echoes—of her otherworld. This comes across most clearly in scene 2, when she confesses to her mother the horror she felt at Rubicam’s Business College, and then chronicles her trips to the places she turned to in order to avoid going back to school. Each one of these is essentially an otherworld sheltering her from reality, and the first such place is a Laurine type. She says, “Lately I’ve been spending most of my afternoons in the Jewel Box, that big glass house where they raise the

tropical flowers” (155). St. Louis’s Forest Park actually features a large, ornate glass greenhouse by this name which is walking distance from the old Williams home (*Selected Letters* 1: 98). Williams is using this structure as a symbol for the fragile seclusion Laura’s otherworld affords floras like her, “Blue Roses”—her nickname (157).

Her otherworld is also paralleled by Forest Park’s St. Louis Art Museum, which she visits, an appropriate enclosure for Laura, a “girl in glass,” an objet d’art as timeless as Coleridge’s Grecian urn, who never seems to age or lose her innocence, destined (tragically) to remain atemporal. Finally, her otherworld is paralleled by another feature of Forest Park: She tells her mother she visits “the birdhouses at the Zoo. I visited the penguins every day!” This is Forest Park’s “Flight Cage,” which, along with the art museum, is one of two remaining structures from the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Again, Williams is using a feature of the park as a symbol; just as the birdhouse shelters odd animals like penguins, so out of place and freakish in an urban context, her otherworld shelters her, the unicorn (another of her symbols), so out of place in the modern world, a creature which Laura suggests feels “freakish” (226).

As GM progresses, the promise of a gentleman caller even comes to constitute an otherworld. Tom and Amanda eventually see this figure as a paradise they long to secure for Laura, and because their destinies are, to an extent, intertwined, paradise for her means paradise for them all. The promise of the gentleman caller is an otherworld associated with the future, like Tom’s. He has the potential to lift Laura from the darkness of her situation to some transcendent, fabled height. He is even cast as a Laurine type, to an extent: Like the glass sphere at the dance hall, his promise hangs above them, just out of reach. In scene 3, Tom says, “An evening at home rarely passed without some allusion to this image, this specter, this hope. . . . Even when he wasn't mentioned, his presence hung in Mother's preoccupied look and in my

sister's frightened, apologetic manner—hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields!” (159).

There is a near parallel in Williams’ short story “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin,” in which the narrator (patterned after Williams) speaks of a young man with whom his sister fell in love when she and the narrator were extremely young—and because the narrator was so close to his sister, he immediately followed suit, falling in love with the boy himself.

Gradually, his presence came to hang above the family as surely as the prospect of the Gentleman Caller hangs above the Wingfields. The narrator says he almost immediately began to

dream about him as I had formerly dreamed of storybook heroes. His name began to inhabit the rectory. It was almost constantly on the lips of my sister, this strange young lady who had come to live with us. It had a curious lightness, that name, in the way that she spoke it. It did not seem to fall from her lips but to be released from them. The moment spoken, it rose into the air and shimmered and floated and took on gorgeous colors the way that soap bubbles did that we used to blow from the sunny back steps in the summer. Those bubbles lifted and floated and they eventually broke but never until other bubbles had floated beside them. (*Collected Stories* 275)

Though the promise of Jim is somehow more ominous because of the high price associated with failing to secure him, the imagery between the two accounts is almost certainly related—and the presence of the Laurine type in the latter excerpt is clear, with the description of a fragile sphere illuminated by light—the bubbles which “shimmered” that summer—and their polychromy—the “gorgeous colors.”

In GM, when Jim finally does appear, he is ushered into the otherworlds of both Amanda and Laura: the former’s otherworld in scene 6, and the latter’s otherworld in scene 7. Amanda transforms the apartment into her otherworld in several ways: by decorating the interior with Blue Mountain memories (the jonquils she places on the table, from her memories of the fields of her youth); by appearing in her Blue Mountain dress; and particularly by her evoking Blue

Mountain charm with every word she speaks. By way of contrast, Laura brings Jim into her otherworld with great reluctance, requiring considerable charm on his part. Though she initiates this process, she does so under duress, and when she realizes she has no choice but to let him in, she puts on one of her records, a signal she is immersing herself even more deeply into her otherworld. Her letting him in is traumatic because she is figuratively letting him into both her otherworld and her soul—the two are almost interchangeable where she is concerned, so deeply is she immersed in her fancy. He enters more deeply later in the last act, when she warms up to him and begins introducing him to her companions in her world—her glass figures—in the final moments of the play when the two are left alone together. During these scenes, it would appear that the Wingfield apartment itself becomes a Laurine type; all the hallmarks are present. The music is supplied by Laura with her Victrola and by the dance hall with its band, and Amanda provides the polychromy, with her putting chintz covers on the chairs and sofa for the occasion. (Chintz fabrics typically feature bright, polychromatic designs.) Finally, a species of glass sphere is present, one which is—true to type—pendant and associated with tragic fragility. When the curtains rise on the last act, immediately prior to Jim’s arrival, they reveal the changes wrought by Amanda, particularly her placing a “colored paper lantern” over the “broken light fixture in the ceiling” (191) This light is Laurine in and of itself, particularly when one recalls that *broken* glass ultimately epitomizes the type. Williams actually uses colored lanterns as a shorthand means for evoking the Laurine type. They function thus throughout Williams’ work: in *Spring Storm*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, etc. Of course, paper lanterns can also be found in the poem we discuss above, “The Paper Lantern,” recounting the tragedy of the speaker’s sister and the light which ultimately annihilated her, burning through her delicate existence,

for love’s explosion, defined as early madness,
consumingly shone in her transparent heart for a season

and burned it out, a tissue-paper lantern!

—torn from a string!

—tumbled across a pavilion!

Although, strictly speaking, this is in reference to a Laura figure rather than the otherworld she inhabits, the imagery of the two texts is certainly related.

The Play Within the Play

Obviously, GM is a narrative, but there is a distinct narrative *within* the larger narrative of GM. When the curtains rise on Tom for the first time, he introduces the audience to a second story, one set in the past, the tale of his final days with his family. This memory, which he literally enters a few moments later, actually constitutes an otherworld for him. Just as Amanda mentally inhabits Blue Mountain, so Tom-the-narrator inhabits the Wingfield apartment, living with Laura in St. Louis, though in reality he left her and their mother years before.

The setting of GM helps to establish the play within the play as an otherworld. The apartment is set in an alley rather than on a busy street, figuratively a place set apart from the world, from reality. In fact, Jim is described as the only visitor to finally break the seal of this otherworld, an “emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from” (145).

Gerald Berkowitz writes,

The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Night of the Iguana, and several other plays all take place in physical settings that are defined, theatrically or symbolically, as being *someplace else*, a spot cut off from the rest of the universe. [. . .] The isolation and separateness of the Wingfield apartment is repeatedly underlined: [. . .] the electric power from outside is cut off; Amanda’s telephone customers hang up on her; and the symbolic fire escape frustrates entrance and exit, swallowing Tom’s key and tripping Laura when she goes out. (713-14)

Speaking more broadly, the audience itself inhabits an otherworld of sorts during the course of the play. We are drawn into the “small and tender” story of Laura, which relieves

many of us of the “austere pattern of life” and suspends, for a moment, the passage of time. Williams describes this effect when he calls a play a “world *outside* of time” (*Where I Live* 50). However, this otherworld of Williams’ is as ephemeral as any other. When Laura is destroyed, we are forced to trade the charm of the theater for our lives outside. For a few moments, however, the play does help to make life endurable—to the sensitive. Incidentally, the very act of writing was an otherworld for Williams; in 1959, he wrote, “At the age of fourteen I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge” (*Where I Live* 106). In his *Memoirs*, he adds, “There are worse things than a fantasy world to live in. I wonder, indeed, if a fantasy world is not the only world inhabitable by artists” (196). As strange as it may sound, Williams even depicts the act of composition as bringing an artist into an otherworld which is specifically Laurine. In his short story “The Field of Blue Children,” the protagonist Myra begins writing poems whose

beauty startled her: sometimes it was like a moment of religious exaltation. She stood in a frozen attitude; her breath was released in a sigh. Each time she felt as though she were about to penetrate some new area of human thought. She had the sensation of standing upon the verge of a shadowy vastness which might momentarily flower into a marvelous crystal of light, like a ballroom that is dark one moment and in the next moment illuminated by the sunlike brilliance of a hundred glass chandeliers and reflecting mirrors and polished floors. (*Collected Stories* 71)

Many otherworlds in Williams are associated with the past and, consequently, with nostalgia—as with Amanda’s Blue Mountain. To the extent that the play within the play is an otherworld, it too is associated with nostalgia. Tom’s feelings about his former life are certainly complicated, but he clearly feels nostalgia for Laura and the time in which she was supported and cared for. GM’s original audience, which saw the play on December 26, 1944, would also have looked at this past with nostalgia. They were living during the darkest days of the Battle of

the Bulge, and the play was primarily written in even darker days, before D-Day. They would have looked back on pre-war days with a sense of longing which is probably difficult for us to imagine. Essentially, they were sorely in need of and open to nostalgia, to otherworlds oriented toward the past, even more so than most of us. Laura's innocence may have represented both their own forsaken personal innocence as well as the innocence of an inviolability they as a nation had lost forever, subsequent to Pearl Harbor, which Williams had described a few years prior as the "end of the world as we know it" (*Stairs to the Roof* xvii), our "*fin du monde*" (*Selected Letters* 1: 368).

The play's temporal contrasts would also have been clearer for GM's original audience. Within the play, before the last act, the present is consistently dreary, whereas the past is full of wonder. This would also have been true of the play as a whole; the original audience would have seen Tom in his merchant-marine uniform as a figure in the dreary present, whereas his memories are of a past which contains a personality which haunts him, which he feels nostalgia for. When present-day theatergoers see a lost Tom in merchant-marine garb, they are seeing a past which is not necessarily nostalgic, but the past would have been consistently nostalgic originally. Williams does direct that the setting of the play is "Now" and in "the Past" (127).

One indication that the play within the play is an otherworld for Tom parallel to Amanda's is his insistence that it is not necessarily the past as it was, but that it is "memory"—his memory (145). This is important, because one of the statements Williams is making concerns the nature of memory, not simply the nature of the late 1930s. To an extent, his memories represent all of our memories; he seems to be saying that we all rely on such ephemeral otherworlds. One of the consequences of our entering memory is that what we are shown is "not realistic," it is "sentimental," which explains the "fiddle in the wings" (which we

literally hear). Williams believed that everything in memory is set to music, so music plays an important part in the play within the play. This should not be too surprising, because we have already seen how otherworlds and music—particularly music evocative of nostalgia—go hand in hand.

As strange as it may seem, Williams casts the music of GM as an otherworld, and specifically a Laurine type, of sorts. First, he associates it with delicate glass and the tragic fate of such objects: “When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken. Both of those ideas should be woven into the recurring tune.” The music is also characterized as being “like circus music, not when you are on the grounds or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and very likely thinking of something else” (133). The circus connotes other aspects of the type: the polychromy of the tents, spotlights illuminating performers in darkness and, most importantly, the distinct sense of an otherworld. It is even associated with nostalgia—nostalgia is precisely what circus music evokes in most adults, particularly those who were living during the period when the circus was a more central part of popular culture. Moreover, Williams directs that the music be played so faintly that one is barely conscious of it, so that the nostalgia steals upon one almost unawares. It would seem that this is an attempt by Williams to connect with deeply hidden otherworlds within us all.

The play within the play is an otherworld, and it may be specifically a Laurine type. There is music, which is Williams’ primary means for communicating a sense of fragility and nostalgia. There is the lighting—the play is set in darkness, yet illumined by beams of light; the production notes direct that though the stage be “dim,” that “[s]hafts of light” be “focused on selected areas or actors” (133). This is emphasized a few lines later: “A certain correspondence

to light in religious paintings, such as El Greco's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky, could be effectively used throughout the play" (134). Toward the end, the play within the play is even reminiscent of the Laurine glass sphere, suspended in darkness. The Wingfield apartment is suspended above the ground like the sphere—accessible only by ascending a fire escape; it is set in darkness—the play ends at night; and the women inhabit an otherworld of glass—during Tom's final speech, Williams directs that the interior exchange between Amanda and Laura be seen "as though through soundproof glass" (236).

The Laurine Type in Earlier Works

Bubbles

GM is by no means the first Williams narrative with instances of otherworlds in general, or the Laurine type in particular. The latter appears as early as "Beauty Is the Word," written circa 1930, described by Leverich as "the earliest play written by Tennessee Williams" as "far as is known" (113). It opens on a remote, tropical paradise which Esther, a young visitor to the island, immediately explores. She then tells her boyfriend of her impressions: "Such color, such gorgeous color! Have you ever blown soap bubbles, Steve, on a bright day when the sunlight shining on them made them look like they were made out of rainbows? Well, I felt as though I had gotten inside of one of those soap bubbles" ("Beauty" 188). This is startling evidence of the protracted development of Williams' symbolism. The Laurine type already existed as early as 1930, fourteen years before the completion of GM. Virtually all the characteristics of the type are present: the soap bubbles here are fragile, suspended, polychromatic spheres, exposed to shafts of light—exposed to the "sunlight" which is "shining on them"—and, most importantly, signifying an otherworld: Esther reports feeling as though she had "gotten inside one of those soap bubbles," an expression of how the island, her otherworld, makes her feel.

Williams must have liked this particular species of the Laurine type because he uses bubbles in later narratives. We have already seen them above in “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin,” written in 1949. They recur in another passage of the same story where the narrator describes his and his sister’s relationship, the “magical intimacy of our childhood together, the soap-bubble afternoons” (*Collected Stories* 274). In *Not About Nightingales*, when Butch, a prison inmate and one of the main characters, is exposed to the warden’s draconian brutality by being thrown into what is essentially a large-scale oven, he mentally escapes the barbaric treatment by singing a popular tune of the era at the top of his lungs, with lyrics which evoke the otherworld he is attempting to inhabit in his efforts to escape reality: “I’m forever blowing BUBBLES! / Pretty bubbles in the—AIR!” (*Tennessee* 1: 174). He seems to be successful because he eludes the torment of reality and survives, even helping other prisoners to do the same by having them sing the same song. In a contemporary play, “Portrait of a Madonna,” bubbles are again associated with otherworlds, this time in an even darker context. A porter and an elevator boy enter the apartment of Lucretia Collins, an elderly woman who is permanently abandoning reality and escaping to her otherworld with the finality of both Laura and Blanche toward the end of their respective plays. The phonograph record the porter finds in her apartment, which he describes to his companion as coming out “[b]efore your time, sonny boy,” is Butch’s song, “I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles” (*Theatre* 6: 112). The song itself refers to otherworlds, to castles in the air. For a 1919 version of the song, performed by Charles Hart and Elliott Shaw, click on the following link:



The lyrics, by Jaan Kenbrovin and John William Kелlette, are as follows:

[Verse 1:]
I'm dreaming dreams
I'm scheming schemes
I'm building castles high

They're born anew
their days are few
Just like a sweet butterfly

And as the daylight is dawning
They come again in the morning

[Chorus:]
I'm forever blowing bubbles
Pretty bubbles in the air
They fly so high
Nearly reach the sky
Then like my dreams
They fade and die

Fortune's always hiding
I've looked ev'rywhere
I'm forever blowing bubbles
Pretty bubbles in the air

[Verse 2:]
When shadows creep
When I'm asleep
To lands of hope I stray

Then at daybreak
when I awake
My bluebird flutters away

"Happiness, you seem so near me
Happiness, come forth and cheer me"

[Chorus]

Finally, in the short story "The Poet," published in 1948, the image of the artist is associated with this species of the Laurine type. The protagonist regularly makes what is essentially allegorical alcohol which inspires him, causing his world to "change color as a soap bubble penetrated by a ray of light," so that a "great vitality would surge and break as a limitless

ocean through him.” In this same context, Williams mentions a “chamber of glass exposed to a cloudless meridian of the sun” (*Collected Stories* 246).

Spring Storm

Bubbles constitute one early species of the Laurine type, but they are not the only species. Another occurs in Williams’ *Spring Storm*, written circa 1937. One of the characters throws a party to which Hertha, who is somewhat like Laura, has not been invited. For her, the party is an otherworld she is tragically unable to inhabit, one in which Arthur, a character whom she loves, will soon meet with Heavenly, her rival. Aggravating the situation still further, she is forced to listen to the music of the party while at her post at the town library, a symbol of her desolate, lonely soul. Ultimately, she closes the library windows to shut out the music and the paradise it evokes. The party itself possesses many characteristics of the type; it is set high on a hill, shining in the darkness of the evening, and illuminated by a string of Japanese lanterns. (Recall the significance of the paper lantern, and note that strings of Japanese lanterns during the early twentieth century were typically polychromatic.) Williams also directs that the party feature a “punch stand with a cut-glass bowl,” the glass sphere of the type, and that there be music provided by a “stringed orchestra from Memphis” (*Tennessee* 1: 52). In speaking of the Laurine type, I do not mean to imply—by using the word “type”—that Williams created it in anticipation of Laura. She and the imagery with which she is associated are merely the most classic instances of the symbol.

Stairs to the Roof and the Carnavalesque

Like *Spring Storm*, *Stairs to the Roof* was completed prior to GM, circa 1940, and it too features an otherworld. The protagonists, a character named Ben and another simply named Girl, are swept from their mundane existence into the excitement of a carnival, which distances

them from reality—the stage directions say that as they join in the fun, the play “progresses further from realism” (*Stairs* 70). Furthermore, this carnival is specifically Laurine. It evokes musicality, polychromy, and illumination in darkness: Ben and Girl stumble across the melodic, parti-colored event at night. Moreover, several images in the carnival reinforce the presence of the type. There is a “booth containing a perpendicular roulette wheel of a sort, surrounded by the usual assortment of prizes: a beautiful Spanish shawl or mantilla and brilliant cheap jewelry among other articles being touted by the Barker.” The roulette wheel is Laurine, round and suspended in darkness like the prototypical glass sphere, here juxtaposed with vitreous polychromy—the “brilliant cheap jewelry”—and offering a temporary escape, of sorts, to passersby. The items which best establish the presence of the type are the Ferris wheel and carousel. Williams suffuses their description with the type’s characteristics:

Above these gorgeously colored little structures [including the roulette wheel], always turning at some distance, the upper half of it visible, is the glittering Ferris wheel which had originally drawn our two protagonists into adventure. The carousel, not visible, can always be heard, however: it has a light repetitious music, somewhat minor—sometimes fast and sometimes slow—with many starts and stops and now and again the distant, indistinct childlike laughter and shouting of the pleasure seekers who ride upon it. (70)

The reference to the “childlike laughter” of the patrons in this scene suggests that their otherworld has taken them back to their childhood, to their past. In a 1940 letter, Williams even specifically asserts that this scene, the “big scene” of the play, “represents ‘the bright, lost dream of the child’” (*Selected Letters* 1: 267). Williams often uses the imagery of the carnival to evoke an otherworldly return to childhood. For example, the booths of the carnival recur in *The Rose Tattoo*, when Williams wishes to establish the childhood that Serafina, the protagonist, refuses to abandon. Her home is a metaphor for her heart, an otherworld for her, as Laura’s is, and Williams begins its description by saying it is as “as colorful as a booth at a carnival” (*Theatre* 2:

269). The atmosphere of timeless childhood is often a feature of otherworlds. Laura's otherworld keeps her securely in her childhood where she continues playing with her little glass figures; Amanda's otherworld returns her to her girlhood; and Tom-the-narrator's otherworld takes him back to a point in his life when he was in contact with a more innocent side of himself—his life with his sister. These youth-oriented otherworlds often make the atmosphere all the more tragic because a reality which characters once enjoyed has been lost—and the otherworlds which restore this innocence are shattered.

Williams specifically uses carnival music as a cue that characters' innocence and youth are being restored to them. The sounds of the carousel above serve in this way, as does the music of GM described above, in its association with the circus. The music of *You Touched Me!* functions similarly. In 1945, Williams wrote a letter calling for the music of a nearby carnival to seep into various scenes of the play. Often this sense of childhood is touched by the turmoil of adolescence, and there is this sense in *You Touched Me!* In the letter, Williams says that he thinks the carnival music will bring out a "feeling of spring madness, incipient out-break, young confusion and delirium" (*Selected Letters* 1: 562). This sense of "spring madness" and "young confusion" can also be found in Amanda's reminiscences regarding her jonquils, and in the final evening of GM generally. Interestingly, in the drafts, this evening is terminated by yet another circus allusion: Amanda offers Laura and Jim something she says looks like "circus lemonade" (HRC 16.5).

This circus motif may have even inspired the title of GM. Above, in Williams' description of GM's music, he briefly mentions one of the activities associated with the circus, the "parade" that the circus offers when first entering a town, enchanting local children and enticing them to attend. However, there is another feature of the circus of this era worth

mentioning. Next to the big top, circuses typically featured what was called a “menagerie tent.” When Williams entitled this play “The Glass Menagerie,” he may well have been alluding to this very thing, the magic of the circus and, above all, the curiosity of seeing exotic animals in an urban context. In GM, Laura is a rare animal confined in this way. She and her mother—like all of Williams’ romantics—seem out of place, particularly with their mentally inhabiting another time. They look back longingly on their childhood and other, more dramatic epochs (for Amanda, the Old South), and because of this orientation, they are as freaks for those they come into contact with. The menagerie and the circus’s freak show are actually related: after all, when Jim breaks the horn of Laura’s unicorn, she insists the unicorn will feel less “freakish” (1: 226). Moreover, the zoo’s penguins which Laura visits could easily stand in as either freaks or animals in a menagerie tent as far as their dramatic function is concerned. This theme can be found elsewhere in Williams: see his poem “Les Etoiles D’un Cirque” and especially “Carrousel Tune” (*Collected Poems* 111-113, 60). We even have specific documentation of Williams’ affinity with those in freak shows. There is a letter from him, written less than three years after the opening of GM, describing a trip to the carnival, where he mentions sympathizing with the “freaks” (*Windham* 193-94). The menagerie tent resonates with GM for yet another reason. The animals of the menagerie are much like Tom, a wild animal desperate to break from the confines of his home and job; in the words of the subtitle of *Stairs to the Roof*, he is one of those who are “wild of heart that are kept in cages.”

Further evidence that menagerie tents were typical of the period—and another link between them and Williams—comes from the poetry of his friend, Clark Mills, whom Williams formed a “literary factory” with in St. Louis. For a time they spent their days together writing determinedly in the basement of Mills’ house. In 1941, three years before *New Directions*

published Williams' poetry, it published some of Mills' poetry, with one collection entitled "The Circus" (Mills 127). A subcollection of this group features four poems about different animals found there, entitled "Four from the Menagerie" (131). Many have suggested that GM's title comes from a poem of Hart Crane's, "The Wine Menagerie." Williams was tremendously devoted to the work of Crane and would certainly have been familiar with the poem, but it really bears little resemblance to GM and its imagery and themes. The menagerie tent was surely responsible—at least in part—for the title he gave to his first masterpiece.

Circuses-as-otherworlds appear elsewhere in Williams. The narrator of his short story "Two on a Party" (1951-1952) says that the protagonists' primary foe, the

one great terrible, worst of all enemies [. . .] is the fork-tailed, cloven-hoofed, pitchfork-bearing devil of Time!

Time, of course, was the greatest enemy of all, and they knew that each day and each night was cutting down a little on the distance between the two of them running together and that demon pursuer. And knowing it, knowing that nightmarish fact, gave a wild sort of sweetness of despair to their two-ring circus. (*Collected Stories* 292)

The Emergence of the Laurine Type in GM

Other instances of the Laurine type can be found in drafts of GM. One early draft confirms the play within the play as a Laurine type, and even casts elements of the type as catalysts of this internal play. In HRC 16.6, Tom says,

Time is the longest distance between two places, and yet sometimes it appears no distance at all.

A moment ago I was walking down Royal street in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans. It was late at night, I was walking alone, the sidewalk was deserted.

I passed in front of a faintly lighted window of a shop where perfume was sold. The window was filled with tiny crystal bottles, many little transparent pieces of glass...

I stopped without meaning to—

Way down the street somebody dropped a nickel in a slot and there was music—

The glass and the fiddle turned into a play.

The play is memory!

The “glass and fiddle turned into a play”: As we have seen in relation to Laura, glass and music are among the primary signifiers of Laurine otherworlds—with her “world of [. . .] glass” and “phonograph records”—and here they are depicted as the impetus for the creation of the play itself!

Another species of Laurine type can be found in a typescript in HRC 17.2 (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”). There, on Christmas Eve, Tom and Laura decorate their Christmas tree with ornaments while reminiscing about their life in Blue Mountain:

LAURA. It seems to me we lived on top of a hill.
[holding up a brilliant green xmas ornament]
The color of this!

TOM. *[looking up and smiling]* All that bright?

LAURA. Oh, yes. There was so much light and color everywhere!
We lived inside a—soap-bubble!—in the sun.

There are two types of otherworlds. Some are products of imagination—Laura, for instance, imagines that her glass figures are actually companions—while others are products of memory, as with Tom-the-narrator’s and Amanda’s otherworlds. The otherworld in Laura’s response above is explicitly of the second sort, whereas an alternate rendering of the scene contains an otherworld which is explicitly of the first sort. In HRC folder 16.6, Tom says,

Laura’s joy at Christmas is the tree.
She loves to handle the delicate balls of glass, the only
things in the world more delicate than herself.
She holds them up to the light—the light shines through them—

Jewels—jewels!—Rare and magical colors!
Colors of a world we cannot live in....
all of transparent glass in very delicate colors,
like bits of a broken rainbow...

She loves to handle delicate spheres of glass,

she holds them up to the light—the light shines through them...
Jewels—jewels—rare and magical colors!
Colors of a world we never lived in!

Deception: Illusory Otherworlds

In Williams, characters typically create otherworlds in order to bring solace to themselves, whether those otherworlds are positive—quixotically romantic—or merely sedative. However, at other times, they create them in order to enchant others, to manipulate them for the purposes of survival. Blanche creates an otherworld for this reason in *A Streetcar Named Desire*—to captivate Mitch, who she believes will be able to support her. She tells her sister, “When people are soft—soft people have got to court the favor of hard ones, Stella. Have got to be seductive—put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and glow—make a little—temporary magic just in order to pay for—one night’s shelter!” (1947 version, *Tennessee* 1: 515).

In GM, Amanda is as aware as Blanche is of the demands of survival, and she projects otherworlds for the same reason, except that her concern seems to be primarily for Laura rather than for herself. The latter part of GM is given over almost entirely to her attempts to realize her otherworld in order to secure for her daughter a mate, a man who will be able to support her. She reupholsters the furniture, places a “colored paper lantern” over the light in the ceiling, etc., all in hopes of captivating him. On the night preceding his arrival, she is under a strain because she fears her efforts will prove to be insufficient. Her insecurity is paralleled by that of Blanche, who loses faith in her power to attract, telling Stella, “[T]he soft people have got to—shimmer and glow—put a—paper lantern over the light. . . . But I’m scared now—awf’ly scared. I don’t know how much longer I can turn the trick. It isn’t enough to be soft. You’ve got to be soft *and attractive*. And I—I’m fading now!” (*Theatre* 1: 515).

Amanda, for her part, is determined to make Laura the centerpiece of the attractive otherworld she envisages, going so far as to stuff Laura's brassiere with "Gay Deceivers," telling her, "All girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be" (*Theatre* 1: 192). Naturally, Jim is unaware that his invitation is a pretext—Tom says to Amanda that when he extended their invitation to Jim, "I didn't let on that we had dark ulterior motives" (187). The play ends when the artifice fails and the deceivers find themselves deceived; Jim reveals what he has concealed from Tom and the employees at the warehouse that he has a secret life of his own: He is engaged.

Laura's otherworld stands in marked contrast to the duplicitous otherworlds of the others, with Williams going to great lengths to establish her innocence. In fact, this is one of the distinguishing features of her otherworld, that in the midst of poverty and sordidness, she remains uncorrupted, persistently ignoring material exigencies. In the drafts, this innocence is indicated by links between her vitreous otherworld and the prelapsarian world. In drafts of "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," the narrator speaks of her trips to the Jewel Box, describing the latter as a "miniature Eden" (HRC 17.7).

The Limberlost

Two of the three defining characteristics of Laura's otherworld—glass and music—are also features of the Laurine type, as we have discussed. There is, however, a third component of her particular otherworld which is not generally a feature of the Laurine type: her perpetual retreat to a land called the Limberlost, where she joins a character named Freckles. In Williams' description of "The Gentleman Caller," he says,

Laura's hero is a character named Freckles in a novel by that title (Gene Stratton Porter's). This isn't a book that she finished and laid aside but one that she actually lives in, a sort of dream-life and avenue of escape. The Limberlost—the scene of the novel—is another world that she goes into when she sits alone at

night reading the book or polishing her collection of little transparent glass articles which are her chief interest. (HRC 16.9)

In HRC 17.7, the narrator speaks of this book, adding that “Laura had somehow found in it keys to a world that she could create herself. A world that she could escape to” (drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass”). Admittedly, the novel is not explicitly mentioned in GM proper, but it is found throughout the drafts, and its presence can still be perceived in the final version; as R. B. Parker says in “The Texas Drafts of *The Glass Menagerie*,” though many items among the drafts were ultimately thrown out, the “rejected alternatives are still faintly there, like an imaginative penumbra” (57). The Limberlost is most perceptible in the final scene: Immediately after Jim breaks Laura’s unicorn, she unconsciously calls him “Freckles” (226).

This novel of Porter’s actually exists. In it, Freckles, a young, handicapped, orphaned innocent, finds work and a home for himself in a logging camp where he is put in charge of a patch of forest called the Limberlost, which he protects from rogue lumberjacks. Rejected by most, he loses himself in the forest, where he eventually befriends small animals. Laura, who has her own collection of small animals—her menagerie—is taken with this character. In fact, she comes to prefer his forest and his society to reality. In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Tom tells her, “[Y]ou can’t always be so childish.” She responds: “Let me stay like I am, don’t make me change!”

TOM. You’re not happy, Laura.

LAURA. I am, I am!

TOM. You live apart from the world. You don’t go near it.

LAURA. I know what it’s like. It’s Rubicam’s Business College.

TOM. Not all of it.

LAURA. The warehouse where you work and can’t write poems! Or the

Paradise dance hall, with that horrible jitterbug music and slipping out in the alley behind the ash-pit to kiss!
I don't want any of that. I'd rather be like—the unicorn, that doesn't exist anymore.

TOM. But you'll be lonely some day.

LAURA. You mean when you leave?

TOM. [*throws away his cigarette*]

LAURA. I'll go to the Limberlost.

TOM. That's in a book, a novel.

LAURA. It used to be. Now it's in here. [*She touches her forehead.*]

Tom then responds, "But you don't want to get lost in the Limberlost, Laura" (HRC 17.2).

Tragically, she does get lost in the Limberlost; she rejects reality and clings to her glass and music. In drafts of "The Gentleman Caller" at the HNOC, Tom alludes to some of her reasons for doing so:

She wanted to escape attention. Why? Well—she had met with discouragement in the world outside. And so she'd begun the business of an oyster, surrounding the irritating little grain of reality in her shell with a faint and pearly secretion of her own. She was engaged in making the pearl of imagination, a dangerous pearl, a sort of interior glass that she could peer into, which finally would take the place of all windows and doors to the world.

Ultimately, this "interior glass that she could peer into," another species of the Laurine type, attracts her, and the distance between her and reality "increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf" (129). Incidentally, Williams' process of composition and Laura's manufacture of otherworlds are described in similar terms. As we have seen, he believes an artist's work consists of the "transmutation of experience into some significant piece of creation, just as an oyster transforms, or covers over the irritating grain of sand in his shell to a pearl, white or black, of lesser or greater value (*Where I Live* 140-41).

Sleep

One indicator of Laura's otherworldly existence is her somnolence, her trance-like state, alluded to throughout the play. First of all, her bed dominates the stage; Williams says, "Nearest the audience is the living room, which also serves as a sleeping room for Laura, the sofa unfolding to make her bed" (143-44). Her ties to somnolence are further established in scene 5, when Tom tells Amanda of the imminent arrival of the gentleman caller. Immediately afterwards, Amanda calls for Laura to leave the kitchen and wish upon the moon, and she appears looking "faintly puzzled as if called out of sleep" (189). A final attestation of her somnolence can be found in scene 7, where she is associated with somnolence via the candelabrum, one of her symbols, as we shall see below; it was taken from "the altar at the Church of the Heavenly Rest." Her somnolence is reinforced even more strongly in other versions of GM. In "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," she sings a song entitled "Sleepy Time Gal" (*Collected Stories* 112). A few lines down, the narrator recounts her looking at her glass figurines "with her vague blue eyes until the points of gem-like radiance in them gently drew the arching particles of reality from her mind and finally produced a state of hypnotic calm in which she even stopped singing or washing the glass and merely sat without motion until my mother knocked at the door and warned her against the waste of electric current" (112). This is similar to a passage in GM proper; at her mother's approach in scene 2, she sits stiffly before the diagram of the typewriter keyboard "as though it held her spellbound" (151). In HRC 17.7, the narrator says that the "meaninglessness of the little round black circles with letters and figures on them was one thing more to channel her consciousness inward."

This characteristic of Laura's is further reinforced in *You Touched Me!*, a play mentioned above, which Williams wrote with a friend, Donald Windham. It was begun early in 1942, with

Williams working on it steadily in 1943 at the very time he was composing GM. It is an adaptation of a short story by D. H. Lawrence, and an understanding of its symbolism is crucial to an appreciation of the symbolism of GM, for it amplifies virtually every major symbol that exists in GM. Leverich believes the two authors had an equal share in the play's composition, while other scholars believe Williams did most of the writing. Whatever the case may be, Williams is definitely the source of the play's symbolism. Many of the play's dominant symbols are identical to those of his earlier plays, as we will see, and because it sheds light on the symbolism of GM, I refer to it throughout this work.

The play features two characters who are virtual equivalents of Laura and Jim—Matilda and Hadrian. Matilda is associated with somnolence, as well as other symbols we have discussed in relation to Laura, as can be seen in the following passage from the preliminary stage directions of the play:

Before the full stage lights come up, a pin spot of light appears on a large piece of heavy silver and the hands of Matilda moving dreamily over its surface with a polishing cloth. The light blooms gradually from this. Matilda is at the tea table, polishing silver and washing little glass ornaments. She is a girl of twenty and has the delicate, almost transparent quality of glass. (4-5)

Obviously Matilda's association with glass is parallel to Laura's. The imagery in the title of "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," which Williams began in 1941, is present here just as it is present throughout Williams' work at this time. There is even a place in drafts of "The Gentleman Caller" where Laura is described as being "almost transparent looking" (HRC 17.3), absolutely parallel to Matilda's "almost transparent quality of glass" here; of course, the reference to Matilda's moving "dreamily" parallels Laura's somnolence. In one letter, Williams even specifies that Matilda's dress be "dreamy" (*Selected Letters* 1: 562). Matilda's somnolence is further reinforced in the stage directions, which add later that the "brilliant metal has had an

hypnotic effect on her. Her motions have slowed to a halt” (5). In one of the first lines of the play, her sister Emmie complains, “I have to say everything twice. You drift out of consciousness” (5). A few lines later, Matilda complains of fatigue. Emmie responds, “Less dreaming would help you” (6). Essentially, Laura and Matilda are both so immersed in their otherworlds, they strike others as being absent from this world.

After Jim’s chilling disclosure toward the end of GM, there is a sense that Laura is withdrawing into her somnolent otherworld forever, in a final, fatal way, evocative of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is precisely what afflicts the protagonist of Williams’ incomplete play “Talisman Roses” (HRC). Ida Stallcup, the Laura figure, has lived in a dreamy otherworld since her romantic attachment to Richard Jackson, the Jim figure, was broken. She is now an invalid and lives with her older sister, Ethel Stallcup, and her aunt, Lily. Early in the play, she joins them in the room where they are sitting, walks around in a daze, and then wanders back out. Ethel eventually remarks, “It’s like she was walking around in her sleep.” Lily responds, “I reckon she is in a way.”

E. How do you mean?

L. It’s just like she’s been asleep these past five years. They say it’s—it’s kind of [an] escape from life.

However, Ida awakens when Richard returns, reminiscent of Sleeping Beauty. The tragedy of GM is that Jim’s kiss ultimately fails to lift Laura from a similar enchantment.

Spirit

Laura’s dual status as both a character and a symbol has been noted. As a character, she inhabits an otherworld, while as a symbol, she represents such otherworlds and all “small and tender things” which “relieve the austere pattern of life.” There is, however, a second signified for which Laura is the signifier, related to the former yet distinct. She and her glass figures, with

their crystalline purity, represent things of the spirit. Thompson expresses it this way: “The symbolism woven around Laura is composed largely of religious and ascetic images connoting the innocent otherworldliness of the saint, the cloistered nun, and the chaste virgin” (*Tennessee* 19). In the last scene of *Stairs to the Roof*, Williams describes the sky as being the “last high reach of the spirit, matter’s rejection, the abstract core of religion which is purity, wonder and love” (*Stairs* 90). Much of this sense finds its way into the characterization of Laura. A multitude of symbols indicate her ties to spirit, which will be discussed in greater detail in the section on religious symbolism on page [212](#), in the chapter on the final act.

If Laura represents spirit, her brother Tom represents the contrary. He is expanding his knowledge of human nature as assiduously as Laura is clinging to her innocence. This pursuit has brought him into contact with deep strains of flesh within himself, which he accepts rather than disowns, putting him on a distinctly different path from Laura’s. These two characters, then, present us with the traditional spirit/flesh dichotomy, which permeates virtually everything Williams ever wrote regardless of genre, becoming his most pervasive and important motif relative to symbolism. I normally refer to it as Williams’ “prime dichotomy.” One could think of the clichéd image of the ambivalent person on whose shoulders rest an angel and a devil, both attempting to influence the choice being made though this is an oversimplification of Williams’ symbolic system.

GM is actually unusual in that the forces of spirit and flesh are divided up among several characters; typically he depicts single characters with these forces both fighting for dominance within them. He mentions this “duality” within his characters in a 1971 interview, a “duality not reconciled,” and adds, “These divided characters reappear constantly in my work: Val [*Battle of*

Angels], Shannon [*Night of the Iguana*], Blanche [*A Streetcar Named Desire*], Alma [*Summer and Smoke*]" (*Conversations* 209, 210).

Williams saw his own nature as being divided along these spiritual/carnal lines, as can be sensed in his *Memoirs*: "A man must live through his life's duration with his own little set of fears and angers, suspicions and vanities, and his appetites, spiritual and carnal. Life is built of them and he is built of life" (*Memoirs* 242). He also says,

In the course of the book I will talk a great deal about love and much of the talk will be about carnal love as well as spiritual love. I have had, for a man so nearly destroyed so often, a remarkably fortunate life which has contained a great many moments of joy, both pure and impure.

"That sensual music..."

I still hear it clearly. (*Memoirs* xviii)

Elsewhere, he expresses his dual nature another way, asserting that his play *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* expresses "the two sides of my nature. The side that was obsessively homosexual, compulsively interested in sexuality, and the side that in those days was gentle and understanding and contemplative" (qtd. in Bigsby, "Tennessee" 47). Finally, in a 1974 interview, he was asked, "What are some of the new attitudes you think might be reflected in your new plays?" He responds, "You got me! hahaha! I remain [. . .] a sensualist [flesh] and a lover of God and a believer [spirit]" (*Conversations* 274).

Throughout his writing, he indicates what may be the source of the two sides of his nature, the reason for the conflict within himself and his characters. First of all, he identifies his mother and her line as being the source of his spirituality because they were either literally or metaphorically Puritans. For example, in a 1944 letter, he describes his mother as being "one of those conscientious Puritans" (*Selected Letters* 1: 519), and in "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair," a relatively straightforward autobiographical story, he describes his brother as "more of a Puritan than I am" (c. 1960, *Collected Stories* xvi). This phrasing is significant because it

implies that, to some extent, Williams himself is a Puritan, which he ultimately admits: In a 1971 interview, he calls himself a “decadent puritan,” an apt compression of the two forces (*Conversations* 210). He also indicates that his memoirs were written as a “sort of catharsis of puritanical guilt-feelings, I suppose,” implying that this spirituality was present at a surprisingly late stage in his life (*Memoirs* 144).

Just as Williams traces his spirituality to Puritan ancestors on his mother’s side, he traces his carnality to Cavalier forebears on his father’s side. The dilemma is explicated more fully in his essay “Facts About Me” where he describes his mother’s side of the family as being descended from Quakers, and his father’s side as descended from “pioneer Tennessee stock” (*Where I Live* 58). He concludes: “Roughly there was a combination of Puritan and Cavalier strains in my blood which may be accountable for the conflicting impulses I often represent in the people I write about.” This is mentioned again in the previously noted short story “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin”:

My mother and maternal grandmother came of a calmer blood than my sister and I. They were unable to suspect the hazards that we were faced with, having in us the turbulent blood of our father. Irreconcilables fought for supremacy in us; peace could never be made: at best a smoldering sort of armistice might be reached after many battles. Childhood had held those clashes in abeyance. They were somehow timed to explode at adolescence, silently, shaking the earth where we were standing. (*Collected Stories* 273)

Williams introduced this war directly into the first of his plays to receive a full-scale production, *Battle of Angels*. The heart of the play revolves around this conflict, which Williams himself acknowledges, writing that it “touched upon human longings, about the sometimes conflicting desires of the flesh and the spirit. This struggle was thematic; implicit in the title of the play” (*Tennessee* 1: 281). For Williams, this type of moral struggle is actually the essence of tragic drama; he would write later that tragedies consist of “certain moral values in violent

juxtaposition.” They are a “world of fiercely illuminated values in conflict” (*Where I Live* 53, 54).

The point in Williams’ work where he exploits the Puritan/Cavalier conflict within him most explicitly is in his short story “The Yellow Bird,” published in 1947. It is essentially the chronicle of a Puritan couple and their descendents who are plagued by the recurrent presence of a Cavalier element in their line. This finally expresses itself in a pastor’s daughter named Alma, who becomes a renegade, a very jovial prostitute in New Orleans. The narrator adds that she was encouraged by the very Cavalier force her parents had feared: “[W]hen she was alone in her room it sometimes seemed as if she weren’t alone—as if someone were with her, a disembodied someone, perhaps a remote ancestor of liberal tendencies who had been displeased by the channel his blood had taken till Alma kicked over the traces and jumped right back to the plumed-hat cavaliers” (*Collected Stories* 226). It will come as no surprise that Williams identifies with Alma. Of the related play *Summer and Smoke*, he says, “[T]he character I like most is Miss Alma.[. . .] You see, Alma went through the same thing that I went through—from puritanical shackles to, well, complete profligacy” (*Conversations* 210). The similarities between them are particularly strong in his description of his own trip to New Orleans. He says it was there he “found the kind of freedom I had always needed”; more germane to our discussion, he adds that the “shock of it against the puritanism of my nature has given me a subject, a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting” (qtd. in Bigsby, *Critical* 34)

However, he did not pick his themes merely because they were private concerns of his own, but because he truly felt them to be a universal. In his essay “Too Personal?” he writes,

It is the responsibility of the writer to put his experience as a being into work that refines it and elevates it and that makes of it an essence that a wide audience can somehow manage to feel in themselves: “This is true.”

In all human experience, there are parallels which permit common understanding in the telling and hearing, and it is the frightening responsibility of an artist to make what is directly or allusively close to his own being communicable and understandable, however disturbingly, to the hearts and minds of all whom he addresses. (*Where I Live* 159).

Evidence that he saw the spirit/flesh conflict as universal can be found in an interview conducted in 1961 by Studs Terkel, who mentions the passage above where Williams speaks of the Puritan and Cavalier strains, and adds, “It occurs to me this is America, isn’t it? The puritan and the pagan, always embattled.” Williams responds: “Yes, I think it’s most of the world, actually” (*Conversations* 78). He spoke of this eternal conflict as late as 1978: “It would seem that our childhood myths of One called God in constant combat with one called Lucifer, were an ingenuously incarnated but none the less meaningful concept of the all-pervading dilemma” (*Where I Live* 171).

In terms of symbolism, Williams typically uses women to represent the spirit pole of the dichotomy, while men represent the flesh; he essentially identifies the poles of spirit and flesh with femininity and masculinity. Evidence for this can be found in an interview conducted with Jeanne Fayard in 1971. A few moments prior to speaking of the forces of spirit and flesh in Val, one of the protagonists of *Battle of Angels*, Fayard says, “Your work, it seems to me, is a quest of the androgynous.” He replies, “Exactly,” and immediately begins speaking of the interplay of innocence and corruption in Hannah (*The Night of the Iguana*) and Val (*Conversations* 209). His belief in the androgynous within us may have been strengthened by Jung’s concept of “animus” and “anima”—we know he read some of Jung during the early 1940s (*Windham* 113). This masculine/feminine system is so dominant in Williams’ mind that often fairly bland male characters are nevertheless identified by their symbolism as representatives of carnality, while a few rather sensual female characters are identified as representatives of spirit (as we shall see).

However, there are a number of exceptions. Cassandra Whiteside of *Battle of Angels*, for example, is a wholehearted representative of flesh, while Reverend Tooker in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* represents spirit. Furthermore, regardless of what a given character primarily represents, there are often contrary forces within him or her battling for supremacy, as noted, so that, for instance, though Alma of *Summer and Smoke* represents spirit, there are strong currents of flesh within her, which ultimately master and transform her into a representative of flesh. Alma's beau John, on the other hand, is a representative of flesh ultimately claimed by spirit.

Incidentally, Williams probably did not see actual men and women as being as simple as the flesh-and-spirit system might indicate. He apparently believed that there are masculine and feminine forces within us all, which, for him, is the same as saying that there are measures of carnality and spirituality within us all.

Otherworlds typically fall on the spiritual side of this dualistic system, associated with a longing for atemporal realms which are removed from the terrestrial world where physical drives ultimately push us into maturity and away from the magic of childhood. To an extent, Williams even sees the creation of these otherworlds, and the plays which contain them, as being spiritual, asserting that the "passion to create [. . .] is all that we know of God" (*Memoirs* 242). He speaks in similar terms of the artistry of Laurette Taylor, who played the part of Amanda and helped make GM famous:

[T]here are sometimes hints, during our lives, of something that lies outside the flesh and its mortality. I suppose these intuitions come to many people in their religious vocations, but I have sensed them equally clearly in the work of artists and most clearly of all in the art of Laurette. There was a radiance about her art which I can compare only to the greatest lines of poetry, and which give me the same shock of revelation as if the air about us had been momentarily broken through by light from some clear space beyond us. (*Memoirs* 86)

Even here Williams includes classic Laurine imagery, with a clear beam of light from a force beyond ourselves breaking through our darkness. The play in which Laurette starred is actually Williams' most exalted testament to spirit. He typically suffuses his plays with intense carnality, but *GM* is an exception. Tom is a very vocal advocate of recognizing the carnal components within human kind, but as narrator he focuses our attention on Laura, the representative of spirit—on her seclusion from the world and, ultimately, on her figurative immolation.

Stasis/Flux

Williams' primary symbolic means for representing flesh and spirit is the use of the imagery of stasis and flux, with stasis representing spirit, and flux representing flesh. These signifiers are found throughout *GM*, with Tom constantly expressing his yen for escape and motion, both of which are species of flux. The primary signifier, however, is water in motion. The classic instance of this is the imagery of rivers traveling toward the ocean, particularly toward the tropics, the ultimate locus of flesh. Tropical waters are actually a composite symbol, involving flux as well as heat, another signifier of flesh. This symbolic compound is present in *GM* when Tom informs Jim of his joining the Merchant Marines, which he hopes will bring him to the "South Sea Island," the former name of part of the Fijian archipelago, in the Pacific (201). He is apparently emulating his father, who travels to the Pacific; his father's last missive was posted from Mazatlan, a steamy city on the "Pacific coast of Mexico" (145).

Laura, on the other hand, is associated with extreme stasis, scarcely daring to venture out of the apartment unless almost forced to do so, as in scene 4 (168). Her stasis, her seclusion from the flux of experience, works in conjunction with her somnolence and her glass-like delicacy and purity to evoke her spirituality, the distance between her and the world. Jim is able to perceive this private quality of hers, which—like the unicorn—he believes to be almost

impossible to find in the modern world. Predictably, he uses the imagery of stasis to express his wonder, assuring her, before kissing her, “[O]ther people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here” (227).

One species of the symbolism of stasis is water in stasis. It is found more often in drafts of GM and in parallel narratives, but it is also present in GM proper. When the curtains rise on scene 2, we see Laura juxtaposed with the glass menagerie for the first time and, significantly, they are found in the context of water in stasis: She has in her lap a “bowl of ornaments” in which she is “washing and polishing her collection of glass” (151). Other portions of the play reveal her association with water in stasis—relative stasis, at least. In scene 4, Amanda complains that Laura “just drifts along doing nothing. It frightens me terribly how she just drifts along” (174). A few moments earlier, she says Laura is “quiet but—still water runs deep!” (172). This expression is apparently important to Laura’s characterization, for Williams uses it to describe two analogues of Laura: Ida Stallcup of the HRC’s *Talisman Roses* (observe the stasis in her surname—*stall-cup*) and Matilda of *You Touched Me!* (96).

The latter play powerfully attests to the symbolism of water in stasis. Just as Matilda possesses both Laura’s somnolence and her glass-like qualities, she is also associated with this still-pool quality of hers. Evidence for this can be found first in the initial stage directions of the play, where Matilda’s somnolence and her association with glass are found. Just as the Wingfield apartment is a metaphor for Laura’s soul, Matilda’s house is a metaphor for hers. Of this house, Williams says,

A clinging antiquity, a withdrawn quality must be expressed in a way that will show why those things were attractive to a timid girl like Matilda. The house has grace and beauty as many things do which nevertheless are not in vital contact with the world. As Matilda observes at one point, the light through the vines that

cover the windows “give such a cool, green color—like being under water.” It is this dreamy, aqueous effect which should be realized—not heaviness or gloom!—Feminine ornaments, a multitude of them, are on shelves, and the colors of the room are gentle and pleasing. Hardly a sound comes in from the world outside. (4)

This passage makes Matilda’s withdrawal from the world explicit and links it to the imagery of water in stasis, particularly to an underwater world. Also, where the preliminary scenes of GM feature Laura washing her ornaments in a dreamy way, *You Touched Me!* opens with Matilda seated next to her ornaments, polishing her silver in a dreamy way.

This is not the first time an analogue of Laura is joined with such imagery. As early as 1937, a poem by Williams with similar features was published—his “Swimmer and Fish Group”:

1
Here the round laughter, up-tossed,
bubbles into cool green light.
The caverns of crystal momentarily gleam
and are lost.
 The diver goes down.
The pale pink soles of her feet
push water upwards and myriad balls
of air escaping from lips and nostrils swarm
to the turbulent surface. (*Collected Poems* 186)

This poem reinforces the association between Laura figures and the world of the submarine, imagery which reinforces her isolation. It also attests to other symbols discussed: The first stanza features the classic spheres of the Laurine type, juxtaposed with light: The “myriad balls” and the “bubbles” float up into the “cool green light.” There is also the imagery of glass, with “caverns of crystal” which “momentarily gleam / and are lost,” paralleling the foreshadowing in the lines of GM where Laura is described as being “like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting” (191). The conclusion of the poem follows:

2

Cool is the depth—
cool as girl's laughter and girl's lips!
The shimmering arms, the flashing thighs,
the golden-curving hips
quiver through depth on depth of frosty green
through hidden forests of the submarine!

3
Gaze after her!
Beseech her with anxious cries!
Try to follow her form in its flight!

She is oblivious to your cries,
she is lost to your sight,
this terra cotta lady of brown thighs
and pale blue under-water-flashing eyes!

4
Slim coral fish dart from her fingertips,
their fan-like tails caress her bubbling lips
and flutter sidewise from her thrashing feet.

Shelled creatures, crab and star-fish, crawl
from rock to rock where her light shadows fall,
her arms sweep out in movements strong and fleet,
her hair sweeps backward in a golden sheet!

5
Retrieve her if you can!
Stand in her way!
Catch her swift ankle, her thin, immaculate wrist!
With startling turn and twist,
she will elude you, still escape your grasp!

You cannot have her, you can never wive her,
this quicksilver girl, this silver diver,
this searcher after pearls,
terrestrial striver! (*Collected Poems* 186-87)

This poem is almost a complete compendium of Laura's symbols. In the second stanza, "cool" imagery is prevalent, with the "depth of frosty green." We have just learned that heat is a signifier for flesh, and coolness is obviously its opposite. The "hidden forests" are reminiscent of the Limberlost. The imagery of gold in this stanza and in stanza 4 is also significant. As we

shall later learn, the classic color of spiritual otherworlds—particularly those oriented toward the past—is gold, as with Amanda and her jonquils. Finally, toward the end of the poem, there is the imagery of pearls, which we have already seen in association with Laura, as well as an allusion to spirit, with the diver’s “immaculate wrist,” which works in perfect accord with the depiction of Laura.

The world of the diver here is a joyous one, and in *You Touched Me!*, Matilda’s underwater world is specifically not depicted with “heaviness or gloom.” This is not, however, an atmosphere which is maintained in the play. As the narrative progresses, Matilda’s isolation and her submarine stasis are depicted negatively; she is in need of balance. Here, just as in GM, *Summer and Smoke*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the impression is given that the static, spiritual protagonists need to become reconciled to carnality.

Matilda’s father, the “Captain,” makes her need for flux/flesh clear. A representative of flesh, he is associated with flux in almost every conceivable way, true to form for such an uninhibited character. For instance, he once commanded his own ocean-going vessel (the reason for his nickname), and he has fitted out his room to resemble the cabin of this ship in every detail. Tragically, however, he has become static. He now lives on land, distanced from his beloved ocean and his ship. This is paralleled by his spiritual condition—he is being forced to bear the puritanical shackles imposed upon him by his daughters, whose standards keep his impulses in check. Their behavior is galling to him in the extreme, so different from his and his forebears’ wild oceanic acts. He tells Hadrian, the character analogous to Jim,

My fathers were navigators. Men who sailed many seas! [*Crying out.*] Here’s where they end— [*Sobbing.*] The whole wild raging crew end here in this old shut-down pottery house. Here’s where their blood stops, boy. Here’s where it stops. In two locked, stagnant pools—my sister Emmie and my daughter Matilda!
(52)

One could not ask for a clearer contrast between stasis and flux than these “two locked, stagnant pools” and the Captain’s “wild raging crew” sailing the seas. The play concludes when Hadrian finally draws Matilda out of stasis, liberating her. On a literal level, he draws her from her house, and from England, to a new life in the New World. On a figurative level, he draws her from the constricting standards of her and her sister, and from the quiet, stifling recesses of her soul, into flux, into congress with himself—the representative of flesh—and the world at large.

Laura, like Matilda, is excessively static. She too needs someone to pull her from her solitary retreat into the wider world, particularly as the distance between her and reality increases. Up until a certain point, there is every indication that Jim will fill this role. She is dreamy because she inhabits another world, but Jim, as Prince Charming, will kiss her, waking her from her ominous enchantment. Though she is a sealed room, Jim will open the door to her soul, rescuing her from her isolation. He will be the wind blowing through the white curtains on the Wingfield’s windows, blowing new life into the suffocating enclosure of her soul. Finally, she is water enclosed, but he will free her.

It is interesting to note in passing that flux/stasis imagery is present even in Williams’ more autobiographical writing, in his description of his beloved grandfather, who was an Episcopal priest, and his grandmother:

My grandmother formed quiet but deeply emotional attachments to places and people and would have been happy to stay forever and ever in one rectory, once her bedroom was papered in lemon yellow and the white curtains were hung there, once she had acquired a few pupils in violin and piano, but my grandfather always dreamed of movement and change, a dream from which he has not yet wakened in this ninety-sixth spring of his life. (“Grand,” pub. 1964, *Collected Stories* 379)

Williams obviously associates his grandmother with stasis—and note particularly the imagery of white curtains (in GM, a symbol of Laura’s purity) and gold, the “lemon yellow.” By way of

contrast, his grandfather's otherworld, the "dream from which he has not yet awakened," is associated with motion and the potential of the future, like Tom's.

Breathing / Breathlessness

Laura's cloistered spirituality is signified by the imagery of stasis, but also by a related symbol: breathlessness. Just as Matilda's house, with its withdrawn, submarine quality, indicates a barrier between her inner world and the outer one, so Laura's breathlessness signifies a lack of easy congress between an inner world and the outer one. The glass sphere she apparently inhabits admits no outside influences, and like a girl in glass, she seems to be sealed on a literal level in the same way.

Evidence for this figurative breathlessness can be found throughout the play, particularly when Jim arrives and threatens her seclusion. A line describing Matilda could be applied to her at this point—" [h]er perturbation is only understandable to the shy, for whom all intimacy is rich with danger" (15). The symbolism establishes that she is letting him into her soul, particularly with the wind blowing into the Wingfield apartment by way of the white curtains, an indication of the advent of the outside world and flesh into the soul of such a pure, snow-white character. This is the parallel of the "old shut-down pottery house" in *You Touched Me!*—Jim ends Laura's isolation just as Hadrian opens the old clay pot which is Matilda's soul, and breathes life into her. The text begins to emphasize Laura's breathlessness, a figurative indication of her heart's seal which is being unclasped; when the doorbell rings, she "catches her breath and touches her throat" (196). A moment later, she goes to the kitchen and "breathlessly" asks her mother to open the door for the two men. After she is forced to open the door herself, admitting Jim, she "catches her breath and darts through the portieres" (198). Although she is able to evade Jim for the first part of the evening, Amanda eventually sends him in to speak to her. When he does so,

her voice is “thin and breathless as though she has just run up a steep flight of stairs” (210), and she begins “breathlessly” explaining to him why she was quiet when he first came through the door (214). Later she “breathlessly” confesses to him that she cannot dance (224). When they finally do start to dance, she begins “laughing breathlessly” (225).

The end of her breathlessness, her life of cloistered maidenhood, is foreshadowed at about this point when Jim handles the glass unicorn, a symbol of herself. The title to an early version of GM is “If You Breathe, It Breaks” and this line is found here, as she hands him the glass figure: “Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks!” (223). Shortly thereafter, Jim kisses her, figuratively breathing life into her, and this does break her, but in a positive way, breaking down the enclosures to her solitary soul. Tragically, he reveals almost immediately that he is engaged to be married, so that, on a figurative level, he cannot permanently fill the role of breathing life into her, as he has already committed himself to doing so for another.

A more incidental way Laura’s breathlessness is indicated is by her association with maladies affecting the lungs. For example, in the second act, she is accused of “[d]eliberately courting pneumonia” (154), and in the middle of scene 7, the most significant scene symbolically, she reminds Jim of her having had pleurosis, another disease affecting the lungs. Pleurosis is almost her nickname, the inspiration behind Jim’s calling her “Blue Roses” (215).

Public / Private Textuality

Amanda’s description of Laura as being “quiet but—still water runs deep!” is an allusion to her stasis. This is actually a composite symbol, for it includes both Laura’s association with water, mentioned above, and what I call her “wordlessness,” parallel to her breathlessness, stasis, etc. This same composite symbolism is particularly prevalent in an excerpt above from *You Touched Me!*, indicating the importance of both signifiers to Williams’ symbolic system:

“Hardly a sound comes in from the world outside” of Matilda’s home (4). This is reinforced when Hadrian arrives and mentions the amazing silence of their retreat: “What makes the grounds so quiet? The vines have grown over the windows!”

MATILDA. Yes, they have.

HADRIAN. Doesn’t anyone trim them?

MATILDA. We prefer them like that. They give such a cool, green color, like being under water. (18)

Wordlessness is a symbol parallel in significance to Laura’s breathlessness. We see it when she breaks down during her typing test, and during her trip to the Young People’s League, where “[s]he spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her” (175).

Her wordlessness is also an allusion to a related yet distinct concept in Williams. In his essay “The Timeless World of a Play,” Williams speaks of the playwright’s imperative to convert life into art: “Great sculpture often follows the lines of the human body: yet the repose of great sculpture suddenly transmutes those human lines to something that has an absoluteness, a purity, a beauty, which would not be possible in a living mobile form” (*Where I Live* 51). Playwrights operate similarly—they transmute experience into something with “an absoluteness, a purity, a beauty.” In Williams’ case, he has taken his experience, particularly his knowledge of himself, and distilled it, producing the absolute concepts of flesh and spirit. It is important to note that he seems to see those who are interested in such absolute, pure and beautiful things as belonging to a particular class, distinct from those preoccupied only with surviving and thriving in this world. Tom is an example of the former class, while Jim is a member of the latter.

Within this system, flesh is an absolute, virtually a Platonic ideal. When Williams describes tragedies as containing “certain moral values in violent juxtaposition,” he is definitely including carnality as one of these moral values (*Where I Live* 53). His acknowledgment of

carnality as an absolute is something which springs from one of his prime objectives in life—the discovery and expression of truth. Truth is one of his most transcendent ideals, and because it is so deeply true that there is carnality within us, carnality occupies a central place in his ideological pantheon. There are hints of this in GM’s drafts: At times, the D. H. Lawrence book to which Amanda objects in scene 3 of GM proper is hidden behind Tom’s “Books of Knowledge”—flesh is associated with knowledge, though it is hidden because traditional, conservative society resists acknowledging it (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” HRC 16.10). One can find indications that flesh is an ideal for Williams throughout his writing. In “The Timeless World of a Play,” he speaks of snatching the eternal out of the “desperately fleeting” (*Where I Live* 52), and that carnality is one of these eternal things is indicated by his saying: “In actual existence the moments of love are succeeded by the moments of satiety and sleep. [. . .] But the fact that passion occurred in *passing*, that it then declined into a more familiar sense of indifference, should not be regarded as proof of its inconsequence. And this is the very truth that drama wishes to bring us” (51). Flesh is actually one of those things that has “an absoluteness, a purity, a beauty” that he believes sculptors capture: In his *Memoirs*, he says, “[T]hose who painted and sculpted the sensuous and the sensual of naked life in its moments of glory made them palpable to you as we can never feel with our fingertips and the erogenous parts of our flesh” (250). Flesh is spoken of similarly in his essay “The Meaning of *The Rose Tattoo*” in which he insists that it “must not be confused with mere sexuality. The element is higher and more distilled than that” (*Where I Live* 56). It is the “light on the bare golden flesh of a god”; ultimately, it is Dionysus himself (57). The entire play, *The Rose Tattoo*, is actually a tribute to flesh as an ideal. (Gold normally is a symbol of otherworlds associated with the past, but where it occurs on bodies animal or human, as in the “golden flesh” of the god, it often represents flesh

as an ideal. See also the “golden panther” in the story “One Arm” [*Collected Stories* 184], the yellow bird of Williams’ short story by that name, and the “great yellow eyes” of the black goat in *The Rose Tattoo* [*Theatre* 2: 286].)

Carnality is treated as a transcendent ideal in Williams’ narratives as well. In “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin,” the narrator says that adoring the “beauty of Richard [Miles]” was natural for him, that boys his age were “made to be stirred by such ideals of grace” (*Collected Stories* 277). Ultimately, this beauty him to become a “devout little mystic of carnality” (278). Flesh is depicted similarly in other short stories, including “Gift of an Apple,” “Ten Minute Stop” and “Beauty Is the Word,” where it becomes part of the gospel Esther preaches. It is also strongly present in “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” where it is referred to as “dark glory” (103). Above all, it is present in “One Arm,” a short story Williams wrote at the same time he was composing *GM*. It features a one-armed male prostitute depicted along ideal lines: Oliver Winemiller had a face with the “virile but tender beauty of the sort that some painter of the Renaissance might have slyly attributed to a juvenile saint, a look which had sometimes inspired commentators to call him ‘the baby-faced killer’” (183). After Oliver’s execution, his body

was turned over to a medical college to be used in a classroom laboratory. The men who performed the dissection were somewhat abashed by the body under their knives. It seemed intended for some more august purpose, to stand in a gallery of antique sculpture, touched only by light through stillness and contemplation, for it had the nobility of some broken Apollo that no one was likely to carve so purely again (188)

Appropriately, the dust jacket for the collection *One Arm and Other Stories* features a Greek statue of a man with one arm broken cleanly off (Leavitt 67).

That Williams considered both spirit and flesh to be ideals can be seen in a statement he made in 1974: Among his good qualities, he considers himself both a “lover of God” and a

“sensualist” (*Conversations* 274). The status of spirit and flesh as ideals is also reflected in his short story “The Field of Blue Children,” written circa 1937 and published in 1939. Incidentally, it was Williams’ first story to be published in the periodical *Story*—a sign he had truly arrived as a short-story writer. Its protagonist is named Myra, a college student who is struck by desperation for transcendence. Her boyfriend is a representative of spirit to an extent: His name is Kirk Abbott, and Kirk means “church,” while Abbott is obviously “abbot.” He represents conventional religion, the type of spirituality that is enough for most people, Williams believed; Williams later wrote that for most, if they are “conscious of there being anything to explore beyond this *soi-disant* universe, they comfortably suppose it to be represented by the mellow tones of the pipe organ on Sundays” (*Where I Live* 43). However, Myra is looking for something still higher, which is represented by her dating other boys even while going steady with Kirk. At the same time, she begins writing poems more avidly than ever, and

[t]heir beauty startled her: sometimes it was like a moment of religious exaltation. [. . .] At such times she would turn out the light in her bedroom and go quickly to the window. When she looked out across the purple-dark town and the snowy white dome above the quadrangle, or when she sat as in a spell, listening to the voices that floated down the quiet streets, singers of blues songs or laughing couples in roadsters, the beauty of it no longer tormented her, she felt instead a mysterious quietness as though some disturbing question had been answered and life had accordingly become a much simpler and more pleasurable experience.

“Words are a net to catch beauty!”

She wrote this in the back of a notebook toward the close of a lecture on the taxing powers of congress. (*Collected Stories* 71-72)

This innocent-looking passage is actually rife with symbolism. While she is writing the poems, experiencing something like “religious exaltation,” she senses the ideals of both flesh and spirit. The catalog of the things she perceives is broken down into two categories—she sees the “snowy white dome above the quadrangle,” and she sits “listening to the voices that floated down the quiet streets, singers of blues songs or laughing couples in roadsters.” The “snowy white dome”

is spirit, with the imagery of white and the cathedral-like edifice, and the second is flesh, with the blues songs and the couples, and the imagery of flux—rivers of sound rippling down the streets, the mellifluous music, and couples in roadsters. The lofty heights of art lift her to the ideals of both flesh and spirit.

Flesh, then, is an ideal in Williams, just as spirit is. Above, we mention that in Williams, those interested in spirit and/or flesh as ideals constitute one group, whereas those apathetic to them as ideals—those interested merely in surviving and thriving—constitute another. Most often, representatives of spirit are the ones belonging to the former category. Though carnality is an ideal, the representatives of carnality in Williams' narratives are not typically concerned with ideals; they are more likely to be interested in carnal and material gain, and are thus more likely to be of the latter class. Although, strictly speaking, the truth about the carnality within human nature is absolute, pure, and beautiful according to Williams, predictably, predominantly carnal characters have other concerns than meditating on this.

There are many exceptions, however, and Tom is one: Though a representative of flesh, he is interested in it as more of an absolute, particularly in his writing and in his association with D. H. Lawrence. He is not just interested in eating, drinking, and acquiring, unlike other representatives of flesh. Amanda too is an exception, though in the opposite way. She is a representative of spirit, but her energies are more devoted toward survival, toward securing the temporal well-being of her daughter. This is expressed succinctly in the drafts: In HRC 17.2, which contains drafts of "The Gentleman Caller," Laura falls in love with a representative of flesh (though not, in this case, with a Jim figure). Speaking of him while "[d]reamily facing the mirror," she says, "The cavalier is an immortal type." Amanda responds, "Give me a mortal type that makes a living." This passage again establishes flesh as an ideal—the cavalier is just as

much of an “immortal type” as the spirit pole of the spirit/flesh dichotomy—and it establishes Amanda’s orientation toward survival.

At one point, Williams wrote, “Even in the actual world of commerce, there exists in some persons a sensibility to the unfortunate situations of others, a capacity for concern and compassion, surviving from a more tender period of life outside the present whirling wire-cage of business activity” (*Where I Live* 50). Here Williams himself mentions that there are exceptions to the rule that those who are obsessed with thriving in this world are apathetic to the ideals which transcend it. However, if these people are in touch with ideals, it is because they are in contact with past-oriented otherworlds like memories of childhood, which tend to be allied with the spiritual side of the dichotomy.

During this discussion of ideals, the reader may sense a Platonic influence in Williams. Though Plato would never have agreed with positing carnality as an ideal, there is a Platonic influence, which Williams makes clear. For instance, in scene 7 of GM there is an explicit allusion to Plato’s allegory of the cave, when Jim abruptly draws Laura’s attention to his shadow on the wall (224). We know Williams was familiar with the allegory, because in a letter to his agent Audrey Wood in 1939, he wrote, “It is marvelous what you are doing for me—I think it would surprise you a little to know the fabulous image that you have projected on my little cave of consciousness out here” (*Selected Letters* 1: 193).

In symbolic terms, the two classes of which we have been speaking—the one constituted of those interested in ideals, the other with those who are not—are signified by what I call “private textuality” or “artistic textuality,” and by “public textuality” or “commercial textuality,” respectively. Those in the former class are less obsessed with survival, and less inclined to join their voices to the river of voices of the world at large. One could use the metaphor we have

discussed in relation to Laura—verbally, they are like sealed enclosures, sealed spheres of glass, so that they resist intimacy with the outside world and the “taxing powers of congress” (another composite symbol). Those in the latter class, on the other hand, are like rivers eager to commingle with others, driven to join their voices to the voices of the world at large, and determined to use their verbal talents to secure them a place in it. Sheer volubility is one sign that an individual belongs to this group, particularly when his or her conversation and preoccupations revolve around commerce. Williams often suffuses the speech of such characters with the imagery of textuality, a further signifier of the group, so that they are constantly making reference to written language—bills, newspapers, articles, catalogs, and rosters—as well as to spoken language—conversations, opinions, rumors, etc. Those associated with private textuality are very rarely associated with the imagery of textuality, and when they are, the texts are artistic, relatively self-referential and self-contained, as though Williams had adopted the New Critical distinction between artistic and commercial texts and applied it to this system. Such characters almost seem to be New Critical texts themselves, relatively isolated from their contexts, isolated from the world at large. Henderson and Brown write that “New Criticism regards the work of art as an autonomous object, a self-contained universe of discourse. Whereas scientific language corresponds with an external referent, literary language is internally coherent.” Characters associated with private textuality could be described in much the same way; in fact, the otherworlds they often live in are precisely “self-contained universes.” Characters associated with commercial textuality, on the other hand, seem almost to be commercial texts, relating directly to the world around them.

Many today would argue against the notion that artistic texts are more self-referential than commercial texts. However, it is understandable that Williams would have made such a

distinction, given his exposure to commercial textuality. While at the University of Missouri in Columbia, he was constantly trying to find time to write plays, but was often forced to give this up and write news reports as he studied to become a reporter. He was often given orders to write texts which were relatively far from being self-referential, as when he was engaged in the “daily reporting of prices in local produce” (*Selected Letters* 1: 60). Allean Hale provides an instance of such reporting: For Tuesday, March 1, 1932, he wrote, “Local Produce: Heavy hens, 12c; light hens, 8c; springs, 12c; cocks, 4c; Eggs, 7c” (“Tennessee Williams’s St. Louis Blues” 618). In a letter to his mother in which he speaks of this assignment, he wrote, “It is considered an honor to be given a regular beat by the editor, as it is supposed to indicate that he holds you to be reliable, but I should, in this instance, preferred to have remained unhonored” (*Selected Letters* 1: 60).

Myra, in “The Field of Blue Children,” is an excellent example of a character associated with private, or artistic, textuality. She spends much of her time writing poems in private and is associated with the ideals of flesh and spirit, while living in defiance of commercial textuality, ultimately summing up the beauty of flesh and spirit in “the back of a notebook toward the close of a lecture on the taxing powers of congress.” Representatives of private textuality can be found in Williams as late as 1966 in his novella “The Knightly Quest,” which features protagonists who speak privately to each other “in a foreign tongue that sounded like no earthly language” (*Collected Stories* 447). However, Laura of GM is the classic instance of the type. She enjoys the textuality of her private world—her novel and the lyrics of her phonographs—but when it comes to language which is in congress with the outside world, she balks. In scene 2, she sits “stiffly before the diagram of the typewriter keyboard as though it held her spellbound,” rather than using it to type (151). “[S]pellbound” is an apt description of her relationship to words in general. Spells—and all textual production and exchange—mystify her. The narrator

speaks further of this diagram in drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” as noted: “The meaninglessness of the little round black circles with letters and figures on them was one thing more to channel her consciousness inward” (HRC 17.7). The texts of the outer world tend only to push her more deeply into her own.

She shuts down altogether at Rubicam’s Business College when she is given a typing test. Her teacher later tells Amanda, “Her hands shook so that she couldn’t hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed test, she broke down completely—was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the washroom! After that morning she never showed up any more. We phoned the house but never got any answer” (154). There is symbolism in the school’s last act. The Wingfield apartment, as we have seen, is a metaphor for Laura’s soul, and the school’s receiving no answer is indicative of the barrier between her and the textual intrusions of the larger world. This textual barrier is again alluded to when Amanda confides to Tom, “I took her over to the Young People’s League at the church. Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her” (175). Moreover, in the last scene, when she is left alone with Jim, she “can hardly speak from the almost intolerable strain of being alone with a stranger” (210). Gradually, she is able to speak, but she makes reference to her usual wordlessness in her description of her glass figures—she facetiously tells Jim that the members of her menagerie seem to get along with one another: “I haven’t heard any arguments among them!” (223).

This wordlessness of hers is reinforced in the drafts and in earlier narratives. In HRC 16.10 her private textuality is the reason she leaves high school: She explains to Jim: “I— couldn’t recite in classes” (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”). In those narratives where her voice is described, it is usually weak. The narrator of the published “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” says, “Often she sang to herself at night in her bedroom. Her voice was thin, it usually wandered

off-key. Yet it had a curious childlike sweetness.” Even then, she sings songs with titles that downplay her verbal production—songs with titles like “Whispering” (112). Some drafts do feature a relatively outspoken Laura—a stage in the development of GM when she more closely resembled Williams’ sister Rose—but there is little hint of this in the final version.

Brick, one of the main characters of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is surprisingly parallel to Laura in a plethora of ways. Though they are certainly different as characters, virtually every major symbol of hers is a symbol they share. Significantly parallel is their wordlessness, related to their apathy for the demands of survival. A signal indication of Brick’s private textuality appears as the play is ending, when Margaret asks him, “What do you say?” Characteristically, he responds, “I don’t say anything. I guess there’s nothing to say” (3: 165). His relative wordlessness traumatizes his wife throughout the play.

In GM, Tom is characterized by private—or artistic—textuality because he is obsessed with the truth of human nature and apathetic to Jim’s interest in public speaking courses and securing promotion and success in the business world. He is similar to his sister in this regard: When language is demanded of Laura, she loses consciousness and is carried to the washroom. Tom too is often in the washroom, a symbol of the barrier between his concerns and the concerns of the company he works for. Writing poems there which few seem to read typifies his private textuality. Tom’s and Laura’s acts indicate the extent to which their worlds are separate, self-enclosed. Even his nickname is evocative of artistic textuality: Jim calls him “Shakespeare” (190). Jim, on the other hand, balks at being associated with artistic textuality, at least on a symbolic level. He hides his engagement from the others at the warehouse to avoid being called “Romeo” (233).

In his *Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, C. W. E. Bigsby describes these two groups as follows:

Language operates both as [. . .] a prosaic lodestone dragging the self into the world of money, power, routine and death, and as evidence of resistance, a poetic reshaping: but it is a different language. Thus it is that, in *The Glass Menagerie*, the gentleman caller is intent on learning public speaking as a route to power while Laura's powerlessness is symbolised by the fact that she cannot master the typewriter. Her hesitant speeches are in fact a series of withdrawals. The only language which is wholly uninfected by commerce, bitterness and disillusionment is that which she employs when describing her glass menagerie, the private language in which she addresses her own inventions. And Tom, too, wishes to escape from the encasing prose of his setting into the poetry that Williams permits him in his role as narrator. It is his only resource. It is the evidence of his resistance. (43-44)

Amanda, for her part, is characterized by public textuality. Like most representatives of spirit associated with public textuality, she takes the texts associated with private textuality—art, literature, etc.—and uses them to further herself in a publicly textual way, as when she uses literature to sell subscriptions over the phone. Blanche, another representative of spirit, behaves similarly in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, using her experience with literature—her background as an English teacher—to verbally enchant Mitch, to secure him for the purposes of survival. Stanley, for his part, is associated with commercial textuality in a much more straightforward way, as he speaks of the Napoleonic code, demands to see the will, expresses his interest in Blanche's papers, all instances of the imagery of textuality. He is similar to Jim in this regard, with Jim's offering to sell Tom a "bill of goods," etc. (199). The textuality of the other characters will be treated in detail in their respective chapters.

Animality—The Aviary

One of the ways Williams evokes Laura's delicacy is through the use of glass imagery, as we have seen; another is his utilization of avian imagery. In "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," the narrator recalls that when he and Jim arrived at the apartment, "[t]he door came timidly open and

there she stood in a dress from Mother's wardrobe, a black chiffon ankle-length and high-heeled slippers on which she balanced uncertainly like a tipsy crane of melancholy plumage. Her eyes stared back at us with a glass brightness and her delicate wing-like shoulders were hunched with nervousness" (115). Earlier in the story, avian imagery is combined with private textuality to denote the barrier between her and the world at large. Speaking of her typing course at business college, the narrator says that Laura would practice her typing determinedly, and when she arrived at school, she "would seem to know the positions of the keys until the weekly speed drill got underway, and then they would fly from her mind like a bunch of startled birds" (110). Throughout his narratives, Williams uses avian imagery to denote the fragility of what he calls his sensitive non-conformist individuals (*Selected Letters* 1: 220).

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams depicts Blanche's fragility in a slightly different way, transforming avian imagery into the symbolism of moths, an image which combines the delicacy of birds with the fate of spiritual characters drawn toward carnality—moths attracted to and perishing in flame. In *GM*, we see the beginning of this transformation in the opening stage directions of scene 5, in the description of the Wingfield family: "It is early dusk of a spring evening. Supper has just been finished in the Wingfield apartment. Amanda and Laura, in light-colored dresses, are removing dishes from the table in the dining room, which is shadowy, their movements formalized almost as a dance or ritual, their moving forms as pale and silent as moths" (178).

However, avian imagery is more common in Williams than heteroceran imagery, and the characters with whom it is associated are typically described as being *caged* birds. For instance, the characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* make the stage sound like "a big bird-cage" (3: 134) and Williams directs that the stage be designed so that the characters' "restlessness, their passion for

breaking out” can be expressed (3: 16). Similar symbolism is present as early as his *Stairs to the Roof*, subtitled “A Prayer for the Wild of Heart That Are Kept in Cages.” The motif is also prominent in another early play, *Not About Nightingales*, set in a penitentiary which is essentially a large cage, in which the characters are repeatedly depicted as caged birds. For example, one of the protagonists’ names is “Miss Crane,” the secretary of the warden. She ultimately becomes trapped in the prison with her boyfriend, who is nicknamed the “Canary,” a man responsible for the publication of the prison’s monthly, entitled *The Archaeopteryx* (*Tennessee* 1: 100, 103, 110). The archaeopteryx is an extinct bird, a composite symbol combining avian imagery with the ideas associated with GM’s unicorn, another image of the alienation the romantic feels.

The ubiquity of Williams’ avian imagery is perhaps due to the proximity of the Williams’ apartment to the mammoth birdcage in St. Louis’ Forest Park, the “Flight Cage.” As mentioned earlier, Laura visits both while avoiding her business-college courses, later confessing, “I went in the art museum and the bird houses at the Zoo. I visited the penguins every day!” The penguins are of course symbols of Laura herself, but with a difference from other instances of avian imagery in Williams. She and the caged birds she visits show no signs of resenting their confinement. Though Tom feels entrapped and despises his condition, she experiences a world far more constricted than his without seeming to mind.

It would seem that the important thing for most women in Williams is not escape, not travel or a life in flux, but the securing of a home—consistent with the symbol of stasis usually associated with women. In fact, Amanda describes tragedy in terms of avian imagery and flux when she tells Laura of the dark fate of unmarried women, spinsters forced to travel from relative to relative, “little birdlike women without any nest” (156). Determined to protect Laura from sharing their fate, she begins selling subscriptions to “properly feather the nest” and “plume

the bird” (159). Immediately prior to scene 6, the “nest” is ready, and the Wingfields are finally in a position to attract a suitor for Laura, a bird with a nest but no mate. They need a bird to fill the role of the active male bird immersed in flux, while Laura is ready to be the bird at home, on the nest. Toward the end of the play, it appears that Jim may be the needed mate. Appropriately, as he and Laura dance immediately prior to their kiss, this is precisely the imagery of the song they dance to: “La Golondrina,” Spanish for “The Swallow,” with lyrics by Walter Hirsch:

High in the sky at break of dawn I see
the swallow fly above the world
among the drifting clouds he flashes by
beneath the eaves his little mate is waiting
beneath the leaves where all his treasures lie.

At this point, it seems as though Jim will be this male bird in flux, while Laura is ready to be the bird in the nest. Although these lyrics are not in GM proper, Williams was clearly familiar with them, for they appear in drafts of GM, where Jim actually sings the song to Laura (HRC 16.5). Williams also uses the song in *Summer and Smoke*, a play he began soon after GM; Alma Winemiller begins singing the song just as John, her love interest, returns from his travels (*Theatre 2*: 132). The song and the two plays are parallel because they feature representatives of stasis, the female characters, waiting for the arrival into their lives of representatives of flux, the male characters. In the drafts of GM, this theme is reinforced by Laura’s playing a song on the Victrola entitled “The Love Nest” (HRC 16.6).

Conclusion

In summary, then, Laura is associated with a host of symbols reinforcing her purity and delicacy—the imagery of glass—as well as symbols reinforcing her reclusiveness—the imagery of somnolence, water in stasis, breathlessness, wordlessness, and birds. She is also associated with symbols linking her to the transcendent, particularly to artistic textuality. She is signified

by this imagery, and she in turn signifies various concepts: the high reaches of spirit as opposed to flesh, and the “small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive,” including otherworlds.

2. TOM: CARNAL IDEALIST

Flesh and the Caged Bird

Tom is almost as important to the symbolism of GM as Laura is, representing, as we have seen, one of the poles of Williams' central dichotomy. Like John of *Summer and Smoke* and Stanley of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he is associated with flesh; he signifies—and is an advocate of—a materialistic worldview where animal instinct is central and where spirituality is downplayed. In scene 3, in a rage, he tells his mother, “Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!”

AMANDA. Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!

TOM. What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?

AMANDA. Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys—pigs—

TOM. I reckon they're not. (174)

His association with flesh and animality is figuratively reinforced later in the scene when he speaks of his mother's confiscating his books. He explodes, claiming he is being “*driven out*” of his senses” (161). He laughs “wildly” at one of her comments, and soon afterwards, “crouches toward her, overtowering her tiny figure. She backs away, gasping” (164). (By way of visual symbolic contrast, a “clear pool of light” is trained on Laura throughout this scene [160].) Yet if he is at heart a wild animal, he is a wild animal *entrapped*, precisely like the birds we have discussed. Toward the end of the scene, as he is leaving, “he goes through a series of violent, clumsy movements, seizing his overcoat, lunging to the door, pulling it fiercely open. [. . .] His arm catches in the sleeve of the coat as he struggles to pull it on. For a moment he is

pinioned by the bulgy garment” (164). Tom is not simply a trapped wild animal, but specifically a trapped wild bird; he is “pinioned.” In his case, associated as he is with flesh, stasis is extremely negative. He wishes to be freed, a fantasy enacted before him after he leaves the apartment and goes to the movies: A magician turns a cage of canaries into a bowl of goldfish, which in turn “fly away” canaries. At times, in the drafts, he is associated with both avian imagery and heteroceran imagery, just as Laura is. In HRC 17.1, Tom, whose name there is Larry, says to Jim: “It’s like a cocoon that a moth is wrapped up in.”

JIM. What is?

LARRY. A job. It’s like a fine soft bandage that keeps you from flying. (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”)

Stairs to the Roof, subtitled *A Prayer for the Wild of Heart That Are Kept in Cages*, anticipates Tom’s dilemma. In it, the tragedy of stasis is combined with the imagery of caged birds, all associated with Ben, a character forced to endure employment as oppressive as Tom’s in GM. Ben’s employer is named “Mr. Gum,” a name which evokes confinement and tragic stasis. When he discovers that Ben has been spending time on the rooftop of the business, dreaming of liberation, he teases him about keeping company with pigeons. Ben, in turn, insists that pigeons are good company. Mr. Gum replies, “Especially for you, Mr. Murphy.”

BEN. Sure. We have lots in common.

GUM. And just about the same amount of intelligence, too.

BEN. No, sir, pigeons are smarter than me—a whole lot.

GUM. You admit it?

BEN. Yes, sir. They take the liberty of the sky. Me, Mr. Gum, I never get any further than the roof. (*Stairs* 8)

Williams uses this same idea of caged animals in a later play. In an interview with Henry Hewes in 1953, he indicates that this symbol is at the heart of *Camino Real*: “[T]he theme,’ says the playwright affably, ‘is pretty much the same as that of a play I wrote in 1941 called *Stairs to the Roof*, which was produced at the Pasadena Playhouse. It is, I guess you could say, a prayer for the wild of heart kept in cages” (32).

In GM, the avian motif predominates, evoked even by the family’s last name. Judith Thompson writes that in their surname, “a symbol of transcendence is fused with an image of mundane reality, relentlessly evoking the painful disparity between aspiration and actuality, or between what the characters would be and what they must be” (*Tennessee* 16). Although “Wingfield” is taken from the surname of a woman Williams knew, he was clearly thinking of the imagery of the name; earlier in the drafts (and in the early play *Spring Storm*) the family’s name is “Critchfield.”

Though Tom is “pinioned” in scene 3, he does succeed in escaping eventually. In HRC 16.9, he leaves and Amanda learns the next morning that “the bird has flown the coop” (description of “The Gentleman Caller”). However, he is liberated at a price, which is foreshadowed in scene 3: When he finds himself pinioned, he “tears the coat off again” with an “outraged groan,” splitting the shoulder of it, and “hurls it across the room. It strikes against the shelf of Laura’s glass collection, and there is a tinkle of shattering glass. Laura cries out as if wounded.” His decision to follow his carnal instincts will entail spiritual destruction—the loss of his sister. In the acting edition, under “Notes on the Characters,” Williams insists that Tom’s “nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he must act without pity” (*Glass Menagerie* 8).

His desire to escape and the symbolism associated with it are autobiographical. While living with his family in 1938, Williams wrote,

Dad started griping about my lack of job, Etc.—Surely I won't stay on here when I'm regarded as such a parasite. Now is the time to make a break—get away—away. I have pinned pictures of wild birds on my lavatory screen—Significant—I'm desperately anxious to escape. But where and how?—No money—Grand & Mother the only possible source. What a terrible trap to be caught in!—But there must be some way and I shall find it. (qtd. in Leverich 272)

Stasis / Flux

Tom's successful escape links him to the symbolism of flux. In the chapter on Laura, we have identified the imagery of flux as a signifier of flesh, of carnality. Tom's drive to be liberated from his cage joins him to this signifier, of which there are several types: movement across land; the motion both of water and individuals traveling by water, particularly down rivers toward the ocean; the movement of bodies through air, as well as wind (the movement of air itself); and motion through outer space.

Overland Motion

Tom is heavily drawn toward motion across land, eager to emulate his father who has “skipped the light fantastic out of town” (145). Tom later implies that he wishes to be where his father is: “GONE! [. . .] As far as the system of transportation reaches!” (163). Tragically, he works in a locale which is the opposite of flux: a shoe warehouse—essentially an enclosure (the warehouse) containing enclosures (shoe boxes)—boxes within boxes, the equivalent of cages within cages, extreme images of stasis. However, the boxes in the warehouse do enclose shoes, which call to Tom, as he tells Jim in scene 6: “Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing! Whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes—except as something to wear on a traveler's feet!” (202). Amidst the entrapment, the stasis, there is a call to action, to flux. In scene 6, he tells Jim,

You know what happens? People go to the movies instead of moving! Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there's a war. That's when adventure becomes available to the masses! *Everyone's* dish, not only Gable's! Then the people in the dark room come out of the dark room to have some adventure themselves. Goody, goody!—It's our turn now, to go to the South Sea Island—to make a safari—to be exotic, far-off! But I'm not patient. I don't want to wait till then. I'm tired of the *movies* and I am *about to move!* (201)

Williams himself was associated with an extreme form of overland flux, like Tom. Leverich marks the moment in 1938 when Williams became a perpetual wanderer, and he remained something of a vagabond his entire life, as he succumbed to the gypsy impulse (275). One may detect in this how he came to see the imagery of flux as an apt symbol for carnality. Maturity forced him from his spiritual innocence into carnality, and it also drew him from his home, inspiring him to strike out on his own, so the two things—movement and maturity—may have become associated with one another in his mind.

The Oceanic

In the passage above, the mention of Fiji's "South Sea Island" is particularly significant. The motion of which Tom speaks involves momentum toward the oceanic, specifically toward the wide Pacific, the ultimate expression of flux. This is echoed in drafts of "The Gentleman Caller" where the Wingfield home overlooks the Mississippi river itself (HRC 17.2). In this context, Tom speaks of his longing to go down the river and much further, "around the Straits of Magellan," thus into the Pacific. In scene 3, Tom's dilemma is expressed in symbolic terms; he works at the Continental Shoemakers, a figurative indication of the distance between him and the ocean and the free life of untrammelled instinct and carnality which it represents. His ambitions in this vein are visually indicated immediately prior to his "South Sea Island" speech above: Before fantasizing about leaving, a sailing vessel with the Jolly Roger appears on screen.

Simultaneously, “[t]he incandescent marquees and signs of the first-run movie houses light his face from across the alley. He looks like a voyager” (200-01). This is not the first time the imagery of ocean-going sailing and piracy appear in relation to Tom. In scene 4, he is explaining to his mother that he goes to the movies because he likes adventure. When she attacks this tendency, he begins to resist, and a “sailing vessel with Jolly Roger” appears on screen (173). His is a landlocked soul, longing for life on the high seas. Ultimately, he makes his choice, joining the Union of Merchant Seamen, another symbol of his complete identification with the carnal pole of the prime dichotomy.

The image of piracy is an apt one for representatives of flesh. In Williams, it could almost be said that they define themselves by their opposition to the negative spirituality of the status quo, a defiance well represented by the Jolly Roger. This same piratical tone can be found in Williams’ short story “Two on a Party,” where the narrator describes the relationship of the two protagonists, both representatives of flesh, in similar terms:

It was a rare sort of moral anarchy, doubtless, that held them together, a really fearful shared hatred of everything that was restrictive and which they felt to be false in the society they lived in and against the grain of which they continually operated. They did not dislike what they called “squares.” They loathed and despised them, and for the best of reasons. Their existence was a never-ending contest with the squares of the world, the squares who have such a virulent rage at everything not in their book. Getting around the squares, evading, defying the phony rules of convention, that was maybe responsible for half their pleasure in their outlaw existence. (*Collected Stories* 292)

Flux—specifically oceanic flux—is predictably a symbol Williams uses in association with these two outlaws. Toward the end of the story, they drive to the ocean, and Billy, one of the characters, even dresses himself in a “shirt that is covered with leaping dolphins” (295), symbols of extreme flux. The dolphin function thus in the Captain’s tale of having sex with one in *You Touched Me!* (where it is technically a porpoise), as well as in the short story “The

Yellow Bird,” which features one of the best illustrations of how carnality and the imagery of flux are related to one another. Normally Williams feels obligated to fit his symbols into the realism of the story, but on those rare occasions when he breaks from realism entirely, he is free to use symbols more uninhibitedly, as occurs in the later portion of the story. Alma, the protagonist, draws progressively closer to carnality. She is a preacher’s daughter, but she rebels and becomes a New Orleans prostitute, a profession she thoroughly enjoys, and which brings life to her—and as her proximity to carnality increases, the imagery of flux begins to pervade the narrative. She bears a male baby out of wedlock who begins behaving strangely: “At half past six every morning he crawled out of the house and late in the evening he returned with fists full of gold and jewels that smelled of the sea” (*Collected Stories* 227). A few lines later, the narrator explains that when the baby grew up, he went “on a long sea voyage for unexplained reasons.” While she was waiting for his return, his father unexpectedly appeared: Her “bed began to rock like a ship on the ocean, and all at once not John the Second, but John the First appeared, like Neptune out of the ocean. He bore a cornucopia that was dripping with seaweed and his bare chest and legs had acquired a greenish patina such as a bronze statue comes to be covered with.” (His being statuesque reinforces the presence of carnality as an ideal.) “Over the bed he emptied his horn of plenty which had been stuffed with treasure from wrecked Spanish galleons: rubies, emeralds, diamonds, rings, and necklaces of rare gold, and great loops of pearls with the slime of the sea clinging to them.” Ultimately, her son “came home, and a monument was put up,” a monument which featured figures sitting “astride a leaping dolphin” (228).

Williams evinced a very clear attraction to flux in his personal life, not just in his writing. Leverich says that in 1936, when Williams was twenty-four, he began “in earnest the habit of swimming nearly every day, regardless of the obstacles of snow-covered streets or his studies at

school or the lack of a fifteen-cent carfare. It was a habit that would in time become as ingrained as writing every day and one he would maintain for the rest of his life wherever in the world he might be or whatever the conditions he might encounter” (163). He was also attracted to flux and carnality in tandem; he was particularly attracted to sailors, constantly speaking of his affairs with them in his letters and even dressing like one in a picture taken in 1943, while he was writing GM (Leverich illus. 81). Predictably, there are sailors—all representatives of flesh—throughout his works, including Tom of GM, Jack of *The Rose Tattoo*, “Sailor Jack” of *Not About Nightingales*, and John of “The Yellow Bird.” (Obviously he is particularly drawn to naming such characters “John” or “Jack.”) John of *Summer and Smoke* is a representative of flesh associated with flux: He appears for the first time in scene 1 after having just gambled his way down the Mississippi as part of a “floating crap game” (2: 133). Skipper of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* seems to be associated with flux, at least by his name, as does Dick Miles (another persistent name) of *Spring Storm*, who constantly speaks of his desire to follow the Mississippi to the sea and beyond.

Tom dreams of the paradise that awaits him in flux. The specific location he mentions is in the Pacific—the “South Sea Island”—just as his father apparently found paradise on the Pacific—in the city of Mazatlan, on the west coast of Mexico. Tom’s seeing the South Sea Island as a carnal otherworld actually springs from a general trend in the early twentieth century to see societies which were considered primitive as being particularly pervaded by carnality, but his mention of this particular locale is directly related to a song popular earlier in the twentieth century: “On the South Sea Isle.” The imagery of its lyrics evokes the very carnal paradise Tom envisages, though the carnality is much lighter than it would be later in the century. For a 1916 version of the song, performed by Helen Clark, the following link can be selected:



The lyrics (written by Harry Von Tilzer in 1916) of verse 2 are as follows:

In this dreamy land of pleasure
There are memories I treasure
Moonlight strolls along the silv'ry sand and

Loving eyes that seem'd to haunt me
Lips that used to laugh and taunt me
List'ning to the oriental band, so grand.

The lyrics of this song work well with the symbolic system of GM, with the carnality of spooning and the distinct sense of an otherworld in this “dreamy land of pleasure,” so it is clear why Williams would have been attracted to using it to evoke the flesh.

Liquids Contained / Liquids Set Free

Tom is associated with liquid flux both in its oceanic sense and in another way as well. While Laura is represented by images of stasis, often liquid in stasis, Tom is frequently associated with the imagery of liquid escaping its containers. When he goes to the movies prior to scene 4 and attends a show featuring Malvolio the Magician, every trick Malvolio performs is evocative of flux and escape, and two of the three tricks Tom describes feature water leaving its containers. The first, involving “pouring water back and forth between pitchers,” is rather tragicomic. Tom recalls, “First it turned to wine and then it turned to beer and then it turned to whisky. I know it was whisky it finally turned into because he needed somebody to come up out of the audience to help him, and I came up—both shows!” (167). The tragic dimension in this comic routine results from the shadow of inebriation, a negative type of otherworld in Williams. Furthermore, on a symbolic level, this decanting of Malvolio’s is frustrating, for the liquid escapes its container, yet is confined again in another container. The second trick, mentioned

earlier, features a positive image of liquid in flux: he turns a cage of canaries into a bowl of goldfish which in turn “fly away canaries.” Malvolio himself is freed in his final act, when he escapes from a coffin “without removing one nail.” Tom interprets the symbolism for us when he adds, “There is a trick that would come in handy for me—get me out of this two-by-four situation!”

The metaphor of water escaping its containers can be found in the drafts of GM. In HRC 16.6, Tom uses the imagery of spillage and steam:

The days at the warehouse were pitilessly bright.
Fluorescent tubes gave it a garish day,
and all this light showed only pasteboard boxes
and cartons of shoes and shoes—
 how I detested shoes!
But five o’clock released me. I went home,
ate hurriedly: then spilled upon the streets
the steam of frenzy gathered through the day.
There was no happiness in it and yet it served
to anesthetize my nerves a little longer.

Flight through Air and Space

The next type of flux is fairly easy to identify at this point. Representatives of flesh are often cast as birds desperate to escape their cages. When they are ultimately liberated, flight is the natural result, as when Malvolio’s goldfish “fly away canaries.” The motif of flight in Williams, then, is another of the types of flux, as is the wind which seems to urge Tom to leave his home behind. This can be seen in the poem Tom composes in Williams’ early one-act “The Poetry Prize” (HRC 17.1; see appendix 1 for the [play](#) in its entirety). The first two stanzas read:

“I see the road at night
stretching above my bed.
How long the road and white
above my troubled head!

I hear the wind at night
calling down the lane.

It's calling *me* tonight—
Shall I refuse again?

This is paralleled in GM proper when Amanda tells him that after Laura is taken care of, he will be able to travel the world and do whatever he wants; “you’ll be free to go wherever you please, on land, on sea, whichever way the wind blows you!” (175).

Often the imagery of wind and flight is extended so that carnality offers its representatives total transcendence. This is effected when Williams extends flight into outer space itself. In HRC 17.5, Larry (the Tom figure) says to Amanda,

You can't frighten me
Not with all your threats
and all your warnings
I'll take to the roads and
then I'll take to the sea.
I'll be a tramp and
a sailor. And I'll make
voyages, blue voyages,
move out far.
I'll be a bird that flies around a star.

(Coincidentally, these lines were written while Williams himself was apparently in flux, composed longhand on a train—on the stationery of Super Chief Santa Fe System Lines.) The symbolism of flight—particularly space flight—will become far more important in relation to Jim, as will be made clear in the chapter devoted to his symbolism.

Flux in *Spring Storm*

Williams' early play *Spring Storm* is replete with flux symbolism, and Dick Miles, one of the main characters, is its prototypical representative. His first name evokes flesh, the signified, whereas his last name evokes flux, the signifier: motion and distance, reminiscent of Mr. Wingfield who “skipped the light fantastic out of town.” Associated with flux in other ways. Dick Miles is known for living near or on the Mississippi river and is constantly expressing his

desire to follow the river to the sea, parallel to his desire for social freedom, in his eschewal of all commitment, all domestic constraints, rejecting, until the end, any suggestion that he marry his girlfriend Heavenly. The mud of the Mississippi is particularly underscored in relation to him; at times he walks around covered in its mud, another symbol of his gritty carnality. In contrast to this flux, most of the women of the play long for stasis, with Heavenly particularly disdainful of any mention of travel in relation to the river.

Much of this symbolism can be found in the following excerpt from *Spring Storm*, which opens with Dick staring longingly out at the river. Heavenly comes up to him, but he ignores her. She says, “Can’t I compete with the river?”

DICK. Not right now.

HEAVENLY. Why not?

DICK. It’s goin’ somewhere.

HEAVENLY. Oh! So’m I. [*She starts off. He grabs her arm.*]

DICK. No, you’re a woman. Women never go anywhere unless a man makes ‘em. Don’t you know what’s the real diff’rence between the sexes?

HEAVENLY. Yes, I mean, no. I don’t want to hear any dirty jokes.

DICK. This isn’t dirty, this is scientific. Set down an’ I’ll tell you. The real diff’rence is that a man knows that legs’re made to move on but a woman thinks they’re just for wearin’ silk stockin’s. (*Tennessee* 1: 6)

Shortly thereafter, he explicitly establishes wind as a species of flux, asking her if she does not become “restless sometimes. Don’t that river-wind ever slap you in the face an’ say, ‘Git movin’, yuh damn l’il goober digger, git movin’!?’”

HEAVENLY. No.

DICK. It does me.

HEAVENLY. You’re getting’ one of your restless spells?

DICK. I'd like to follow that river down there—find out where she's goin'.

HEAVENLY. I know where it's goin' an' I'm not anxious to follow. Gulf of Mexico's the scummiest body of water I ever refused to put my feet in. Crawdads an' stingarees an'—

DICK. Aw, is 'at where it's goin'? I thought it was goin' further'n that. I thought it was goin' way on out to th' Caribbean an' then some. I didn't think it would stop till it got clear round th' Straits o' Magellan!

HEAVENLY. What is this? A geography lesson?

DICK. Naw. It hasn't got a damn thing to do with geography.

HEAVENLY. Oh. You're speaking symbolically about the Gypsy in you or something. (7)

Time and Eternity

Time is the flow, the continual show,
Go says the bird, and on we go. (*Memoirs* 122)

Though not immediately apparent, the symbolism of flux and stasis undergirds the entire symbolic structure of GM on a profound level. Williams uses it to express his thoughts on the concept of time. Essentially, the flow—or passage—of time is associated with flux, while the arrest of time, as it exists in memory and other otherworlds, is associated with stasis. As GM ends, Tom finally indulges his instinctual hunger for freedom in defiance of the spiritual standards of responsibility and compassion which his mother upholds; i.e., he chooses to immerse himself in flesh. However, this act of his entails immersion of a more turbulent sort. His decision to leave home means that he remains in the now, in the river of time, which takes him far from his mother and sister, who—from this point on—exist only in the past, as memories, from his perspective. Flux distances him far from them, for as he says in the final lines of the play, “[T]ime is the longest distance between two places” (236). On a literal level, he becomes a sailor and moves toward the ocean, like a river, leaving Amanda and Laura to a life

of stasis in the middle of the continent of North America. This is paralleled temporally: he remains in the present, in the flow of time, its flux, while his family is abandoned to the inaccessible past, to the atemporal, static, riparian islands of memory on which he is stranding them.

Memory is a prominent force throughout the play, which explains why Williams describes nostalgia as the “first condition of the play” (133). The entire family is haunted by Mr. Wingfield, now only a memory, one constantly evoked by his picture and by another remembrance, the music he has left Laura “as a painful reminder of him” (156), and even by the old bathrobe Amanda wears, “a relic of the faithless Mr. Wingfield” (162). By way of contrast, Amanda and Laura are enchanted rather than haunted by memories recorded prior to his abandoning them. Amanda is nostalgic for Blue Mountain, her home in Mississippi, and Laura is enchanted by a static, atemporal world which never was—the Limberlost—but also by one that once was—the world of her memories of her high-school acquaintance with Jim, indicated by her treasuring her high-school yearbook, one of the few things she reads, featuring his pictures and the playbill of the operetta he starred in. Gradually, Amanda becomes aware that Laura will be nothing more than a memory if she is not provided for, so she attempts to effect a marriage between past and present, between Laura and Jim, who is an icon of scientific advance and technological progress. Sadly, she fails, and she and Laura are, in their turn, relegated to memory—Tom’s memory. The play within the play—Tom’s memories of his life with his family in their apartment—becomes his Blue Mountain, a world to which he retreats as surely as Amanda turns to her memories of her old Mississippi home. There is, then, a sense in GM of the tragedy of the flux of time, which distances people from the existence they once enjoyed.

To an extent, memory can help the distance between past and present to be overcome. However, in their hearts, neither Tom nor Amanda finds the experience of nostalgia wholly satisfying. Like Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, who attempts to leap over the high hurdles and into the past, both wish to return physically to their past. Amanda temporarily succeeds shortly before the end of the play, when she anticipates entertaining a gentleman caller and makes the apartment over into the image of her storied home. At this point, there appears to be some promise that she will be able to return permanently to the joy she knew in her past, to recapture its luster, vicariously, through her daughter. She succeeds temporarily—the entire apartment is transported in spirit to the dusky atmosphere of Blue Mountain—but this illusion is quickly shattered, and the past is lost. It is precisely this loss, this distance between the present and the inaccessible past, which Tom mourns in the early moments of his final speech.

Representatives of stasis/spirit are typically relegated to memory by representatives of flux/flesh. This is true in GM: Tom and Jim both abandon Laura and Amanda. By their agency, flux strikes the two women down, and they are abandoned to the past, as surely as lightning—and Gypsy Jones and his fulminations, which succeeds it—strikes down the Church of the Heavenly Rest, burning it to the ground and marring the candelabrum, Laura's image (210). (Gypsy Jones is another representative of flux/flesh.) All representatives of flesh break Laura and her symbols in their turn. Williams seems to be saying that flesh/time moves all of us forward, turning reality into nothing more than memory, often alienating us from our past, which is often an innocent, spiritual past. This is a tragedy the spiritual side of Williams mourns. In fact, he often writes in defiance of flux, in favor of atemporal stasis, often using memory as an instrument of his defiance. A sense of this can be found in an early poem of his, written in 1935, entitled "The Mind Does Not Forget":

The mind does not forget; that which is limned
Can never be obliterated quite
But lives securely, though its life is dimmed
Behind the fretted jewelry of light.
The mind does not forget; each mood or thought
Is bound together in an endless chain,
Is inextricably compressed and caught
Within the cellular sequence of the brain . . .

The mind does not forget. Though it be thrust
Into the blind anonymity of dust,
The mind remembers still. Its memories live
In forms forever sifting through the sieve
Of water, earth, and air, becoming one
With memories inviolate of the sun! (*Collected Poems* 183)

To a great extent, then, Williams' symbolic system as it has been described thus far can be described as follows: Flux, whether expressed in terms of motion, water flowing, or flight through air or space, is associated with flesh (always) and the passage of time (often). Similarly, the flow of words is often associated with flesh, with the instinctual, animal drive toward staying alive and thriving ("public textuality"). On the other hand, the imagery of glass and the imagery of stasis, whether expressed in terms of entrapment, land, or water at rest, are associated with spirit (always), as well as other atemporal things, such as memory and other otherworlds (often). Similarly, self-enclosed verbal worlds are frequently associated with spirituality—with spiritual hunger for eternal truths and contact with ideals ("private textuality"). These two poles work together to form what I call Williams' prime dichotomy, which runs the length and breadth not only of GM, but of his entire body of work. I can think of no exception.

Journal entries written as early as 1937 reinforce time's position in the prime dichotomy. On July 4 he was strongly drawn toward the spiritual, atemporal pole: "This morning had odd experience—wakened by a bird call—gave me a strange, delightful sensation—an atavistic emotion from my early childhood—So clear and pure—the delight of an early morning in

childhood—pure, spiritual delight—made me realize what a muddy stream my adult life has become—If only I could regain that lost clarity and purity of spirit!” (*Notebooks* 95). However, a few days later, he felt irresistibly drawn toward the temporal, toward flux and away from atemporality and the otherworld of his mind: “My life is entirely too internal—I need action on the outside—in the world! [. . .] Wish I were going somewhere new and exciting—I wish that something would happen—And something *will*—I can feel it coming!” (99).

The Atemporal and Laura’s Symbols

Now that we are familiar with the atemporal/temporal dimensions of stasis/flux, we are ready to examine these in relation to Laura’s symbols. We have already seen how glass signifies one species of atemporality—those otherworlds signified by the Laurine type. When characters lose themselves in such otherworlds, the passage of time becomes moot—they find that they have temporarily escaped the dread mutations wrought by time. Glass also represents a higher species of atemporality, one which can be sensed in Williams’ description of Galatea in his early poem “Sonnet for Pygmalion,” published in 1936, replete with the imagery of marble which parallels the significance of glass:

For you, Pygmalion, no silver-bought
Woman of Cyprus with kohl-darkened eyes!
For you, Pygmalion, a vision caught
In its first blinding moment of surprise
And therein crystallized: no less than this:
Perfection carved by your own hand from stone,
The lips forever lifted toward the kiss,
The breast immutable and still unknown!

And so think twice: in making her alive
You stain her with the dust of time and change,
While you should have, in taking stone to wive,
Her loveliness forever new and strange,
Her palm a chalice and her lifted face
A fire, a sacrament, an altar place! (*Collected Poems* 182)

This truly underscores much that Williams was attempting to depict in his use of the imagery of glass. The beam of light which strikes Laura's vitreous, spherical otherworld is actually, on a higher level, a symbol of the arrival of vision, revelation, and the transcendent, just as it is here, when Williams speaks of the "vision caught / In its first blinding moment of surprise / And therein crystallized." This poem also reflects Williams' view of the role of artists which we discussed earlier in this work, that it is their task to capture eternal things in their art, snatched from the flux of experience. Williams speaks of this drive to extract the eternal from flux in his essay "The Timeless World of a Play": "The great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power deliberately to choose certain moral values by which to live as steadfastly as if he, too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time. Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence" (*Where I Live* 52).

Glass or crystal, then, is a symbol of truly timeless things. On a more specific level, it often represents the timelessness of memory, as when Laura gives Jim the glass figure which represents her, after it and she are shattered, calling it a "souvenir" (231). Henceforth, she knows Jim will not be returning, and all she will be to him—and to us—is a static, unchanging inhabitant of the past, existing solely in memory. This is also evoked when we see Laura and her mother "as though through soundproof glass" at the end of the play as Tom describes his abandoning them: they are being relegated to the past (236). One may be able to sense in all this that Williams identifies things which resist time—things like memory and imaginative otherworlds—as being eternal, placed in the same category as truth, ideals, and other atemporals.

Among the HNOC's Williams papers, there are drafts where the narrator reinforces the symbolic association of glass with the past, as well as further establishing the symbolic link between the imagery of flux and the flow of time:

Rivers tell us plainly what we are!
All motion—going—space—the rest is dream!
The rest is history only—hieroglyphics—
infinitesimal creases in brain tissue—
Once the dynamic of *Now, Just now!* is removed—
What have you left but rooms of statuary?
Why, this day's morning is already set under glass.

Glass is used similarly in HRC 16.6; Tom says,

It is unalterable, everything that's done,
and irretrievable, every moment gone.
We pass through woods, forever dropping behind,
like crumbs of bread for woodsmen to follow us by,
statue after statue, ourselves unalive,
transformed to memory—
Why this day's morning
is already set under glass!
Tomorrow this night
will belong to the taxidermist—
the stamp collector or the collector of jewels—
becoming a pinned butterfly—
facsimile of a bird whose kind is extinct—
scarab of agate or stamp pasted into an album... (drafts of GM)

The reference to jewels and statues is parallel to the imagery of glass, again denoting atemporality. Furthermore, there is an image here which is parallel to the most prominent symbol of Laura's, her unicorn, which is linked to the past: When Laura shows it to Jim, he says, "Unicorns—aren't they extinct in the modern world?" (223). Above, the "bird whose kind is extinct" is an echo of these figures, and is reminiscent of yet another symbol of Laura's, the penguins at the zoo, and of the archaeopteryx of *Not About Nightingales*, cited above.

Thus far, then, the symbols of Laura have been found to represent several things:

- the purity of spirit, as opposed to flesh, particularly where the purity of glass is emphasized,
- those “small and tender things” which make life endurable to romantics, as with the menagerie itself,
- romantics themselves, alienated in the modern world, like the awkwardness of the penguins and the unicorn in a modern urban setting,
- mere escape into the fancy of imagination, as with Laura’s vitreous otherworld, a Laurine type,
- the otherworld of memory and the past generally, as with the unicorn as “souvenir,”
- artistry and the atemporal ideals Williams perpetually pursues, often the acknowledgement of the eternal truths of human nature, including both flesh and spirit, and
- the eternal and transcendent in the abstract.

Williams uses the art museum, another symbol of Laura’s, similarly. Parallel to the imagery of the mind in his poem “The Mind Does Not Forget,” above, it is a repository for memory, housing the statues which are symbols of memories, just as the mind is a repository for “that which is limned.” The poem quoted immediately above continues:

Once the dynamics of NOW are removed from a scene,
 What have you left but a room of statuary?
 A corridor in a museum, lit somewhat dimly,
 down which is seen the skillful hand of the Faun
 stretched toward but never enclosing the breast of a nymph!
 —The crouch of the Roman wrestler, the boy who removes
 a thorn from the sole of his foot in dusty Sparta!
 All of these once were action and once alive—
 but now are statues—even as when we leave
 this theatre, it will become a hall of shadows

or statues—memories—dreams....

One can easily see the influence of Keats here. However, the mood is more tragic than in “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Instead of using objets d’art primarily as the foundation for a celebration of beauty’s timelessness, they become metaphors for the species of death time brings, transforming living things to statuary, memories. This is what Laura and the broken unicorn become. The unicorn as it exists when it is given to Jim will be as lasting as memory, and as enduring as Keats’ urn, but in the context of GM, this is cold comfort, for it functions merely as a reminder of the estrangement between past and present. Laura too will become nothing more than a relic, a “souvenir,” in Tom’s memory. As the final curtain falls on the play in this “statuary” passage, the theater itself becomes an analogue of both the mind and the museum, a figurative repository for timeless memories tragically estranged from us, just as during the play the theater has been a repository for Tom’s memories of his life with his family.

The Impact of Time

Williams wrote that the “diminishing influence of life’s destroyer, time, must be somehow worked into the context of [an author’s] play” (*Where I Live* 54). One can certainly see that he was no hypocrite as he followed his own dictum in GM and elsewhere. However, because of his dread of time, there is an impulse within him to free his characters from its influence, to permit them to enjoy the eternal. He succumbs to this temptation toward the end of his novella “The Knightly Quest,” after the narrative breaks sharply from realism. The protagonists board a space ship which blasts them to distant galaxies, permitting them to transcend the earth and the mutability of experience. As they travel, the narrator says that it “doesn’t matter” that their ultimate destination “may still be a secret to them for a long time to come” because they are “so far away now that their watches are timed by light-years. In

weightless ozone the concern with time is steadily left behind” (*Collected Stories* 454). Their actual destination is a “spot marked X on the chart of time without end” (455). A hint of this timelessness can also be found in *Not About Nightingales*, in Jim’s mention of the amaranth, a “flower that never dies” (*Tennessee* 1: 104).

However, Williams rarely indulges in such fantasy, and his characters inevitably suffer time’s impact. Pablo of the short story “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio” (1941) attempts to disregard time entirely. Though he is the owner of a clock shop, and he fixes clocks and watches “with marvelous delicacy and precision, [. . .] he pa[ys] no attention to them” (*Collected Stories* 101). Nevertheless, he is ultimately devastated by the flux of time, evident in the following passage, which hints at plays to come: “Pablo had never flown. But the sweet bird of youth had flown from Pablo Gonzales, leaving him rather sad, with a soft yellow face that was just as round as the moon” (*Collected Stories* 101). His “yellow face” is paralleled by the old timepieces in Williams’ one-act “The Last of My Solid Gold Watches,” which features an older man similarly abandoned by time. (Yellow is typically a symbol of otherworlds associated with the past.) We have once again the imagery of characters being abandoned because of the progression of time, parallel to Laura and Amanda’s abandonment.

The impact of time is also evident in *Summer and Smoke*. Though pride of place at the center of the set is given to the figure of a stone angel, explicitly identified as an eternity figure (2: 120), as timeless as the statuesque memory symbols just mentioned, Williams also depicts the impact of time, forcing Alma to renounce her spirituality and embrace carnality. However, to a certain extent, the angel encompasses within itself both the flux and stasis of time. It is a static, timeless figure, yet it is a fountain; water flows from its cupped hands, the imagery of flux, presumably into a pool of water, an image of stasis. The angel’s status as a dual stasis/flux

symbol is also supported by the fact that both spiritual and carnal characters continually drink from its waters. Perhaps Williams is positing that though eternity is timeless, it is nevertheless the source of the passage of time, and all characters—those associated with timelessness, as well as carnal characters fully immersed in time’s flow—are nurtured by it. Whatever the case may be, flowing fountains are almost certainly symbols of the transcendent. By contrast, Williams uses dried fountains to indicate the absence of transcendence, as in the short story “Oriflamme” and in *Camino Real*.

Williams insists that a playwright must depict the impact of time, and he adds that the playwright who does not “will be left among his magnificent debris on a dark stage, muttering to himself: ‘Those fools . . .’” (*Where I Live* 54). If the audience hears him, it will respond,

But you have shown us a world not ravaged by time. We admire your innocence. But we have seen our photographs, past and present. Yesterday evening we passed our first wife on the street. We smiled as we spoke but we didn’t really see her! It’s too bad, but we know what is true and not true, and at 3 A.M. your disgrace will be in print!

There is a sense of distress in the audience members here regarding time and its mortal power. Many passages in Williams attest to his dark view of time. In the essay “The Timeless World of a Play,” he speaks of the “corrupting rush of time” and calls time “life’s destroyer,” and in a later essay he speaks of his strong “dread of time passing, and past” (*Where I Live* 52, 54, 153). Part of this dread can be seen in a poem he penciled into his notebook while writing *GM*, a poem in which he mourns the temporal distance between him and his younger self:

I could tell him of danger.
I could shout in his ears,
Watch out, the signal is
Red, the tracks ahead are broken.
But there will be no
Message passed between us.
Poor blind passenger on the flight of time— (HRC 16.10)

The imagery of avian flux we have examined takes a dark turn in the last line, as locomotive imagery metamorphoses into aeronautical disaster.

In drafts of GM at the HNOG, the narrator explicitly describes the mutations wrought by time as being a species of death:

Rivers tell us plainly what we are.
We only exist in the moment that we are flowing.
We live in one jiggling instant; the rest is death:
the rest is memory, is hieroglyphics.

Time is obviously horrifying for Williams, and he believes it to be the same with us, though our fears may be subconscious: “Whether or not we admit it to ourselves, we are all haunted by a truly awful sense of impermanence” (*Where I Live* 51). It is this very dread of the flux of time which motivates Williams to embrace the atemporal, both with his otherworlds and with his eternal “moral values,” noted above, which he was always “[s]natching [. . .] out of the desperately fleeting.” He selected a great many such values: In a 1957 interview, he said, “I think it’s very necessary to discover those things in life one can believe in. I think life is meaningless unless we find something to which we can be faithful, believe in, consider valuable, hold to in ourselves. [. . .] I believe very strongly in the existence of good. I believe that honesty, understanding, sympathy and even sexual passion are good” (*Conversations* 40). He was particularly searching for a value which would reconcile his spirituality with this “sexual passion” of his, and to some extent, the other moral values fit the bill: sympathy, understanding, and above all, honesty, which he uses to combat mendacity and other transgressions. He speaks of this value in a letter he wrote to Donald Windham in July 1943:

You say that you are pompous, selfish, and stupid. Of course you are sometimes, but at least you have the good sense to see it and the honesty to say it. The innermost “you” is building his world on honesty which is the only good foundation we can find. It is the common level on which occasion[ally] “you” and “I” or somebody else’s innermost being can momentarily meet, during the

flux and torrent of our disparate parts. [. . .] We all bob only momentarily above the bubbling, boiling surface of the torrent of lies and distortions we are borne along. We are submarine creatures, for beneath that surface is the world we live in, with all its names and labels and its accepted ideas. And over it only is the oxygen unadulterated which we can only breathe in spasms now and again, and the only vision which is pure at all. (Bracketed insertion is Windham's, *Windham* 93)

In this passage there is roughly the very symbolism we have been examining, in that flux is opposed to eternal values. Williams prizes honesty because he puts such a high premium on truth, and in part, he prizes plays because they facilitate the perception of this truth. Behind the temporal flux of the narrative of plays, we can appreciate timeless, atemporal verities regarding human identity and the human experience. In the theater we see these things with the value they actually have, which the mundane experience of our everyday lives often conceals. He writes, "A play may be violent, full of motion: yet it has that special kind of repose which allows contemplation" (*Where I Live* 51). He adds, "The audience can sit back in a comforting dusk to watch a world which is flooded with light and in which emotion and action have a dimension and dignity that they would likewise have in real existence, if only the shattering intrusion of time could be locked out" (52). In his mention of a stage "flooded with light," we observe again imagery parallel to the Laurine type and the "blinding" vision we have discussed in the "Sonnet for Pygmalion" above, though the imagery of flux is there as well.

Clearly, the imagery of stasis and flux pervades Williams' *weltanschauung*. One can actually follow this system from the minute to the particularly broad. First of all, as we have seen, GM's otherworlds feature in this system, for they are atemporal, static loci within the narrative flow of the play. However, there are larger considerations, for the narrative of the play, which is flux, presents eternal truths, which are static, atemporal. Furthermore, when the play ends, it becomes a static force in the minds of the audience, a memory discrete from the hurried flux of the quotidian:

when we leave
this theatre, it will become a hall of shadows
or statues—memories—dreams....

The flux of the narrative, then, becomes a static force in our memories, and on a broader level, the flux of our narratives—our lives—becomes static and timeless: “About their lives people ought to remember that when they are finished, everything in them will be contained in a marvelous state of repose which is the same as that which they unconsciously admired in drama. The rush is temporary” (*Where I Live* 52). So stasis (otherworlds) is contained in flux (the narrative of the play) which becomes static, encased in our minds, as we continue on in the flux of the moment (the present), drawing ever closer to ultimate stasis (death) and to that “repose” which will encapsulate our own narratives.

Textuality

To a certain extent, Tom and Laura stand on opposite sides of the prime dichotomy: he is associated with flux/flesh, whereas she is associated with stasis/spirit. However, there are clear parallels between the two. Tom’s concern is for eternal truths—with his “Books of Knowledge” we have discussed—just as Williams’ was. Similarly, Laura is associated with the eternal. Williams saw childhood as a state of deep purity, a state she seems never to have left. Both Laura and Tom are characterized by a disregard for more mundane affairs, like survival, in contradistinction to Amanda and Jim, who almost always seem to be preoccupied with surviving and thriving. This characteristic of Tom and Laura’s is signified by the imagery of private textuality, their being depicted almost as if they were artistic texts as conceived by the New Critics, self-contained worlds relatively isolated from their contexts, isolated from the world at large. Several sections of GM attest to Tom’s association with private, or artistic, textuality. I

allude to some of these only briefly, those which we have already discussed, but others are mentioned here for the first time and display GM's symbolic density.

Rather than enrolling for courses in public speaking as Jim does, Tom sequesters himself in the "cabinet of the washroom" where he writes poetry few seem to read (190). This is further reflected in scene 4 when he dodges sharing his thoughts with his mother. She tells him, "There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you!" (172). He ultimately replies: "That's true of me, too. There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to *you!* So let's respect each other's—" (173). He is eager to maintain his privacy, quick to maintain the distance between them. In the next scene, he and his mother wish upon the moon, and she then asks what he wished for, but he responds, "That's a secret."

AMANDA. A secret, huh? Well, I won't tell mine either. I will be just as mysterious as you.

TOM. I bet I can guess what yours is.

AMANDA. Is my head so transparent?

TOM. You're not a sphinx.

AMANDA. No, I don't have secrets. (180)

Though Amanda is associated with public textuality—she is loquacious in expressing her thoughts and dreams—Tom goes to great lengths to keep his own counsel.

Tom's private—or artistic—textuality is evoked again in scene 6. When the lights go out, Jim tells Amanda: "Shakespeare probably wrote a poem on that light bill" (209). We suspect this to be untrue—we have just learned he has used the money to join the Merchant Marines—yet there is symbolism here as well. It would have been a response typical of Tom to use the light bill, with its ties to industry and commerce, as nothing more than paper for his poetry, a deliberate snubbing of the texts of the commercial world. Jim does try to bring Tom's

artistic texts into the commercial light of day, suggesting to Amanda, “Maybe the poem will win a ten-dollar prize.” However, in the end, his efforts are futile. Tom is fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe box, which he does in the same spirit, defying commercialism and the exigencies of survival. His actions are paralleled by those of Myra, the protagonist of “The Field of Blue Children.” Bored by her studies at college, she begins writing poetry. Ultimately, after experiencing extreme transcendence while composing, she writes, “‘Words are a net to catch beauty!’ She wrote this in the back of a notebook toward the close of a lecture on the taxing powers of congress” (*Collected Stories* 72). Again, this is art in defiance of commerce.

“Accent of a Coming Foot” is a short story Williams completed in 1935. Though Bud, the male protagonist, fills Jim’s role in terms of plot, he is far more similar to Tom in terms of characterization and symbolism. First of all, like both Jim and Tom, he is a representative of flesh. This is evinced most clearly by the animal-like ferocity with which he pursues his writing. Cecilia, one of Bud’s sisters, tells Catherine, who is interested in him romantically, that he is always in the attic writing, “not even bothering to put on all his clothes, Kitty, just a sweatshirt and a pair of old pants like he was training for a championship prizefight or something. . . . I tell you he doesn’t act civilized anymore, Kitty! He shaves about once every week, he never combs his hair and it seems like Mother just has to *make* him take a bath! Can you imagine that?” (*Collected Stories* 36-37). She makes these comments about his uncivilized behavior immediately after Evelyn, another sister of his, loudly remarks that the “butcher’s truck had broken down,” another reference to animality and carnality. Catherine, for her part, intends to appeal symbolically to his carnality when he arrives; she will lift her hands “to the bright red cherries on her hat as if to signify by their color something of what she had to offer this time” (39).

Bud is associated with both carnality and artistic textuality. The narrator reports that he

hadn't reacted at all well to college. It hadn't brought him out of his shell, as they had hoped it would, but had made him even shyer than before. He sat in the back of his classrooms almost like a deaf-mute, mumbling that he didn't know when questions were asked and staring gloomily out of the window when tests were given with his pencil clasped tightly between unmoving fingers. (*Collected Stories* 34)

Having returned home, he is just as reclusive. Cecilia tells Catherine, "Most of the time he's up there in the attic by himself, pounding away on that old typewriter of his that he got from the junk shop" (36). She adds that he "has poetry published in the little magazines, you know, but they never pay him a cent for it!" (37). Catherine scarcely replies, knowing it was "useless trying to explain to Cecilia that poetry wasn't a commodity, that it could never be bought or sold, that it was, in fact, untransferrable, remaining forever a part of the one who wrote it—the little black trail that his fugitive spirit left behind it on paper." Cecilia adds, "Not even his rejection slips seem to bother him much: no more than being beaten at a game of solitaire would!"

"That's what it is: a game of solitaire!" Catherine suddenly cried out, lifting both hands to her face.

"What is?" asked Cecilia.

Catherine flushed: "Bud's kind of life, I guess!"

Cecilia, for her part, is obviously associated with commercial textuality, with her volubility and emphasis on commerce. Catherine is too: She sells "advertising space in a city newspaper" (35). However, the closer the time of Bud's arrival comes, the more she becomes a shy, reserved soul, as he is.

Composite Symbolism—The Oyster

Williams seems to have a sense of fun where words are concerned. In fact, he is almost as preoccupied with puns as Shakespeare is. For instance, in scene 6, when Tom gives a speech rife with the imagery of water in flux, Jim responds, "You're just talking, you drip" (202).

Williams often extends this impulse to the creation of composite symbols; for example, in scene 5, a number of the symbols we have discussed in relation to Tom come together as Amanda describes his being as “eloquent as an oyster” (187), evoking both oceanic imagery and animality, linked to flesh. This expression also connotes entrapment, as with the avian imagery associated with Tom, and finally, the expression “eloquent as an oyster” points to Tom’s private textuality—recall that he refuses to open up and share his heart with his mother, attesting to his tendency to keep his words to himself—like the poems he writes, like a pearl in an oyster, resisting the mundane, the everyday.

The image is parallel to yet another image associated with Tom—the washroom, where he composes his poems. It is also consistent with Williams’ view of the role of the artist, to draw “out of vivid and desperate intervals in his life the most necessary impulse or drive toward his work, which is the transmutation of experience into some significant piece of creation, just as an oyster transforms, or covers over the irritating grain of sand in his shell to a pearl, white or black, of lesser or greater value” (*Where I Live* 140-41). This is parallel to Laura’s creation of her otherworld, seen in drafts from the HNOG, where the narrator says she had “begun the business of an oyster, surrounding the irritating little grain of reality in her shell with a faint and pearly secretion of her own. She was engaged in making the pearl of imagination, a dangerous pearl, a sort of interior glass that she could peer into, which finally would take the place of all windows and doors to the world.”

Conclusion—Tom and Somnolence

Both Tom and Laura create distance between themselves and the world. Where she is concerned, this rejection of the world is evoked by the imagery of somnolence, as we have seen. Tom too is asleep in this sense: In the final scene, Amanda shouts, “You live in a dream; you

manufacture illusions! [. . .] Go to the moon—you selfish dreamer!” (235, 236). In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Jim tells Amanda that Tom is the “dreamy type, that’s all I can say” (HRC 17.1). Amanda replies, “Now why are both my children the dreamy type?” She does not seem to realize that, unlike Laura, Tom is waking up. In GM proper, Jim tells him, “You’re going to be out of a job if you don’t wake up.”

TOM. I am waking up—

JIM. You show no signs.

TOM. The signs are interior. (200)

Tom is becoming discontented with the ephemeral otherworlds on which he relies, particularly with alcohol and the movies. As he tells Jim, he is “tired of the *movies*” and is “*about to move.*” Ultimately, he wakes up and begins a life of flux parallel to Williams’. However, for as long as he remains a writer, he will always be drawn to the creation of otherworlds; he will continue to “live in a dream” and “manufacture illusions.”

3. MR. WINGFIELD: CARNAL PRECEDENT

Introduction

Mr. Wingfield is a representative of flesh, like his son, and is associated with the imagery of flux. Indulging his desire to abandon his family, he “skip[s] the light fantastic” out of town. In doing so, he is like a bird escaping its cage, avian imagery which earlier versions of GM establish: In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” the final postcard he sends his family features a terse farewell on one side, and the image of a parrot on the other (HRC 17.2). The parrot represents his liberation—and his ties to flesh, with its connoting the Mexican rainforest and steamy southern latitudes. Heat is one signifier of flesh in Williams, and representatives of carnality like Mr. Wingfield (“Tom Sr.” in some drafts, and “Jim Wingfield” in others) always seem to be pursuing it. This tie to the tropics is indicated in GM proper; in Tom’s opening speech, he mentions the origin of the postcard—Mazatlan, Mexico, on the tropical coast of the Pacific.

The drafts reinforce Mr. Wingfield’s association with flux, and that men in general are representatives of flesh, associated with flux. In HRC 16.10, Amanda and her husband are shown together at night as newlyweds, just months after their marriage, with Amanda newly pregnant (drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”). (For the autobiographical roots of this passage, see Leverich 33 and 42, and *Collected Stories* xvi). The stage directions refer to her simply as “Woman” and to Mr. Wingfield as “Man,” perhaps to universalize their significance. The prominence of water in flux in the passage is unmistakable: Their hotel room is adjacent to the Mississippi, and the scene opens with the two looking down at the river, where a steamer lies, preparing to leave. “Woman” tells “Man” that she knows he will leave her soon, like the ship: “You feel solid enough, but you’re like water, can’t be held in the hand. I don’t feel sure of you

at all, I never did, and I'm so hungry, so *hungry* for something that's sure, a thing to be counted on. Two months one place and you're on the move again. It's like being tied to the tail of a—run-away horse, Mr. Wingfield.” The presence of flux and stasis in her language is clear, and because horses are traditional symbols of carnality, the presence of flesh is established still further, particularly when Amanda adds,

You've never really seemed like a husband to me but more like a very handsome gentleman caller. I mean I've—I've never stopped fixing and fluttering for you and started taking it easy the way women do when they're dead sure of a man. There's compensations.

In another version of this scene, the river below is even more prominent, and flux/flesh is associated with both Mr. Wingfield and Tom in utero:

[The band on the excursion steamers begins to play “Here the Boat Goes Round the Bend.” The woman sings with it, gaily but softly.]

'Here the boat goes round the bend,
goodbye, my lover, goodbye!
All loaded down with boys and men—
Goodbye, my lover, goodbye

MAN. —Let's go to bed, Amanda. *[He moves away.]*

WOMAN. It's starting to move, it's moving out on the river. Oh, oh, look, how lovely! The paper lanterns on the decks all mirrored in the water and dancing around it! 'Bye low, my baby—Bye, low, my baby!' *[She suddenly catches her breath with a moan and leans over faintly.]*

MAN. *[coming to her quickly]* Amanda—what is it?

WOMAN. Nothing, I—felt it—*move!*

MAN. —The baby?

WOMAN. Uh-huh! Your little boy. I felt him moving a little just as the—lighted boat moved out on the river. I guess it must be a *sign*.

MAN. *[tenderly drawing her to him]* A sign of what, Amanda?

WOMAN. *[pressing her face to his shoulder]* Oh, that he'll be like you—the kind of a stone that—never gathers moss!

Carnal Otherworlds

A familiar aspect of this scene is the “paper lanterns” which cast the boat as an unmistakable instance of the Laurine type, examined in the first chapter. Almost all the characteristics of the type are present: It is set in darkness yet illuminated, found in a musical context, and almost certainly associated with polychromy—strings of paper lanterns in this era were almost always of various colors. With the presence of the Laurine type, there is an indication that the life of flux that the men are entering is essentially an otherworld in its own right. This is parallel to Tom’s otherworld in GM proper; he seems to be dreaming of just such a paradisiacal otherworld, the one his father seems to be inhabiting, who, at least in his photo, is “gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say ‘I will be smiling forever.’”

In escaping, Mr. Wingfield seems to embrace the same private textuality that characterizes his children. As a man working for a telephone company, his life would have been suffused with commercial, public textuality. However, he throws all of this over for a life consisting almost wholly of private textuality: His laconic final letter indicates a departure from the world of words, containing only the following: “Hello—Good-bye” (145).

The Captain in *You Touched Me!*

Much of the flux symbolism associated with men in general, and with Mr. Wingfield in particular, is foreshadowed in *You Touched Me!*, as we have seen. The Captain is the Mr. Wingfield character, except that here he has returned to the family—with great hesitation. Originally, he left for the sea just as Mr. Wingfield does, but when the play opens, he has been home for a long while, which depresses him. Like most representatives of flesh, he yearns for freedom, complete liberty to indulge his senses, and he finds the strictures of his household to be confining. Because of Williams’ symbolism, the Captain’s lust for freedom is, of course,

paralleled on a literal/symbolic level by his yen for the sea: Once the captain of an ocean-going vessel, he longs to return to the swelling main, a longing that has prompted him to remodel his room to resemble the cabin of his ship in every detail; he fills it with items from his old cabin, which “evoke the memory of a freer existence than the gentility of the rest of the house” (4). His room is the visible emblem of flux to which he retreats when the dictatorial behavior of Emmie, his oldest daughter, becomes insufferable. However, his room proves to be nothing more than a temporary escape, an ephemeral otherworld, for it cannot hold the women off forever. He also attempts to escape into a dark otherworld—drunkenness—but, naturally, this too is insufficient.

His original attempts to maintain ties to flux involved his adopting Hadrian, another male, the Jim figure of the play. He had hoped Hadrian would help him combat the static, constraining power of the women. However, Hadrian leaves, as men often do in Williams. When he briefly returns, the Captain complains that he needs him more than ever because he has become “[p]usillanimous! Held in restraint by women. My legs ‘re swollen—they say it’s dropsy. Dropsy, hell—it’s wimmen. I’m soft an’ swollen up with the constant watch an’ touch an’ care of wimmen” (34). The tragedy of stasis! Unlike Mr. Wingfield, he is unable to escape. He must rely on Hadrian, another representative of flesh, for deliverance.

Interestingly, the first name of the Captain is Cornelius, Williams’ father’s first name, an indication that Williams may have had his father in mind, to an extent, when he was crafting the father figure for his early plays—though the personality of the Captain seems far more amiable than Williams’ father’s, from what we know of him. To return to the symbolism of animals encaged, Cornelius Williams did suffer from entrapment, as Williams writes, though he was tyrannical at home and no victim. In “The Man in the Overstuffed Chair” (c. 1960), Williams

describes his father as “the Mississippi drummer [. . .] who was removed from the wild and free road and put behind a desk like a jungle animal put in a cage in a zoo” (*Collected Stories* x).

4. AMANDA: ROMANTIC REALIST

Spirit

Amanda is a staunch representative of spirit; like Emmie and Matilda of *You Touched Me!*, she is quick to attack clear manifestations of the flesh. As noted in the beginning of the chapter on Tom, when Tom insists that “[m]an is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter,” she responds, “Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from! It belongs to animals! Christian adults don't want it!”

TOM. What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?

AMANDA. Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit! Only animals have to satisfy instincts! (174)

Her language is utterly full of such spiritual references: For instance, she mentions ministers and the parish house back home in Blue Mountain (148, 185), and insists on saying grace before eating, both in scene 1 and in scene 6. Her interjections seem to be almost entirely religious, as when she reacts to the sinus condition of an acquaintance by exclaiming: “Heaven have mercy!—You're a Christian martyr, yes, that's what you are, a Christian martyr” (160).

The Human Animal

However, despite Amanda's associations with spirit, Williams seems to have believed that no one is entirely free of the carnal element, even representatives of spirit. They contain within themselves a “duality not reconciled,” so that there are traces of carnality even in Amanda (*Conversations* 209). On a minor level, she enjoys “serialized sublimations” of the body, but there is evidence of carnality within her which is far deeper (159). On a fundamental level, she is, like all Williams characters, a “human animal” (3: 88). There seems to be an assertion on Williams' part that we are all fundamentally animals. In a 1959 essay, he wrote, “We are all civilized people, which means that we are all savages at heart but observing a few amenities of

civilized behavior” (*Where I Live* 105). Spirituality in Williams often seems to be a longing for something that lies beyond us, while the concept of the human animal is associated with something very deep within us. Perhaps the clearest instance of this can be found in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, as Big Daddy explains the idea to his son Brick, recounting his trip to Europe, where starving, mendicant children howled like animals in their bestial attempt to secure money from him. The fat priests of the land turned a blind eye to the children’s plight, as did Big Daddy, who threw money at them only so that he could escape. Afterwards, in North Africa, a woman pushed a toddler toward him to unzip his pants and initiate sex with him, which horrified him. Big Daddy believes the behavior of the starving children, the corpulent priests, and the woman can all be explained by the fact that the “human animal is a selfish beast” (3: 87). Though the beast is essentially dying—because he ultimately has an appointment with death—“the fact that he’s dying don’t give him pity for others” (3: 88). In other narratives, such as *Suddenly Last Summer*, Williams depicts this animality through the metaphor of cannibalism, but in *GM*, it is evinced via Amanda. Though she works hard to meet the spiritual standards she was raised by, she nevertheless manifests a merciless drive to survive—and to help her daughter survive—at all costs.

Williams uses her to represent the animality in us all, but he is not singling her out as being particularly evil. In a later essay, he uses an analogue of hers, Brecht’s character “Mother Courage”—whom Williams describes as a “jackal”—as a representative of “man” (*Where I Live* 118). He then speaks of her thus:

She battened on the longest war in history, following the armies, in an ever increasingly beaten-up wagon, with her shoddy merchandise for which she extracted the highest price she could get. At one point she even denied that her son was her son, and let him be executed without an outcry except the awful outcry in her heart. Why? Because of her need to go on with her wagon and her demented daughter and her simple will to endure.

Obviously there are parallels between Amanda and this figure who works so hard to care for herself and her “demented daughter,” but the point Williams is making is that she represents us all.

Several scenes in GM specifically attest to Amanda’s ties to human animality, over and above her general determination to survive at all costs. For instance, in scene 3, she calls her friends and inquires about their health, pretending to be genuinely concerned, though she is actually manipulating them in order to sell subscriptions. This is particularly ironic given the fight she has with her son in the following scene, in which she condemns him for speaking of human instincts, which make men fighters and hunters. Clearly, her instincts are driving her to be both. The irony is even more salient in scene 1, where the graphic distinction she makes between animals’ stomachs and humans’ confirms the animal status of humans rather than distinguishing the two. The irony deepens when she commands Tom to chew his food thoroughly: “chew—chew!”—making him more a predator than before (146). He complains of this animality, of her “hawklike attention to every bite I take. Sickening—spoils my appetite—all this discussion of—animals’ secretion—salivary glands—mastication!”

This mention of her “hawklike attention” is significant. While Tom and Laura are associated with benign avian imagery, Amanda is associated with raptorial imagery, evinced both in this scene and the following one, where Laura is the prey. Amanda appears wearing imitation fur, the symbolic trophy of her power, and she confronts Laura when the latter is seated in a “delicate ivory chair” which is in close proximity to a “small claw-foot table,” imagery which parallels the scene, for Laura is a delicate character in sudden proximity to Amanda’s claws (151). This raptorial quality of Amanda’s is emphasized when she brutally rips Laura’s typing charts in two. Talons are emphasized again in the next scene when Amanda “grabs” at

Tom as he attempts to leave (163). She resembles Laura's typing instructor, at least in drafts of "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," where the narrator speaks of Laura's attempts to learn to type: "When Laura seated herself before the machine at the school and typing practice was started, the keys would leap from her mind like a flock of startled birds. The hawk-like typing instructor, standing behind her to watch her nearly paralyzed fingers fumbling among the wrong keys, threw her into a panic" (HRC 17.7).

Stasis / Flux

When Amanda grabs Tom upon his attempt to leave, she is acting as a woman typically does in Williams—as a representative of stasis, attempting to keep the men around her in stasis, because flux is seen as a threat. In scene 2, she describes to Laura the sad fate of unmarried women, spinsters forced to travel from home to home, "little birdlike women without any nest" (156). She also confirms women as bringing stasis to others: As she is strengthening Laura's sex appeal by stuffing her brassiere, Laura says, "You make it seem like we're setting a trap." She replies: "All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be" (192). This concept is so central to the narrative of GM that an early version of the play is entitled, "The Pretty Trap." Moreover, immediately after Amanda's line above, the words "A Pretty Trap" are projected onto the screen.

At times, Amanda's stasis is explicitly a negative thing, particularly because Williams seems to be using her to represent many darker aspects of spirituality. In order to remain respectable, the religious establishment (as he depicts it) frowns upon eccentric behavior, and discourages any impulse to indulge in carnal instincts. Individuals must avoid being different, and they must certainly rein in their carnal drives, rein in flux. In GM, this outlook of Amanda's is reflected on a societal level. The initial stage directions say that middle-class America, which

is “fundamentally enslaved,” wishes to “avoid fluidity and differentiation and function as one mass of automatism” (143). This is the very imagery of stasis and flux, with middle-class America in stasis—it is “fundamentally enslaved”—resisting flux—“fluidity.” Unfortunately, Amanda is among those resisting “fluidity and differentiation.” In scene 4, she does praise differentiation, exclaiming with feeling, “Both of my children—they're *unusual* children! Don't you think I know it? I'm so *proud!* Happy and—feel I've—so much to be thankful for” (171). However, in the last act, she exclaims to Laura, “Why can't you and your brother be normal people? Fantastic whims and behavior!” (197).

There was once a balance of stasis and flux in Amanda. Predictably, when a representative of spirit and a representative of flesh enter into a relationship, and both are amenable to the opposite poles, there is balance between the two, an interplay of stasis and flux. This is precisely the set of images connoted by the landscape of the Mississippi Delta, where Amanda spent much of her youth: It literally consists of a balance of stasis and flux, with vast plantations relieved by systems of waterways. During Amanda's young adulthood, this state of affairs was reflected on another level: The spirituality of Delta women was relieved by flesh in the men, and vice versa—the men were balanced by the women. This can be detected in Amanda's Blue Mountain reminiscences in the last act, when she describes one particularly memorable spring when she was being courted; she wore a certain dress

on Sundays for my gentlemen callers! I had it on the day I met your father. . . . I had malaria fever all that Spring. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the Delta—weakened resistance. I had a little temperature all the time—not enough to be serious—just enough to make me restless and giddy! Invitations poured in—parties all over the Delta! “Stay in bed,” said Mother, “you have a fever!”—but I just wouldn't. I took quinine but kept going, going! Evenings, dances! Afternoons, long, long rides! (193)

Though Amanda is a representative of spirit, there are several symbols here which signify flesh in her, which is particularly appropriate to the season of spring, with its connotations of fertility: There is flux, with her refusing to stay in bed, her “going, going,” and “long, long rides!”; and there is heat as well, in her malarial, febrile condition, indicative of the carnality she has begun experiencing within. Critic Judith Thompson speaks of the balance of spirit and flesh here, that Amanda is sharing memories of “spring and courtship, enacted in a kind of Dionysian meadow where the sexual and the spiritual are mythically reconciled” (*Tennessee* 18).

Most of Amanda’s suitors were as reconciled to stasis/spirit as she was with flux/flesh. This is indicated on a literal level by their being “gentlemen—all!” (148). They are, after all, “gentlemen callers.” This reconciliation is reflected on a figurative level by the imagery with which they are associated, with their owning plantations on the Delta, so that there is the imagery of flux intermingled with stasis. Land is a symbol of stasis in Williams, a symbol Amanda emphasizes when she says that among her callers “were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta—planters and sons of planters!” Though Champ Laughlin, another of Amanda’s suitors, was not a planter, the imagery of stasis is still in evidence; he became vice-president of *Delta Planters Bank*. The difference between the occupations of these men, closely associated with stasis, and the occupation of the Captain of *You Touched Me!*, characterized wholly by flux (and instinct and desire), could not be more striking.

Of course, we know that although Amanda’s exposure to carnality is initially positive, it ends badly for her. Her complete chronicle, then, could be told as follows: Early on, she appears to have been a tender representative of spirit, untouched by carnality. Then she left Tennessee and went south, which “weakened resistance.” She is surrounded by men, and contracts malaria, indicative of the carnality which is manifesting itself inside her. Her stricken state

notwithstanding, this period of desire seems to have been a positive thing, even inspiring fevered animation, as she begins gathering flowers, the fertile symbols of spring:

That was the spring I had the craze for jonquils. Jonquils became an absolute obsession. Mother said, “Honey, there's no more room for jonquils.” And still I kept on bringing in more jonquils. Whenever, wherever I saw them, I'd say, “Stop! Stop! I see jonquils!” I made the young men help me gather the jonquils! It was a joke, Amanda and her jonquils! (194)

In the end, however, there came a jolt:

Finally there were no more vases to hold them, every available space was filled with jonquils. No vases to hold them? All right, I'll hold them myself! And then I— [*She stops in front of the picture. Music plays.*] met your father! Malaria fever and jonquils and then—this—boy. . . . [*She switches on the rose-colored lamp.*] I hope they get here before it starts to rain.

Flesh ultimately led her to a species of death, when her husband was found to possess unrestrainable impulses of flesh, unamenable to spirit, causing him to abandon her and her family. She says, “All of my gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I assumed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large piece of land” (204). However, she instead married a figure characterized by extreme flux: “I married no planter! I married a man who worked for the telephone company! [. . .] A telephone man who—fell in love with long-distance! Now he travels and I don't even know where!” After his abandonment, she makes otherworlds out of the miserable circumstances in which she found herself, as in her Blue Mountain reminiscences, and when she “spreads a newspaper” on the tenement fire escape and seats herself “gracefully and demurely as if she were settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda” (180). She also continues to hold high the banner of spiritual standards in a particularly outspoken manner. However, she is ultimately claimed by a more inexorable form of death, when the otherworld she casts over Jim fails, and her fragile world collapses.

In many ways, she is like Blanche, and their stories parallel each other. Early on, Blanche appears to have been a tender representative of spirit, untouched by carnality. However, when she turned sixteen, she says she “made the discovery—love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me” (1: 354). The flesh in her almost overwhelmed her, and ultimately led her to a species of death, particularly after she discovered that incredibly strong carnality also haunted her husband, whom she had assumed to be a classical gentleman. After this discovery, and a species of death, she holds high the banner of spiritual standards in a particularly outspoken way. She also attempts to make otherworlds to which she can retreat, just as Amanda does. However, a more absolute form of death claims her in the end.

Most of Amanda’s suitors are characterized by a balance of stasis and flux, but there is one suitor who is parallel to her husband: Duncan Fitzhugh. The other suitors die tragic deaths, and the tone of her accounts of their passing is distinctly elegiac, but Duncan is a representative of extreme flux, too carnal to be romanticized and, significantly, the only one, other than Mr. Wingfield, still alive. His carnal characteristics are emphasized when he is described as the “Wolf of Wall Street” (149). His ties to flux also resemble Mr. Wingfield’s; the latter “skipped the light fantastic out of town,” and the former skips out of Mississippi and goes North, which is a symbol in GM of the antithesis of spirituality and romance. Neither is associated with land—with stasis.

When Mr. Wingfield takes Amanda far from the Delta, the locus of the balance of stasis and flux, and strands her in St. Louis, in the middle of the continent where there is no balance, and leaves for the ocean, this is a reflection on a figurative level of his abandoning her to a life of

concentrated spirituality, with no carnality at all. (Though she is admittedly on the Mississippi river, Williams does not draw attention to this fact.) This results in her insisting on standards so severe that Tom is provoked into going to the opposite extreme, so that, again, there is no balance. She does hope her daughter will be able to enjoy the balance which she has been denied, and these hopes become concentrated on a single individual, the gentleman caller she prays for, finally realized in the person of Jim. She becomes particularly excited about this prospect; as we shall see in the following chapter, there are strong indications that he is open to a balance of stasis and flux.

Martial Symbols

Amanda's instincts have made her a "lover, a hunter, a fighter," despite her denial of the role of instinct. She is as determined as any warrior to fight for her family, a characteristic which is almost certainly the reason for the "heroism" Williams attributes to her in his description of the characters (129). In an interview with Jean Evans, a few months after GM was first produced, Williams speaks of his attraction to heroism: "It's human valor that moves me. The one dominant theme in most of my writings, the most magnificent thing in all human nature, is valor—and endurance." He adds, "The mother's valor is the *core* of *The Glass Menagerie*. [. . .] She's confused, pathetic, even stupid, but everything has got to be all right. She fights to make it that way in the only way she knows how" (*Conversations* 14). This characteristic of hers is signified by martial imagery. First, she is associated with the D.A.R., the Daughters of the American Revolution. Heroism is, in fact, so central to her characterization that an early version of GM centered on her is even entitled "Daughter of Revolution," after a painting by Grant Wood. Another early title is "Spring Offensive," a further reference to her fighting spirit (HRC 17.9). In a one-act entitled "With Grace and Dignity," she tells her daughter,

Now be a brave little girl and make Mother *proud!*
Make her the proudest daughter of the whole American Revolution!
The spirit—of SEVENTY-SIX! (HRC 17.1; see appendix 1 for the [play](#) in its entirety)

She evinces this very spirit early in GM. When she learns of Laura's failure at Rubicam's Business College—Laura's failure to cross her Rubicon—she produces “plans and provisions” for keeping her daughter alive (174). First, she conducts a “vigorous campaign on the telephone” to provide money for making her daughter and her home especially attractive (159). She also tells Tom how much she needs him in this fight, and in the struggle of life in general: “I've had to put up a solitary battle all these years. But you're my right-hand bower! Don't fall down, don't fail!” (170). She sympathizes somewhat with his frustration, but tells him that “life's not easy, it calls for—Spartan endurance!” (172). When Tom ultimately tells her that the arrival of a gentleman caller is imminent, she is taken aback, but soon recovers her confidence; she “attacks his hair with the brush” and tells him, “We won't be brilliant, but we will pass inspection” (183, 184). Her dedication and determination are reflected in the drafts: During a conversation between her and Jim, she says:

Bringing two children into this—unknown world! It's just as unknown to me—as full of danger and—mystery and—surprises!—as if there were Indians still behind the trees and I—driving by in a covered wagon!—And I don't even have a man with a gun on the plank beside me....

So I—sell my subscriptions and go to church and try not to have—misgivings. What else can I do? (HRC 17.2, drafts of “The Gentleman Caller”)

Public Textuality

Amanda's dedication to survival distinguishes her from her children, who do not seem preoccupied with surviving and succeeding in this world, concentrating instead on relatively atemporal things—Laura on her innocent, ethereal, imaginative world, and Tom on art and the discovery of universal truths about human nature. Their mother, by contrast, is focused on what

it takes to stay alive. Though she is romantically inclined, life has made her very aware that her world could come crashing down if she fails to act astutely. She has to settle with reality if she is ever to truly enjoy the world of fantasy she is fond of retreating to. In Williams' description of her, he never seems to appreciate her grasp on reality, but she is keenly aware of the real world, though relying on superannuated strategies. She is even willing—almost eager—to make concessions to the flesh in order to survive, enthusiastically stuffing Laura's brassiere with "Gay Deceivers," as we have noted. She resembles Blanche in this way, who flirts in a sexual way with Stanley to secure her tenuous footing in his household. This dual realistic/romantic facet of Amanda's is indicated in the drafts, when she tells Tom, "I'm not only the practical member of the family but the romantic one, too" (HRC 17.2, drafts of "The Gentleman Caller").

Williams signifies her concern with survival through the use of public textuality. Representatives of spirit tend not to be associated with public, or commercial, textuality, but the disappointments she has faced have attuned her to the necessity of fighting for the life of her family. Her links to public textuality are particularly signified by the imagery of textuality, which dominates her language in scene 2. Having called at Rubicam's Business College to ask about Laura's progress, she reports that the "typing instructor" did not even know she had "any such student enrolled at the school!" (153). When Amanda insisted that Laura was enrolled there, Amanda tells Laura that the instructor "took the attendance book out and there was your name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent until they decided that you had dropped out of school." Amanda complained, "There must have been some mix-up in the records!" (154). "[E]nrolled," "attendance book," "name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent," "mix-up in the records"—all instances of the imagery of textuality which characterizes the speech of those associated with commercial textuality. An emphasis on

commerce and cash is further indicated by an accessory Amanda carries in this scene, her “enormous black patent-leather pocketbook with nickel clasps and initials” (151).

The point at which her commercial textuality is most powerfully evinced is in scene 3, after she realizes that Laura will not be able to rely on her own verbal production—typing—to secure her future; that she will be relying on Amanda’s. One of the most obvious characteristics of those associated with public textuality is their attempt to verbally “rule the skies,” to dominate their social contexts vocally. This can first be seen here, as she attempts to use verbal charm to manipulate acquaintances into subscribing to the magazines she sells. This scene is pervaded by the imagery of textuality, with her “vigorous campaign on the telephone, roping in subscribers to one of those magazines for matrons called ‘The Homemaker’s Companion,’ the type of journal that features the serialized sublimations of ladies of letters who think in terms of [poetic descriptions of the body]” (159). The imagery of textuality is everywhere, both oral and written: “telephone,” “subscribers,” “magazines,” “journal,” and “letters.” It is also clear that her community is as oriented toward textuality as she is, which makes her goal of verbally manipulating them all the more challenging: In her sales pitch, she says, “You remember how *Gone with the Wind* took everybody by storm? You simply couldn’t go out if you hadn’t read it. All everybody *talked* was Scarlett O’Hara” (160).

Again there are obvious parallels with Blanche. Representatives of spirituality are typically associated with private textuality, particularly literary works of art. However, Blanche and Amanda are threatened with various species of death and are forced for survival to use artistic texts for commercial purposes. Blanche uses her familiarity with literary art—probably acquired out of enjoyment, as part of her genteel upbringing—to survive, first as an English

teacher and then in her desperate, frenzied efforts to secure Mitch. Amanda uses her familiarity with literary art, which she probably acquired in the same way, to bring in hard cash in St. Louis.

Amanda realizes, as Margaret does in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, that those who verbally dominate a social context dramatically improve their chances of both surviving and thriving. In addition to verbally controlling her friends to secure more subscriptions, she attempts to verbally overpower her son, presumably to keep him at home long enough to provide a suitor for her daughter. She first tries to dominate him by controlling his literary output; we witness a quarrel between them which was “probably precipitated by Amanda’s interruption of Tom’s creative labor” (162). Her interruption here is related to another instance of her verbally dominating him, of which Tom complains. Earlier she had seized a book of his by D. H. Lawrence and returned it to the library. She no doubt suspects she must control the Lawrentian, carnal element in him—whether in the stories he writes or the books he reads—or he will be even more inclined to abandon her and Laura to their fate. She knows of his drive to leave—after all, she “can see the handwriting on the wall,” another instance of the imagery of textuality (175).

As the heat of their contention grows fiercer in scene 3, she accuses him of being selfish—a savvy, manipulative maneuver, since he can only counter this by continuing to live with them and provide for them. She even tries to control his voice by direct command:

AMANDA. What is the matter with you, you—big—big—IDIOT!

TOM. Look!—I’ve got *no thing*, no single thing—

AMANDA. Lower your voice!

TOM. —in my life here that I can call my OWN! Everything is—

AMANDA. Stop that shouting! (161)

She then attempts to dominate his verbal production by insisting his speech consists entirely of lies. Finally, after he breaks under the strain and is as rude to her as she is to him, she insists that he apologize, refusing to speak to him until he has done so, another verbally manipulative move. She succeeds: In the next scene, he is pressured into apologizing, and she is then able to extract a verbal promise from him that he will bring Laura a suitor.

Because textuality is so central to her, she seems to believe that if one says positive things, reality itself will be positive, another factor motivating her attempts at verbal domination. When Laura reminds her that she is crippled, Amanda replies, “Nonsense! Laura, I’ve told you never, never to use that word” (157). Later on, in scene 5, she gives Tom the same command (187).

Mother of Sorrows

Amanda believes herself to be a “Christian martyr!”, in words she uses of a friend; she is distinctly aware of the sacrifices she makes for her family (160). In fact, superior to martyrdom, she sees herself as resembling the Mother of Sorrows, the all-suffering mother Mary. Williams makes this surprising link primarily for the purposes of comedy: In scene 2, when she asks Laura why she has been so secretive, Laura responds: “Mother, when you’re disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus’ mother in the museum!” Later, when Tom apologizes for shouting at her the previous night, her association with Mary is confirmed as “Ave Maria” begins to play in the background, and she begins speaking of the trials she endures because of her devotion to her children (170).

Blue Mountain

Amanda is certainly aware of her suffering, and of reality to some extent, but her reality is extremely sordid, a dreary existence in an urban tenement. Like Laura, she indulges in

escaping to an otherworld which relieves her of the sharp edges of a life fraught with despair. Whereas Laura escapes to the Limberlost, Amanda escapes to Blue Mountain, her particular otherworld, her girlhood home. In terms of the real world, Blue Mountain is a physical location in the state of Mississippi where Amanda grew up. (There is an actual town by that name in Tippah county.) However, it has become, in her mind, a place not of this world, an unreal locus of perpetual delight. Blue, as we shall see below, represents transcendence in Williams, and transcendence is precisely what Blue Mountain brings to the life of Amanda. Williams describes her as “clinging frantically to another time and place,” adding that she “continues to live vitally in her illusions,” having “failed to establish contact with reality” (129). This may be stating the case too strongly—she is painfully aware of their dilemma—but she does escape so fully into her otherworld, into the days of her girlhood, that at times she becomes oblivious to reality. Tom pushes this point home a bit too strongly in the drafts. In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” he tells her of Laura’s living in another world, and adds vehemently, “You live in your own world, too. The D.A.R., ‘The Housekeeper’s Companion,’ the gentleman callers you used to have in Blue Mountain. Things right under your nose you don’t even notice!” (HRC 17.1). Naturally, she takes exception to this: “If it wasn’t for me taking an interest in selling that—*damned*—magazine. What would become of this household? Ask yourself that!”

In scene 1, she is so engrossed in childhood reminiscences that she acts like a child. While recounting the days of her girlhood and courting, she “flounces girlishly toward the kitchenette” (150). She behaves similarly in the fourth scene, where she looks “aged but childish” (169) and sheds “childlike tears” after Tom apologizes (170). In HRC 16.9’s description of “The Gentleman Caller,” Williams notes that she has “many charming little ways and mannerisms which must have been quaintly delightful in a pretty girl, but unfortunately

Amanda has never out-grown them. She left the South with them and they remain with her into middle-age, rather pathetic and incongruous in a woman whose bitter struggles have made her haggard and shrewish.”

In the last act, she is finally able to return to her childhood home in a sense, redecorating the apartment to evoke the atmosphere of her Blue Mountain girlhood almost perfectly, with herself, naturally, as the debutante. She does so primarily for her daughter, to create an atmosphere that will enchant Jim and ensnare him, but also because she so enjoys retreating entirely to the otherworld of her youth. A host of images confirm this. In scene 6, when she greets Jim for the first time, an image of “Amanda as a girl” is projected on the screen, as she approaches, “coily smiling, shaking her girlish ringlets” (203). Jim is making “his first contact with girlish Southern vivacity,” particularly with her wearing a “girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash” (202, 193). We later hear a “peal of girlish laughter” coming from the kitchen (222). Finally, when she reappears at the end of the play, she tells Jim, “You modern young people are much more serious-minded than my generation. I was so gay as a girl!”

JIM. You haven’t changed, Mrs. Wingfield.

AMANDA. Tonight I’m rejuvenated! The gaiety of the occasion, Mr. O’Connor! (232)

She then offers to “skip back out.” As the stage directions say when she first emerges in her “girlish frock,” the “legend of her youth” has essentially been “revived” (193).

Amanda has again become the Southern belle sought by innumerable gentlemen callers. To complete the transposition of the apartment to Blue Mountain, she even wears the very dress she wore while receiving them. She claims to have “resurrected” it just as she has the past (193). She tells Laura, “I’m going to show you something. I’m going to make a spectacular appearance!” However, she postpones the resurrection, for it “isn’t dark enough yet”—darkness

being the haunt of romance. Her actions are reminiscent of Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: In her last scene alone with Mitch, he notices the paper lantern she has placed over the light bulb, and complains of the darkness, yet she insists that she likes the dark, adding: “I don’t want realism. I want magic!” (1: 385).

In Amanda’s rummaging through her old things for her dress, there is an echo of one of the earliest poems Williams wrote, composed in 1926 when he was only fourteen, printed in *The Junior Life*, the publication of his junior high school. Entitled “Old Things,” it features an older gentleman in Amanda’s position, living in another past-oriented otherworld:

In the silence of the garret,
 ‘Midst rusted things of long ago.
Aloft from the clamor of life below,
 Old things—sallowed and hallowed,
 Grayed in the gloom;
Things from the old life
 In the dusk of their tomb.
This is the place for him and his dreams,
His old gray head bowed over the remnants
 Of days that are dead.
The silver candelabrum blazes anew,
And the tapestry blooms to a brighter hue.
 The melodeon chimes,
 A faint caprice,
And the whole world dims to a softened peace.
 Eyes gently shine through
The dusk of years,
Old faces he sees,
Old voices he hears,
Amidst the rusted things of long ago. (*Collected Poems* 213-14)

As Amanda’s “silver candelabrum blazes anew” and she wears her “girlish frock of yellowed voile” which is “sallowed and hallowed,” she is clearly parallel to this older gentleman.

Gold

The color of all things sallowed is actually significant. The three colors that are central to Williams’ symbolism are red, white, and gold (or “yellow,” etc.). In fact, in the drafts he

agonizes over which of these deeply significant colors to use. In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” scene 1, Amanda serves red Jell-O instead of white blancmange, whereas elsewhere among the drafts, she serves lemon Jell-O (HRC 17.2). Each color functions in discrete ways in GM’s symbolic system, as we shall see. Gold often operates with its typical connotations, indicating an object of great worth, but it is also used to convey something more specific, signifying, as we have seen, the older order of things, like Amanda’s white dress turned yellow with age. In one of Williams’ early plays, the HRC’s “Talisman Roses,” it is associated with two elderly women who are sewing:

ETHEL. I think yellow always makes you feel so good.

LILY. Um-hum. It sort of lifts you up.

This is paralleled by Williams’ calling his grandmother his “yellow rose” (*Selected Letters* 1: 351). He even claims she colored the walls of her own private world gold: “My grandmother formed quiet but deeply emotional attachments to places and people and would have been happy to stay forever and ever in one rectory, once her bedroom was papered in lemon yellow and the white curtains were hung there” (*Collected Stories* 379). The imagery of stasis is also evident.

Gold particularly signifies otherworlds oriented toward the past. One indication that Amanda transports herself and others into a past-oriented otherworld in the last act is the “delicate, lemony light” which illuminates the Wingfield apartment (191). In this context, Amanda appears in her yellowed dress and begins speaking of her life in Blue Mountain, her language suffused with the gold of the jonquils she once collected. When she actually places jonquils in a bowl on the table following her reverie, it is a very concrete icon, a sign that the past has arrived. In fact, the stage directions indicate that “the legend of her youth is nearly

revived.” Thompson alludes to this convention of Williams’: “The characters’ subjective worlds are [. . .] physically embodied by the very props of the stage set, by the costumes and other accoutrements of the actors, and by the sensory effects of light, color, and music” (*Tennessee* 4). The flowers on the table are the embodiment of Amanda’s otherworld. Unfortunately, the past does not hold. In the final moments of the play, she brings in more gold objects, perhaps to prolong the magic: for instance, she carries “lemonade” in an “old-fashioned, cut-glass pitcher,” and snacks on a plate with a “gold border” (231, 232). However, Laura has been shattered, the spell has been broken, and the past has fled, never to be recaptured. At this point, having lost Jim, she could almost be the speaker of the first stanza of “October Song,” a poem Williams wrote in 1932, when he was only twenty, which contains imagery consistent with this scene:

“There is enchantment here!” I mused. Beguiled
Seemed Time herself, her erstwhile errant ways
Forgot, loitered with us and fondly smiled,
Caught in a net of gold and azure days!
But I lacked wit to see how lightly shoon
Were Time and you, to vagrancy so used
That by the glance of one October moon
From Summer’s tranquil spell you might be loosed! (*Collected Poems* 177)

Gold is associated with the past, and a glass sphere with the Laurine type. These two images often come together when characters live in a past-oriented otherworld. Serafina of *The Rose Tattoo* lives in an otherworld of the past, never ceasing to speak of the transcendence her relationship with her dearly departed husband brought her, and behind her there is an image which evokes this otherworld of hers—a “large bowl of goldfish” (2: 269-70). The goldfish are analogues of Serafina, who lives in a glass-enclosed Laurine otherworld, and they are analogues of similar characters—for instance, the deepwater diver with the “golden-curving hips” and hair sweeping “backward in a golden sheet!” in the poem “Swimmer and Fish Group,” discussed in the chapter on Laura (*Collected Poems* 186). This imagery is also reminiscent of the golden

jonquils Amanda puts in water in a “bowl on the table” in GM (194). Tragically, Serafina’s otherworld will be shattered, which is adumbrated by the presence of “*cut-glass* decanters and vases,” the next articles mentioned (2: 270, emphasis added). This same species of gold imagery can be found in relation to Tom, except that he wishes to be freed from the past-oriented otherworld he occupies with his mother; he is envious when he sees Malvolio the Magician change a “bowl of goldfish” into birds which are freed (167).

Serafina’s past-oriented otherworld is made of glass with golden contents, just as Amanda’s apartment in the last act contains golden light, golden flowers, and her golden dress. However, at times the sphere in which the reminiscences take place is gold. In Williams’ short play “The Last of My Solid Gold Watches,” a salesman, the protagonist, enters a room with “mustard-colored” walls and loses himself in reminiscences for the entirety of the play (6: 93). At other times, the original events about which characters reminisce are set in rooms of gold. In “Oriflamme,” a short story Williams began in 1937, Anna, a protagonist who resembles Laura, revisits in her memory an evening spent with a character parallel to Jim. She remembers being shy, but he was full of confidence and danced with her, just as Jim does. The location in their high school where this event takes place is the school’s “yellow gymnasium” (*Collected Stories* 129). This type of otherworld recurs in “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin.” The first-person narrator remembers essentially falling in love with someone his sister was romantically interested in, so that he began to

dream about him as I had formerly dreamed of storybook heroes. His name began to inhabit the rectory. It was almost constantly on the lips of my sister, this strange young lady who had come to live with us. It had a curious lightness, that name, in the way that she spoke it. It did not seem to fall from her lips but to be released from them. The moment spoken, it rose into the air and shimmered and floated and took on gorgeous colors the way that soap bubbles did that we used to blow from the sunny back steps in the summer. Those bubbles lifted and floated and they eventually broke but never until other bubbles had floated beside them.

Golden they were, and the name of Richard had a golden sound, too. (*Collected Stories* 275)

Williams colors his own past-oriented otherworlds gold. In 1957, he recalls that his first summer on California's coastline was the "happiest summer of my life" (*Where I Live* 86). Like many Williams otherworlds we have examined, it almost literally returned him to his childhood: "I looked so young, or carefree, that they would sometimes refuse to sell me a drink because I did not appear to have reached twenty-one." He adds that the "nights were starry," and "[a]ll the days were pure gold."

"Sand"

Many of the symbols we have discussed in this chapter come together in Williams' short story "Sand," written in 1936, which features an elderly woman who strongly resembles Amanda. Though her life is incredibly bleak, it is relieved by particularly vivid recollections of the past, the otherworld of memory. She is the caretaker for her husband, whose state of decrepitude is particularly advanced. This contrasts strongly with her memories of him, which come to her throughout her day, as well as when night falls:

When the light is out she begins to think again. The thoughts swarm mercilessly into her mind and she murmurs aloud. Sometimes it is the seashore again and he is lying beside her on the warm sand. The bright grains of it are sliding from his palm and trickling over her bare legs and arms. This memory has a remarkable life. It is the most vivid of them all. She hears the sound of waves coming in and her eyes close slowly against the glitter of the sun. Prismatic colors flash through her tangled lashes. She hears his voice slow and caressing as the grains of trickling sand. Rose. Rose. Rose. Rose. He is trying to make her smile. But she will not smile. She keeps her lips drawn tightly together. The sand trickles slowly. Then more swiftly. Then slower. It is warm, so very warm against her bare skin. In spite of herself her lips begin to curl up at the corners. She laughs out loud. The earth rises and sways beneath her. Her body grows large. Immense. The moment is timeless. (*Collected Stories* 51)

This passage is particularly reminiscent of Amanda's jonquil speech. First, the emphasis on sand makes it a gold-tinted otherworld, just like hers. Second, heat is in evidence here, with the sand,

which is “warm, so very warm against her bare skin,” parallel to Amanda’s febrile condition while gathering the jonquils. Other representatives of flux are in evidence also—the flux imagery of the ocean, relieved, significantly, by the static imagery of land, the shore, so that there is a balance of flux and stasis, parallel to the imagery of the Delta as noted earlier. Finally, the characteristics of the Laurine type are present, with the “glitter of the sun” producing a rainbow; “[p]rismatic colors flash through her tangled lashes.”

Her present is far grimmer, as the health of her husband fails, but like all spiritual characters, she is determined to fight the progression of time, tirelessly struggling to care for him and keep him alive, just as Amanda is determined to hold her family together. She draws near to him and “flings her arms passionately around him. Draws him close against her shriveled bosom. In that embrace she must hold him forever. Time must not take him from her. Let the rest slide away like sand. She will have to keep this!” (53)

Conclusion

Amanda is a particularly complicated character. On one level, she represents the bestial side of humankind, while simultaneously representing many of spirituality and religion’s negative aspects. She is also a hero of sorts, determinedly fighting to preserve her delicate daughter in the face of the cold brutality of the world at large. Through it all, she never abandons romance or her ability to infuse her dreary surrounding with mystery. In modern productions, directors have often been tempted to cast her merely as a harridan, but this is to reduce her to a relatively flat character and weaken the play. Williams insists that “[h]er characterization must be carefully created, not copied from type” (129). Her positive qualities must also be emphasized, for “[t]here is much to admire in Amanda, and as much to love and

pity as there is to laugh at.” This is why, when the play is adequately produced, she is among Williams’ most memorable characters.

5. JIM: CARNAL SAVIOR

Introduction

In his opening speech, Tom states that Jim is “the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from” (145). However, because Tom has a “poet’s weakness for symbols,” he is “using this character also as a symbol; [Jim] is the long-delayed but always expected something that we live for.” In the HNOC’s “Provisional film story treatment of ‘The Gentleman Caller,’” Williams further describes him as “that most distinguished visitor, *Success*, that houses are always being prepared to receive but whose arrival is always so uncertain and unpredictable as to hour and manner of coming. [. . .] He is the ultimate goal, the end and aim, of the long-drawn-out and exhausting struggle with circumstances.” Essentially, he represents what all of us are waiting so desperately for, the one thing we believe will bring us happiness that always seems to elude our grasp. All plays are said to be allegories because they represent us and our struggle for resolution. Jim represents the promise of this resolution.

He does not appear until the end of the play because Laura’s material and figurative need must first be established so that we are able to anticipate his potentially answering that need. His potential to satisfy her materially is fairly clear: If she has a husband like him, she will be at least provided for in the near future, and will be even better off as he takes night courses and moves ahead. That he has the potential to satisfy her need on a figurative level is established through a multitude of symbols.

Stasis/Flux

Overland Motion and Water in Flux

Like all men in the play, Jim is associated with flux, of which there are several kinds: overland motion and motion in the abstract; water in flux; wind and flight; and space flight. First, he is described as a “shipping clerk,” and shipping connotes long-distance motion (184). His ties to flux in the abstract are established when Tom describes him as he knew him in high school, “always running or bounding, never just walking” (190). However, the primary type of flux is water in flux, and Jim is continually associated with this type, as in scene 2 when Laura tells her mother, “His name was Jim. [. . .] Here he is in *The Pirates of Penzance*” (156). There are oceanic connotations to the mention here of pirates; and oceanic imagery is, as we have seen, the ultimate expression of flux. Piracy also evokes both flux (the signifier) and flesh (the signified), related as it is to the instinctual, carnal side of human nature, as opposed to spiritual standards and aspirations.

On a figurative level, there is particular promise in this allusion for Laura. First of all, as a character associated with flux, Jim has the potential to bring a balance of flux and stasis—flesh and spirit—to Laura, who is characterized by extreme spirit/stasis. Moreover, the allusion establishes that Jim is not associated with an extreme form of flux/flesh, as Mr. Wingfield is—that Jim would be at least somewhat accepting of stasis. Frederic, the protagonist of Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta, ultimately abandons a life of ocean-going piracy, choosing instead to embrace a life on land, amidst a host of women, his betrothed and her sisters.

In Williams, positive representatives of spirit or flesh can be compared to the traditional yin-yang symbol. Optimally, a spot of white is in the black, and a spot of black is in the white, representing harmony both in Daoism and in Williams’ symbolic system. Jim is just as much a

representative of flux as the other men in GM, definitely black, but with a difference—he is open to the influence of white, as indicated by his starring in *The Pirates of Penzance*.

His promise is further reinforced in the symbolically critical last act of GM, where there are more indications that his impulse toward extreme flux has diminished. Whereas Tom indicated that earlier Jim was characterized by extreme velocity, extreme flux, now he says Jim’s “speed had definitely slowed” (190). Another promising sign occurs in the last scene; when Jim asks Laura where she heard him sing, the audience hears offstage her memory of his singing:

O blow, ye winds, heigh-ho,
A-roving I will go!
I’m off to my love
With a boxing glove—
Ten thousand miles away! (213)

This song, entitled “A Capital Ship,” features a sailor immersed in flux—“roving,” sailing the high seas. However, he is motivated to rejoin his love, presumably waiting for him on shore, a static image. Again, Jim appears to be amenable to a more balanced life, like the men of Amanda’s acquaintance in the Delta.

When Tom mentions Jim to Amanda in scene 5 and tells her that his last name is O’Connor, she immediately replies, “That, of course, means fish—tomorrow is Friday!” (183). On a literal level, this is, of course, her guess that he is Catholic, but on a figurative level, this is a tie to water in flux. However, there may be figurative promise in the species of fish that suggests itself to Amanda: Salmon evoke the image of fish leaping waterfalls, swimming upstream, *away* from the sea, the opposite direction of those men of the play who are associated with extreme flux, Tom and Mr. Wingfield, who leave their families for the ocean. Ultimately, Jim does abandon the ocean on a figurative level, he does abandon flux, but tragically, he does so for another girl, whom he meets, significantly enough, while going upstream. Toward the end of

the play, he tells Laura that he met his fiancée “last summer on a moonlight boat trip up the river to Alton, on the Majestic. Well—right away from the start it was—love!” (229-30)

Wind, Breath/Breathlessness

Now Eros shakes my soul, a wind on the
mountain, falling on the oaks.

Sappho

Epigraph to Williams’ “27 Wagons Full of Cotton”

When we hear Jim singing, another species of flux is emphasized: “O blow, ye winds, heigh-ho.” Wind is established as a species of flux as early as *Spring Storm*, when Dick, the representative of flesh, asks Heavenly if she does not “get restless sometimes. Don’t that river-wind ever slap you in the face an’ say, ‘Git movin’, yuh damn l’il goober digger, git movin’!?” (*Tennessee* 1: 7). Jim is the character most strongly associated with wind in GM, and in effect, there is promise that he will be breathing life into Laura. This is crucial because just as Jim is amenable to some degree of stasis, Laura is in need of a degree of flux, characterized as she is by extreme spirit/stasis.

This is precisely the narrative of *You Touched Me!* The women of the play are characterized as being dusty, sealed clay pots, and the Captain makes it clear that only young men like Hadrian—young representatives of flesh—can bring flux to this stasis, wind to this sealed-off space, the breath of life into their moribund souls. The house is a symbol of the women’s sealed spirits, and naturally, the Captain finds the atmosphere to be stifling in the extreme, at one point shouting, “Tear down the walls, I’m suffocating in here” (52). With a “[s]udden roar,” he declares he is being “smothered” (51). A minister visits sporadically, but a representative of spirit is not what is called for—the women need a representative of flesh. Ultimately, of course, such a man does enter the picture—Hadrian, the Jim figure—and he does breathe life into Matilda’s cloistered soul. The Captain tells Emmie, “[I]n spite of your will to

prevent, he's going to breathe the breath of life back into this poor clay figure you're making of my daughter" (95).

The symbolism in GM functions identically. Matilda is an analogue of Laura, a fact supported by the breathlessness which characterizes her, discussed above. Matilda's house is paralleled by the Wingfield apartment, a metaphor for the women's souls, and like Matilda's home, the apartment seems to be sealed, in a sense: before the last act, no outsiders ever intrude upon its stillness, and there is no mention of the windows' being opened. Laura needs a fresh breeze, a representative of flesh, to relieve the suffocating atmosphere. Tom is a representative of flesh, and is thus linked to wind: He is twice associated with the image of a pirate ship sailing on the high seas. However, as Laura's brother, he obviously cannot be the figure who will complete her, anymore than the Captain can breathe life into Matilda. It is Jim who has the potential to bring about her deliverance, and this is indicated by the wind imagery accompanying his climactic visit. Just before he arrives, there is a rather magical exchange between mother and daughter, during which a "wind blows the white curtains inward in a slow, graceful motion and with a faint, sorrowful sighing" (193). The wind lends almost mythic import to the meeting of Laura and Jim—the world itself is acting in consonance with their coming together.

In some of the early versions of GM, when Williams wishes to make the end a happy one, he almost makes the men representatives of spirit and, predictably, wind is conspicuously absent. In the drafts of "If You Breathe, It Breaks," Mrs. Wingfield tells Mr. Walland, the Jim figure, that there is normally a breeze, "[b]ut tonight is unusually breathless, don't you think?" (HRC 17.6). In GM proper, Laura entrusts her unicorn to Jim, but warns him that "if you breathe, it breaks!" (223). Jim breathes life into her, but ultimately, when he confesses that he is engaged to Betty, his coming breaks her. This is not what transpires in "If You Breathe, It

Breaks.” Rosemary, the Laura figure, warns Mr. Walland that if he so much as breathes on the unicorn, it will break. He replies, “Give it to me.”

R.: Oh, no! A man would break it!

MR. WALLAND: I won’t break it.

She entrusts him with it, and he “wraps it very carefully in his white pocket handkerchief and tucks it with exquisite concern in the breast pocket of his linen jacket.” He then says,

Now!—We’re ready to go.

R.: Go *where*, Mr. Walland?

MR. WALLAND: Down to the White Star drugstore for a coke!

R.: Oh! [*She beams with delight.*]

Flight

Early in the last act, Tom describes Jim as he knew him in high school:

He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality with the scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware. He seemed to move in a continual spotlight. He was a star in basketball, captain of the debating club, president of the senior class and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. He was always running or bounding, never just walking. He seemed always at the point of defeating the law of gravity. He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. (190)

Jim’s “running or bounding,” almost “defeating the law of gravity,” is suggestive of an aircraft during takeoff, a further species of flux. More avionics imagery is introduced in relation to him later, immediately after he kisses Laura. He allows that this act is “way off the beam,” a figure of speech taken from the aerospace industry of the period, when aircraft were guided by radio beams (228). However, there is more than just the imagery of avionics to be found here.

The Shooting Star

The ultimate expression of flux, as we have seen in relation to Tom, is when Williams takes flight a step further, depicting characters who leave earth entirely and escape into the infinite reaches of space. This is apparently Jim's destiny, to find himself among the stars, as his constant association with the imagery of heavenly bodies suggests. In Tom's speech quoted above, there is the imagery of a body in motion, reminiscent of the dynamic white imagery of a shooting star or comet. Jim's "vitality" is juxtaposed with the imagery of "white chinaware," and his "shooting with [. . .] velocity" is juxtaposed with the "White House." Moreover, he moves in a "continual spotlight." He is a "star." In the last scene, this metaphorical description of his being in the spotlight becomes a literal one, as he complains to Laura of her sitting in the dark while he is "in the limelight" (212). This imagery associated with Jim is paralleled by that associated with a male character in Williams' short story "The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin," in which the narrator describes a Richard Miles as being "one of those people who move in light," and that the narrator's realization that he wanted to touch him came "like the sudden streak of flame that follows a comet" (*Collected Stories* 276).

Men in Williams who embrace extreme flux and never accept balance tend to come to bad ends, like Tom, who successfully leaves his family behind by the end of the play, but is ultimately disconsolate in his wandering, longing for the sister he has left behind. In the drafts, it appears that Tom's father shares a similar fate, and Williams employs a darker version of the imagery he uses with Jim. Tom says,

Many of the Wingfield men had lives like comets,
brilliant in the beginning—then suddenly dark...

Some of them—like my father—
took to vagrancy or took to drink— (HRC 16.6, drafts of GM)

Jim needs stasis, he needs the balance that women like Laura can bring him, but as noted, she also needs him. In “If You Breathe, it Breaks!”, Williams writes of the Laura figure, “Her survival in a world that has too little regard for delicate things will depend entirely upon the bare possibility of her discovering somebody who is willing to stand between her and the shattering impact of experience” (qtd. in Bigsby, *Critical* 44). Happily, there are signs that Jim, the shooting star, is decelerating in order to rescue someone like Laura before taking flight again. The ending of GM would then be parallel to the ending of *Stairs to the Roof*, where the two protagonists leave earth on a space ship which takes them to the stars.

There is clearly redemptive potential where Jim is concerned. He is a representative of the present, of the here and now, and as such, he is the perfect candidate for bringing balance to the life of Laura, bringing flesh to her spirituality, and modernity to her orientation toward the past. He makes her link to the past clear when he tells her, “I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl” (212). He is apparently drawn to representatives of the past like her, for he adds, “Well, I think that’s a pretty good type to be.” In the last scene, he perhaps refers to his potential to rescue her: Just before he enters the room where she is seated, he calls himself “Superman” (210).

In “If You Breathe, It Breaks!”, we see precisely this image of a hurtling object rescuing the Laura figure and taking flight again, with the imagery, again, of comets—whiteness and flight. Mr. Walland is dressed in white, and he first rescues Rosemary by proxy, as we can see in the passage above, when he carefully wraps her unicorn in his “white pocket handkerchief,” and delicately places it in his breast pocket. He then takes her off into space with him, delivering her—again, on a figurative level—to the “White Star drugstore.” She reciprocates with parallel imagery as she “beams with delight.” Jim illuminates Laura just as surely, as he kisses her,

giving her a “bright, dazed look” (228). He makes her shine just as Mr. Walland does Rosemary, so that she is like him, a shooting star—until Jim’s confession destroys her, and she becomes a shooting star which burns out. This is the set of images we find in Williams’ poem “The Paper Lantern”:

At fifteen my sister
no longer waited for me,
impatiently at the White Star Pharmacy corner
but plunged headlong
into the discovery, Love!

Then vanished completely—

for love’s explosion, defined as early madness,
consumingly shone in her transparent heart for a season
and burned it out, a tissue-paper lantern! (*Collected Poems* 49-50)

Space Flight and the Flux of Time

Jim’s association with flight is further established in the last act when he tells Laura:

I believe in the future of television! [*turning his back to her.*] I wish to be ready to go up right along with it. Therefore I’m planning to get in on the ground floor. In fact I’ve already made the right connections and all that remains is the industry itself to get under way! Full steam— [*His eyes are starry.*] Knowledge— Zzzzzp! Money—Zzzzzp!—Power! That’s the cycle democracy is built on! (222)

The stage directions add, “His attitude is convincingly dynamic. Laura stares at him, even her shyness eclipsed in her absolute wonder.” The imagery here is replete with the imagery of space flight, and the imagery of flux generally. There is motion in the abstract, with the mention of “[f]ull steam” getting “under way” and of his attitude as being “dynamic,” and there is the imagery of rocketry—the industry is depicted in terms of a rocket ship ready to lift off—he is getting “in” it, and he plans on subsequently going “up right along with it.” Once this metaphor has escaped earth, there is, appropriately, the imagery of space, with his “starry” eyes and Laura’s shyness “eclipsed in her absolute wonder.”

The passage above also establishes Jim's ties to the present—and the future—with his interest in this newly emerging field. As we have seen in the chapter on Tom above, representatives of flesh are often associated with a specific type of flux, the flow of time, the present. Those associated with stasis, on the other hand, are more likely to be associated with past-oriented otherworlds—with memory. Thus Jim's links to the present here is actually a part of the prime dichotomy we have been discussing.

Public/Private Textuality

The passage quoted above demonstrates Jim's association with public textuality, speaking as he does of an extreme instance of it—telecommunications. Representatives of flesh, particularly if they are young, are particularly adept at survival, at remaining in the flow of time, signified in Williams by public textuality and the imagery of textuality generally. (Tom is an exception to this rule, as we have discussed.) For instance, Stanley of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a young representative of flesh, is successful in his job and at staying alive and, predictably, is associated with the imagery of textuality, as when he demands to see Blanche's papers and letters, and speaks of wills and the Napoleonic code. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Margaret, the young representative of flesh, is also skilled at remaining alive and thriving, inasmuch as she secures the Pollitt family inheritance. Her association with public textuality is evinced by her verbal domination of the social contexts in which she finds herself—as well as by the imagery of textuality, as she speaks of newspaper articles, wills, and the books she reads to her dying relations. In the very same vein, Jim is a young representative of flesh predictably adept at staying alive and thriving: His future seems particularly promising, with his obvious incentive to get ahead, made evident during his conversation with Tom in scene 6.

The imagery of flux (particularly space flight) and public textuality operate in tandem both in the passage quoted above and in Amanda and Tom's conversation about Jim at the end of scene 5. She tells him that Jim has the "sort of a job *you* would be in if you just had more *get-up*" (184). A few moments later, she adds, "I hope he's the type that's up and coming."

TOM. I think he really goes in for self-improvement.

AMANDA. What reason have you to think so?

TOM. He goes to night school.

AMANDA. [*beaming*] Splendid! What does he do, I mean study?

TOM. Radio engineering and public speaking!

AMANDA. Then he has visions of being advanced in the world! Any young man who studies public speaking is aiming to have an executive job some day! And radio engineering? A thing for the future! Both of these facts are very illuminating. (186)

Her language is full of imagery consistent with space flight, with the imagery of a rocket's launch: Jim's "get-up" and her hope that he is "up and coming." The imagery of shooting stars and comets is again present, evoked by the juxtaposition of the word "night school" with "beaming" and "illuminating." The imagery of the night sky recurs a few lines down, when she predicts that when Jim comes and sees "how lovely and sweet and pretty [Laura] is, he'll thank his lucky stars he was asked to dinner" (187). References to public textuality can be found in this same context, as Amanda learns of Jim's interest in "radio engineering" and "public speaking." Telecommunications and radio engineering connote the images of television and radio waves pervading everything, so that the flow of language is absolute, like water in the sea. This is the polar opposite of private textuality, of language in small, self-contained, New Critical enclosures, miniature worlds existing separately from the rest of the world.

In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Jim’s link to public textuality is highlighted even further, in references to his strong voice. These drafts also emphasize the success that public textuality inevitably brings to representatives of flesh. Williams writes that Jim

particularly enjoys the sound of his own voice and the idea that he is a good talker. He is an innocent narcissan; his hands are always resting with unconscious affection on some part of his body: tenderly stroking his legs or his hands or his smooth-shaven face: his personality is completely and healthily synthesized on that basis. [. . .]

As Jim goes along his life will be a succession of agreeable discoveries concerning himself: the germ of self-doubt is not in him. Any failures will be easily rationalized. His assurance will give him poise, his poise will give him charm, his charm will give him an easy way through the world. (HRC 16.10)

When Williams’ description of him ends, Jim “smiles benignly at Laura as his rich male voice echo[e]s pleasantly in the tidy corridors of his mind.”

This passage characterizes Jim, who is associated with public textuality, as being oriented toward externals—toward appearances. In GM those associated with private textuality tend to focus on an inner reality, while Jim, the “innocent narcissan,” is in no danger of becoming morbidly introspective. One of the ways Williams depicts this contrast is through the use of mirrors. Jim’s immersion in the outer world, the world of camaraderie and society, is figuratively indicated by the extensive attention he devotes to the mirror while speaking to Laura and her family, simultaneously confirming his narcissism. When he and Laura are alone together, and he is attempting to give her self-confidence, he insists that she possesses some trait which distinguishes her from everyone else. He then says, “Everybody excels in some one thing. Some in many! [*He unconsciously glances at himself in the mirror.*] All you’ve got to do is discover in what! Take me, for instance. [*He adjusts his tie at the mirror.*] My interest happens to lie in electro-dynamics” (221-22). Clearly he is enjoying using himself as an example of a truly self-confident, talented person. Laura’s world, on the other hand, is almost wholly an inner

one. It is strange and alienating when her mother begins obsessing over her outer appearance; it is with a sense of loss that she encounters herself as she exists on the outside. Amanda's fretting about her appearance seems to disorient her, particularly when her mother stuffs her brassiere with "Gay Deceivers." Immediately thereafter, she leaves, and Laura is left to look at herself in the mirror, which she does almost as though she were looking at a stranger: She "moves slowly to the long mirror and stares solemnly at herself. A wind blows the white curtains inward in a slow, graceful motion and with a faint, sorrowful sighing. [. . .] Laura turns slowly before the mirror with a troubled look" (193). It appears that the balancing of spirit and flesh, the inner and outer world, is beginning, as she is introduced to herself as she exists on the outside. Tom, for his part, is emerging from his otherworld more rapidly, and he can sense that he is ahead of her on this point. In scene 5, he tells Amanda that Laura lives "in a world of her own—a world of—little glass ornaments, Mother. . . . [. . .] She plays old phonograph records and—that's about all—" (188). His growing awareness of the outer world is indicated by the very next sentence: "He glances at himself in the mirror and crosses to the door."

Jim's narcissistic nature and his attention to his appearance are at their strongest in the final moments of the play. Before walking out the door and re-entering the public realm, he talks about preserving his self-image in the eyes of others. He cannot tell the guys at work that he is engaged, or they will start calling him "Romeo." Immediately after discussing his public image, he "stops at the oval mirror to put on his hat. He carefully shapes the brim and the crown to give a discreetly dashing effect," and adds, "It's been a wonderful evening, Mrs. Wingfield. I guess this is what they mean by Southern hospitality" (233). Amanda replies: "It really wasn't anything at all" (234). He seems to be unaware of her inner turmoil and the dual meaning in her statement, which further emphasizes his orientation toward externals. Williams grants us explicit

insight into the significance of mirrors in an essay he wrote in 1950, a few years after composing GM. In it he says that E. E. Cummings “established a highly defensible point when he stated, at least by implication, that ‘the everyday humdrum world, which includes me and you and millions upon millions of men and women’ is pretty largely something done with mirrors, and the mirrors are the millions of eyes that look at each other and things no more penetratingly than the physical senses allow” (*Where I Live* 43).

Jim’s ties to public textuality are reinforced by the imagery of the newspaper, particularly when he chooses to read the sports page, and remarks on the antics of “Ole Dizzy Dean.” His interest in sports links him, in a sense, to the camaraderie of men talking sports. The reference to Dizzy Dean is a particularly strong link to public textuality—Dean was one of America’s most famous (and most famously voluble) sports commentators. Originally, he pitched for the Cardinals, Williams’ hometown team, winning a record thirty games for them in 1934. After retiring, he became a popular baseball announcer and commentator on radio and television. His malapropisms and defiance of the rules of grammar made him well known throughout the region, and most fans loved it. Such a voluble character is a good match for Jim, who clearly loves to talk. His volubility, in addition to his narcissism, also establishes that though Laura has her faults, Jim is far from perfect himself.

Laura needs help if the growing distance between her and reality is to be closed. Just as she needs someone to bring her from the past into the future, she needs someone to breathe life into her soul and inspire her to speak. She needs be liberated from her silence, from her private textuality, so that she is able to join her voice to the voices of the world at large. Jim seems to be an excellent candidate, with the potential to succeed where Amanda has failed. Laura is already captivated by his voice. Just as in scene 7 she is transfixed during his comments about the

future, in scene 2 she reports being in awe of his verbal prowess, proudly showing her mother a picture of his receiving an award for verbal adeptness in high school: “Here he is with the silver cup for debating!” (157). In scene 6, Tom points out that Jim was captain of the debate club, a strong indicator of his public textuality. The imagery of textuality also ties him to public—or commercial—textuality. In the same scene, he tells Tom, “I’m going to sell you a bill of goods,” and he then volubly expounds on the value of his public speaking course (199).

Another indication of Laura’s being captivated by his public voice is her interest in his singing; in scene 2, she tells her mother of his having had “a wonderful voice,” which she heard because of their attending a class together, “singing—chorus” (157, 214). Tom later confirms that she speaks “admiringly” of his voice (191). The quality of his voice is emphasized yet again when we are told he was “president of the [. . .] glee club” (190). She particularly enjoyed his voice when he starred in Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta: She went to all three performances, and kept the playbill. In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Amanda even says, “Oh, *Jim*, that name is *music!*” (HRC 17.2). His ties to music are another indication of his potential for completing Laura: he is the wind to her breathlessness, the present to her past, the text to her blank page, and the song to her silence, the human who will eventually stand in for all the phonograph records she treasures, which her father, another representative of flesh, left behind “as a painful reminder of him.” Normally in Williams music is associated with representatives of spirit rather than flesh, through its association with art, which is primarily identified with spirit. In GM, however, it is associated with flesh, perhaps because music—and speech generally—is experienced via the passage of time, which belongs to the carnal side of the prime dichotomy. In this sense, then, Jim can bring Laura into the flux of time itself, out of the atemporality of her otherworld.

Blue Roses

Though Jim tries to bring balance to Laura's life, he is not trying to end her uniqueness. In fact, he is the champion of unique individuals, of nonconformists, helping them to feel accepted by means of his public textuality—specifically, by giving them nicknames. At the warehouse, he knows of Tom's habit of writing poems in the washroom, but rather than ridiculing him, he helps him to be accepted by calling him: "Shakespeare" (190). Tom reports that Jim's humoring him eventually "affected the others," and "their hostility wore off." Jim helps Laura to feel accepted in high school in much the same way, befriending her, and giving her the nickname "Blue Roses" (213). (The nickname began when she told him she had "pleuroses," and he pretended to misunderstand her, though logically, he probably knew she was not abruptly telling him she literally had blue roses.) In fact, his love of her uniqueness becomes a sort of paean during his conversation with her in the last scene, leading up to their kiss. Again and again he insists that her differences are precisely what gives her value; that she is not a freak, but truly worthy of admiration because of how special she is: "The different people are not like other people, but being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Because other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here. They're common as—weeds, but—you—well, you're—*Blue Roses!*" (227).

Freckles

Given Jim's behavior toward her, it is not surprising that she treasures the yearbook in which he is featured. In fact, she seems to go further, identifying him with "Freckles," the protagonist of another favorite book of hers, *Freckles*, by Gene Stratton Porter. This is indicated by her calling him "Freckles" after he breaks her unicorn in the last scene (226). At this point,

she is treating him as if he really were Freckles, as though he had just emerged from a fairy tale, which in her mind is precisely the case. Laura would have had a great deal of incentive to identify him, her crush, with Freckles, for she and Freckles have a lot in common. Both are handicapped: he has only one arm, while she has a limp. They feel like outsiders because of their defects, and as a result, they both become loners, admitting few to their company. Freckles chooses small wild animals as his companions, though he does have a few human friends toward the end of the narrative, and Laura chooses her menagerie as her companions (and a menagerie is, by definition, an assemblage of wild animals), though she also has her family. One family member she never spends time with is her father, who has, of course, abandoned them. She is, in this sense, somewhat of an orphan, and Freckles believes he is literally an orphan. Overall, both are sensitive young characters who remain youths into their adulthood, both rejected by the outer world, both acquainted with private suffering, both with rich inner worlds.

The similarities between Freckles and Laura explain the affinity she feels for him, but the only thing which makes plausible her identification of him with Jim is the similarities between the two men. Both are Irish, both are great singers, both have freckles, and most importantly, both are particularly sensitive toward the “small and tender things” in life: Just as Freckles is a young man who helps the small creatures he encounters, Jim is a young man who helps Tom and Laura, the vulnerable creatures he encounters, who would normally be exposed to the ridicule of the larger world. Williams may have even used Freckles as the source for some of his imagery elsewhere. From early on in his career, Williams had a tendency to concentrate on maimed and rejected characters, a symbolic motif which runs throughout his work. They become a metaphor for the “sensitive, non-conformist individual” he depicts, the fragile soul with an artistic temperament who is scarred by the depredations of the modern world (*Selected Letters* 1: 220).

Williams even has a short story entitled “One Arm” which he began the same year as “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” the narrative which explicitly mentions the novel *Freckles*, and which parallels GM in almost every way (*Selected Letters* 1: 326, 368).

Freckles and Frederic

The novel *Freckles*, then, is one of two narratives which serve to characterize Jim further, at least from Laura’s perspective, in addition to *The Pirates of Penzance*. There are actually several similarities between the two narratives. Both *Freckles* and *The Pirates of Penzance* feature a protagonist who is the odd one out—in the latter, Frederic must nobly endure a life among pirates, though he despises piracy. Both Freckles and Frederic are sent as children into the hard, cruel world, without their families; both are effectively orphan wanderers (flux), looking for a home—Mabel, Frederic’s love interest, even sings a song to him entitled, “Poor Wandering One”—and finally, both Freckles and Frederic ultimately find a home among women (stasis), which would have provided fuel for Laura’s hopes and dreams.

General Discussion

There is a tremendous amount of figurative potential where Jim is concerned. There is promise that he will bring flux to her stasis, flesh to her extreme spirituality, the breath of life to her suffocating soul, the present to her past, and words and music to her silence. In his role as Frederic, and particularly in his being identified with Freckles, he is the embodiment of the companion she has been dreaming of. This is surely why their meeting is the “climax of her secret life,” as Williams says (210).

There are other parallels, tragically. Betty, the woman Jim actually balances, is associated with spirit, just as Laura is: Jim describes her as being Catholic, which links her to the religious imagery we will examine in relation to Laura (229). She is also associated with stasis:

Jim tells Laura that she is a “home-girl like you.” However, he has already begun to bring her balance, for she is in flux as they speak, on a train, returning from visiting yet another representative of stasis—her aunt, who is sick and confined.

This older woman may represent Laura’s destiny. There is no man mentioned in association with her, so there is the assumption that she is unattended, as Laura will evidently be. Moreover, she lives in Centralia, an image parallel to the imagery in the name of Tom’s employer, the Continental Shoemakers, so she is far from the ocean, far from flux. However, she does have Betty, a representative of spirit who has been balanced by flux: Betty receives a “wire” and simply boards a train to see her. Jim has brought flux to Betty’s life, and she has brought stasis to his; as he tells the Wingfields, “I’ve—got strings on me.”

The location where they first meet indicates the balance of stasis and flux, parallel to the Delta. Jim tells Laura that he and Betty met each other “last summer on a moonlight boat trip up the river to Alton, on the Majestic. Well—right away from the start it was—love!” (229-30). As we have discussed, the boat is headed away from the ocean, but it is on the river nonetheless, so that carnality is figuratively still present. Moreover, their meeting occurs in the summer—and heat is another symbol of flesh.

All in all, the Wingfields’ dreams are shattered: The marriage of past and present, spirit and flesh, etc., has been effected with someone else. However, the knowledge that Jim ultimately shatters Laura often prevents those familiar with the play from seeing it as it exists prior to his confession. When he kisses her, it is unlikely that first-time audience members consider this as being tragic. Over and above his ability to care for her materially, there seems to be an intuitive recognition of his potential to redeem her, just as she has the potential to bring balance to him. Yet seeing the play teleologically casts him as a villain from the beginning,

obscuring all that Williams worked so hard to establish, that their coming together, their kiss, is the consummation of all his symbolism has foretold.

6. THE LIGHT AND DARK SIDES OF THE MOON

Introduction

We have already discussed the prime dichotomy, which is primarily comprised of the conflict between flesh and spirit. In Williams' symbolism, however, there is often a secondary dichotomy—that of life and death—with the imagery of night and “garish day” signifying the poles of the dichotomy, respectively (HRC 16.6). However, the ultimate signifier is the moon, with the bright side representing life, and the dark side representing various species of death.

Williams establishes this in an interview with Edward R. Murrow, in which he says of artists like himself,

We show both the light and the shadow, and the shadow is the violence which we lie threatened by. I mean we're threatened with world extinction through violence. In our lives violence, not physical violence but emotional violence, is so much a part of us. I have seen so much depicted of people's longing to meet each other tenderly with love, and violence is represented because it's the obstacle, it's the other side of the coin, it's the dark side of the moon, however you want to put it, but the dark side of the moon is in the sky and we want to show both sides of the moon you know. (*Conversations* 77)

When characters in Williams look at the (bright side of the) moon, their hearts are filled with a deep longing because they wish to reach paradise, though it usually eludes their grasp. They often come close to reaching it, or they briefly step into it, as when Laura is kissed by Jim, but the dark side of the moon then destroys them. Williams writes that tragedies “offer us a view of certain moral values in violent juxtaposition” (*Where I Live* 53). Normally these moral values are the poles of the prime dichotomy, but at times they are the poles of the secondary dichotomy, as death is violently juxtaposed with life in the lives of the protagonists. Death does not simply succeed life, though this does often occur in the end. It is that the two are powerfully present simultaneously, as in the short span of time after death has shown itself to be inexorable, but before hope has had a chance to die. At this moment, the moon is often revealed overhead, as

the tantalizing promise of paradise becomes juxtaposed with the shadow of the Grim Reaper. This is the point of catharsis.

The moon as a symbol of paradise—the bright side of the moon—can be found in GM. Rising above the Wingfields' seedy tenement in scene 5 of GM, it evokes a perfection, a tranquil remove which casts their apartment as tawdry while simultaneously striking their hearts with a deep longing. Amanda is inspired to wish upon it. She wishes that her children could reach its transcendence, so high above the world's depredations, and Tom almost certainly wishes the same thing for himself. The dark side of the moon appears as well. For instance, in the first scene, Amanda recalls a former beau who crossed swords with "that wild Wainwright boy" on the "floor of Moon Lake Casino," where he was mortally wounded (1: 149), and it appears again in the last scene, in the context of Laura's being shattered, when it beams full in Tom's face immediately after he leaves the family (236). Both sides are in evidence in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, when Brick "sings to the moon on the gallery" while the rest of the family informs Big Mama of her husband's imminent demise (*Theatre* 3: 132). In the Broadway edition, he looks skyward in this scene and says, "Hello, moon, I envy you, you cool son of a bitch" (3: 177). Earlier, his father mentions the dark side of the moon explicitly. Big Daddy, who believes he has escaped death, tells his son of the narrow miss: "I have just now returned from the other side of the moon, death's country" (3: 120). He believes he is again in contact with that very transcendence we have seen associated with the sky: "*The sky is open! Christ, it's open again! It's open, boy, it's open!*" (3: 92). However, he is actually dying. All characters are denied transcendence in the end.

The two sides in juxtaposition can also be found in a description of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in its earliest incarnation, "Blanche's Chair in the Moon," which Williams wrote in

Chicago, as GM was being produced for the first time (*Memoirs* 86). He wrote only one scene for it, one in which “Blanche was in some steaming hot Southern town, sitting alone in a chair with the moonlight coming through a window on her, waiting for a beau who didn’t show up.” This is perhaps the heart of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: Blanche, on the verge of securing her tenuous hold on existence, waiting for Mitch, almost physically reaching transcendence, with the moon rising beautifully above—and then, her slowly crumbling as she realizes he will not be coming, while the moon continues rising tantalizingly overhead—the light and the dark sides of the moon.

In scene 4 of GM, Malvolio is a moon figure who has specifically religious overtones, with his turning water to wine and his introducing images of resurrection, all miracles related to Jesus. Like the moon, Malvolio tantalizes Tom with images of escape, but ultimately leaves him to his plight, perhaps the reason for his name—Malvolio, ill-will. There is otherworldly captivation, but only death in the end. With this particular imagery, the message seems to be that God promises much, but in the end he leaves characters to their fate, for his sport. Later, when Tom’s evening is over, a “deep-voiced bell in a church is tolling the hour.” (166). After “each solemn boom [Tom] shakes a little noisemaker or rattle as if to express the tiny spasm of man in contrast to the sustained power and dignity of the Almighty” (166). A few moments later, when Tom drops his key and it falls through the only crack around, we seem again to be witnessing characters suffering for God’s sport, as though God had a cruel streak. This is somewhat typical of Williams, who appears to have been comfortable with contradictions regarding his relationship with God, evident from his *Memoirs*.

Life and death, tenderness and violence, are both evoked by Williams’ lunar imagery, and this is certainly true of its occurrence in GM. In the first scene, Amanda’s voice becomes “rich

and elegiac” as she describes the romantic beaux of her young adulthood, and significantly, most of these reminiscences end in death, accompanied by lunar imagery—or merely white imagery, as a form of symbolic shorthand (149). First, she describes “Hadley Stevenson who was drowned in Moon Lake.” She goes on to describe Bates Cutrere, one of her “bright particular beaux” (bright side of the moon), who had a fight with “that wild Wainwright boy” (dark side of the moon). “They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino.” Moon Lake Casino functions just as the moon does, evoking both the promise of a transcendent, otherworldly escape, in the joyous times patrons have there, as well as the death which claims those who believe themselves to have made this escape. Amanda reports Bates died in the ambulance on the way to Memphis, with the whiteness of the ambulance a shorthand figure for the moon. In his *Memoirs*, Williams even describes an ambulance as a “spectral white vehicle” (181). Amanda concludes this pattern by introducing still more spectral white—she assures Tom that there are a few of her former suitors who have not “turned up their toes to the daisies” (149).

Presiding over this scene is yet another white image evoking both transcendence and death, the screen legend—“Où sont les neiges d’antan?” which could be translated, “Where are the snows of yesteryear?”—appears before her speech. Williams took the line from a fifteenth-century poem describing beautiful women of the past: François Villon’s “Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis,” “Ballad of the Ladies of Times Past.” The poem was apparently an important one for Williams, for he modeled one of his own after it to some extent: “Song” (*Collected Poems* 206). Surprisingly, one of the women of Villon’s poem is “Queen Blanche, like a lily, who sang with the voice of a siren” (obviously reminiscent of the protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire*). Parallel to Williams’ lunar symbolism, the snow in Villon’s poem is evocative of tenderness and beauty, because of the elegance of the women it represents; but it is also

evocative of death, for the entire poem is an elegy to these women who have disappeared like melting snow.

In GM, Paradise Dance Hall functions just as the moon and Moon Lake Casino do, simultaneously evoking both transcendence and destruction. It is a paradise of sorts, yet its inhabitants are doomed like Bates Cutrere, as Tom makes clear in his speech in scene 5—the patrons’ destruction is “imminent, [. . .] waiting around the corner for all these kids” (179). In drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Paradise Dance Hall is a place where dances are held, but also where there is death: Fights break out between frustrated young men with “knives. The moon is flashing on little silver knives” (HRC 17.2). In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Moon Lake Casino operates identically: Blanche, Allan and his lover go there to escape the horror of the revelation Blanche has made, and all seems well until she finally breaks down and confronts Allan. A few moments later, he commits suicide.

Laura, representative of spirit, is the bright side of the moon in GM. This is made explicit in the drafts of “The Front Porch Girl,” where Miriam finally appears before the gentleman caller, who remarks that she has come out like the moon and is as “radiant” (HRC 16.8). Often Williams uses the color white as a shorthand symbol for the bright side of the moon in particular, rather than in its broader, general sense, as in the essay “The Author Tells Why It Is Called ‘The Glass Menagerie.’” There, he describes his sister’s room, one of the only places where he felt he belonged, and contrasts this with the alleyway beneath her window, a place where dogs cornered cats and brutally destroyed them: “The areaway where the cats were torn to pieces was one thing—my sister’s white curtains and tiny menagerie of glass were another. Somewhere between them was the world that we lived in” (68). Another instance of whiteness signifying the bright side of the moon—the positive pole of the life/death dichotomy—can be

found in scene 2 of GM, which opens with Laura “seated in the delicate ivory chair at the small clawfoot table” before Amanda pounces on her a few moments later (151). The delicate ivory chair suggests Laura, and the claws, the imminent ferocity of Amanda, so that again the bright side of the moon is immediately followed by the dark. In the drafts, whiteness is again representative of the bright side of the moon, specifically spirit, in reference to the unicorn itself. Laura describes “him” as being “white but not white, he’s blue that’s just— / Spilled over white like a—picture of snow that you see in the late afternoon” (HRC 17.3). This is reminiscent of the Laura figure of Williams’ short story “Oriflamme,” in which flesh rises up within her, a representative of spirit. Her skin is described as being “white but not white. It was blue spilled delicately over white. And there were glints of silver and rose”—the rose apparently indicative of the rising strains of carnality (*Collected Stories* 129).

With Williams’ lunar symbolism, characters are typically denied their paradise when it is just within reach, as with Amanda and Laura relative to Jim, and Blanche relative to Mitch. This is reflected on a symbolic level in a draft of GM, “The Front Porch Girl” (HRC 16.8), where the Amanda figure locks Rosemary (the Laura figure) out of the house so that she is forced to meet Mr. Walland (the Jim figure) on the porch:

[Like a delicate, fluttering white moon-moth, Rosemary knocks lightly and desperately at the door.]

ROSEMARY. Mother!—Mother!—Mother!

[But the heavy old fashioned door with its rich medieval oval of colored glass is curiously implacable to her white entreaty.]

Again, Laura is the bright side of the moon—gentleness and kindness—a “delicate, fluttering white moon-moth,” being exposed to what she believes is the dark side of the moon, with paradise just out of reach, represented here by the Laurine type, the “medieval oval of colored glass.”

From the passages above, it can be seen that the positive side of the secondary dichotomy—the bright side of the moon—is often spirit alone, though at other times, it is the reconciliation between spirit and flesh. To an extent, this collapses the two dichotomies into one. In GM, though there is a reconciliation between flesh and spirit toward the end, as Jim and Laura became closer and ultimately kiss, emphasis is placed not on the destruction of this relationship (as is the case in *Battle of Angels*) but of Laura, representative of spirit. She is claimed by the dark side of the moon as the forces of modernity abandon her—the electricity goes out—and she is plunged into both literal and figurative darkness. When Tom finally leaves her, he is confronted by the moon immediately after he walks out the door, an image of transcendence which remains hauntingly out of reach. He and Amanda had wished upon it the night before, as it rose above their sordid St. Louis tenement apartment, but the transcendence proves inaccessible.

Regarding the secondary dichotomy, then, the bright side is often spirit and, conversely, the dark side is often flesh, rather than simply death in the abstract. This can be seen on a major scale in GM—Jim is a representative of flesh, after all—but it can also be seen on a lesser scale, particularly in Amanda’s Blue Mountain speech in scene 1. There, men characterized by a balance of flesh and spirit are claimed by death, but note the force which brings a species of death to the balanced Amanda: Mr. Wingfield, a representative of extreme flux/flesh, a man paralleled by another death figure—Duncan Fitzhugh, also a representative of extreme flux/flesh. (Ironically, Amanda seems particularly attracted to representatives of extreme flux.) After she intones her catalog of fallen suitors, she mentions Fitzhugh, associated with a host of figures allied with flux. First of all, he travels North. Traveling is flux, and the North is precisely the pole of the dichotomy typically associated with flesh, contrary to the South, typically associated

with spirit. He then becomes “Wolf of Wall Street” (149). Business, wolves—all these are either representatives of carnality or commerce, typically the opposite extremes of art and spirit relative to the prime dichotomy. Appropriately, he is also associated with a death figure, Midas, who ultimately turned his own daughter to gold, after making himself rich. There may be a parallel here for representatives of flesh in GM generally, who abandon representatives of spirit to the past, turning them to gold—a symbol for past-oriented otherworlds—while continuing on in the present.

PART 2. DIACHRONY

In the preceding section, I examine the symbols of GM as they exist in isolation, and to a great extent they lend themselves to such treatment. However, often Williams' symbols are better understood diachronically, as they develop over time. The symbol of "falling fire" is one such symbol, and for this reason, I discuss it below. The symbolism of the last act is also better understood diachronically because it is particularly complex. Many symbols we have examined are transformed there, and others are joined to each other to form symbolic composites. I have already discussed composites to some extent—for example, the "oyster" symbol at the end of my discussion of the symbolism of Tom. However, there are many more in the last act, composites which are difficult to discern prior to this point in my exposition, after the reader is familiarized with the symbols as they exist in isolation. There are two acts in GM. The first act consists of scenes 1 through 5, while the last act consists of scenes 6 and 7, and contains the narrative of the Wingfields' evening with Jim.

7. THE SYMBOLISM OF FALLING FIRE

The Changing Seasons

Climate and weather are major symbols within GM. Seasons are particularly significant: The appearance of Jim, a potential suitor, occurs in spring, so that his coming coincides with the rebirth of nature. However, the play opens in winter (as deduced from references to her brief stint in the business college), and gradually warms to his coming. The entire play is, in fact, a buildup, meteorologically speaking, to his advent. The winter weather at the beginning of the play signifies that in terms of romance, the environment is frigid, to say the least. There is no man on the horizon for Laura, which is made painfully clear in scene 1, when Amanda practically shouts about the fact that Laura is expecting no gentlemen callers. Moreover, in scene 2, she specifies that the only courting being done is Laura's "[d]eliberately courting pneumonia" (154).

Emphasis is placed on the winter weather, particularly during scene 2. Amanda enters in winter clothing and speaks at length of Laura's ill-advised decision to walk about in the cold. A "[w]inter scene in a park" is even projected on the screen (155). At the end of scene 2, however, Amanda determines to secure a husband for Laura, and begins preparing for gentleman callers, preparations which she makes "[l]ate that winter and in the early spring" (159). Appropriately, Williams turns the season to spring as Amanda's fancy turns to thoughts of love—and/or security—for her daughter. When Tom finally announces the arrival of a gentleman caller, he does so in "early dusk of a spring evening" (178). The vernal mood is reinforced in the drafts, when Tom describes their purchasing a new dress for Laura as appropriate because it "is the mating season" (HRC 16.9, description of "The Gentleman Caller"). The significance of the season is confirmed through the introduction of floral imagery. There are jonquils, both in

Amanda's reminiscences and in the bowl she places on the table. This imagery is reinforced by the bright colors with which she upholsters the furniture: She insists that they will "put the chintz covers on, they'll brighten things up!" (183). Chintz fabrics typically feature bright floral patterns in variegated colors. (This polychromy also helps to establish the apartment as a Laurine type in the last act, as does the bowl in which she places the flowers.) Flowers are also present in the drafts. In HRC 17.8, Amanda wears a "summery girlish frock," which also feature floral designs—they are "sprinkled with flowers." In drafts of "The Gentleman Caller," she even assigns floral imagery to Laura, describing her as being "like a young—green—tree—that's just about to flower" (HRC 17.2). The flowers reinforce the Dionysian, festive mood of procreation.

The spring setting of the final act is typical of Williams; romantic exchanges take place in spring in virtually all the drafts of GM as well as in other Williams plays of the period, including *Spring Storm* and his short story "The Accent of a Coming Foot." He often goes so far as to introduce a spring rain for the climax, a primitive marriage of heaven and earth in the mingling of water and soil, lending (in GM) a distinctly mythic cast to Jim and Laura's meeting, an atmosphere of natural forces at work. The weather in *You Touched Me!* operates similarly. The production notes of the play establish that it takes place in spring, and references to the growing heat of passion, a correlate of the season of spring, can be found throughout the play. For instance, at one point, Matilda walks into Hadrian's room when she thinks she is checking on her father. Touching his forehead, she says, "Your forehead is hot. Have you a fever?" He replies, "No, Matilda." In a panic, she runs from the room, and

raises the hand with which she has touched the youth's forehead. She looks down at it and rubs it with a pained expression as if the hand has touched something that scorched it. Hadrian, in the cabin, sits up in the bunk. He turns on the lamp and

then gently—gently—he touches with his fingers his forehead where Matilda placed her inadvertent caress. (55)

The next day, Hadrian asks her, “Can’t you feel the life that’s in my fingers? I felt the warmth and tenderness in yours—when they touched my forehead last night” (74). Normally, Hadrian complains of her coldness. For instance, as the play draws to a close, he angrily asks her if she has not caught cold, and continues to characterize her as being cold throughout their conversation. She finally replies, “I’m a cold one, am I?”

HADRIAN. Haven’t you thought that you might give that impression?

MATILDA. Impressions can be mistaken. I’m more of an earthly creature than—anyone knows. (105)

It is probably obvious where heat and cold stand in relation to the prime dichotomy of Williams, with its poles of flesh and spirit. The heat imagery here indicates that there is flesh in addition to spirit in Matilda, which is typical of Williams’ protagonists, who are normally divided.

The vernal theme in *You Touched Me!* is ultimately a positive one, but it also brings distress, as with the references to Matilda’s hand being “scorched.” This imagery of vernal trauma is found elsewhere in Williams, as in his poem “Singer of Darkness,” written early in his career, in 1936, under the collective title “Sonnets for the Spring.” The poem features the imagery of “turbulent waves” and the “cataclysm of the uncurled leaf” (*Collected Poems* 180).

“The soundless thunder of the bursting green / Stuns every field.” The poem concludes:

Raise no defense, dare to erect no wall,
But let the living fire, the bright storm fall
With lyric paeans of victory once more
Against your own blindly surrendered shore! (181)

Spring Storm

Williams casts the forces of spring—pervaded by flux—as being even more negative in a play he began the following year: *Spring Storm*. In a 1937 letter, he wrote that he saw the play

as “simply a study of Sex—a blind animal urge or force (like the regenerative force of April) gripping four lives and leading them into a tangle of cruel and ugly relations” (*Selected Letters* 1: 96). Heavenly, the heroine, questions her father about this more turbulent side of passion: “Why can’t people be happy together? Why can’t they want the same things, instead of—fighting and torturing and—hating each other—even when they’re in love?!!” (*Tennessee* 1: 51). He replies: “I guess those things are sort of natural phenomena. Like these spring storms we’ve been having. They do lots of damage. Bust the levees, wash out the bridges, destroy property and even kill people. What for? I don’t know. [. . .] I s’pose they’re just the natural necessary parts of the changing season.”

In the third act, Arthur, the Tom character, further elaborates on the symbolism of spring storms, in his romantic exchange with Heavenly, in the presence of a statue of Eros. Significantly, a spring storm is brewing during their conversation. First he confesses his attraction to her, but she merely makes a comment about the weather: “Lightning. It’s going to storm.” He responds, “Yes. I guess that’s why the Little God’s so excited. —He likes spring storms.”

HEAVENLY. Does he?

ARTHUR. Yes. They’ve so much in common, you know. They’re both so damn cruel—reckless and destructive!

HEAVENLY. Like me. Is that what you mean?

ARTHUR. Yes. I believe the Greeks were laughing when they made him the Little God. Eros is really the biggest god of them all. He’s the one that’s got thunderbolts! (60)

Hertha, roughly the Laura figure of the latter play, actually commits suicide because of this vernal passion, after she is kissed (as Laura is) and then abandoned.

This same species of spring storm can be found in the meeting between Jim and Laura in the last act of GM, in “late spring” (191). On a literal level, there is a brief storm during this first encounter, just as she is enduring an emotional storm in her heart (205-06). Jim, the representative of flesh, brings heat to Laura’s frigidity just as Hadrian does in *You Touched Me!* His very first remarks to her concern her cold hands and the “hot swing music” he recommends as a cure. Predictably, he has extremely warm hands, at least in other versions of the narrative. In “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” Tom says that when Jim placed them “on your arms or shoulders,” they “burned through the cloth of your shirt like plates taken out of an oven” (*Collected Stories* 114). This vernal passion will prove to be almost as destructive to Laura as it is for Hertha.

Falling Fire

Williams’ plays, then, often feature a particularly negative form of vernal symbolism. Moreover, this kind of spring, with its heat, is often augmented so that it becomes a far direr threat than the season would seem to warrant, darkly blossoming into a vast conflagration of almost apocalyptic levels, engulfing the protagonists and threatening to overrun the entire world. In GM, spring-storm imagery signifies something more than the destructive power of desire. In order to raise the emotional power of the drama to the point of tragic purgation, Williams harnesses the imagery of storm and thunderbolts and allies it to the imagery of continental conflagrations and bombardments, magnifying the emotional delivery many fold. This imagery is then linked to Laura’s fate at the end of the play, to signify the horrifying impact of the modern world on “small and tender things.” It is the “dark side of the moon” (discussed above), the force that inevitably annihilates everything good.

This intensified spring-storm imagery has two distinct components: images of heat and storm, especially of lightning and rain. Lightning, in fact, is an increasingly central motif as the play progresses, typically contrasted with the candlelight the Wingfields' world is lit by. Lightning and rain eventually become joined with references to falling bombs, the aerial bombardments of world conflict, until WWII itself is explicitly evoked. The terror of this imagery would have been very real to an audience living in 1944, the year *GM* was first produced, during some of the darkest days of the war. The first performance was on December 26 of that year during the Battle of the Bulge. The previous month, Williams, noting the impact this horror had on him, had written that “[w]ith such savagery unleashed in the world I don’t see how there can be peace again for hundreds of years” (*Selected Letters* 1: 537).

I call this elaboration of the spring-storm signifier, consisting of heat and terror raining down from the sky, the “falling fire” motif, appealing to a tradition practiced in Yosemite National Park for decades. There, after nightfall, groups would assemble at the base of Yosemite Falls, and a man standing before them would cry, “Let the fire fall!” Men at the top of the peak would then push a bonfire over the falls, creating what looked like a cataract of fire. Imagery of falling fire appears also in the 1936 poem discussed above, “Singer of Darkness”: After mentioning the “cataclysm of the uncurled leaf, / The soundless thunder of the bursting green,” Williams writes, “let the living fire, the bright storm fall.”

Williams actually evinced a great deal of resistance to using the war in his plays. In a preface he wrote to *Stairs to the Roof* earlier in the war years, he says, “Wars come and wars go and this one will be no exception. But Benjamin Murphy and Benjamin Murphy’s problems are universal and everlasting” (*Stairs* xvi). This is a classic case of Williams’ determination to include eternal truths in his plays, rather than more ephemeral concerns. Yet he does utilize the

war in GM as a metaphor—to stress the tragic impact of life in general on tenderness and on the romantic sensibility.

Falling-Fire Imagery in GM

In GM, the blaze of falling fire is kindled even before the play begins. The stage directions preceding the dialogue specify that the fire escape attached to the Wingfield apartment is a “touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation” (143). A few lines later, Tom observes that in the period in which the play is set, the “huge middle class of America” had gone blind and were “having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy” (145). Intimations of global war are also introduced, in his description of the mood in America at the time: “In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis...”

The mention of Guernica is, of course, a reminder of bombardment. A city in Spain of no military importance, it was bombed by the Nazis with the objective of complete and total *civilian* annihilation, the first atrocity of its kind. It is Williams augmenting his imagery of storm, lightning, and falling rain to the impact wrought by the *Luftwaffe*, which is in turn a reflection of the destructive impact of the modern world on romance and the “small and tender things” of life, signified also by the destruction of Laura and her symbols, the candlestick and the unicorn. The audience may well have included portions of its own heart among the casualties Tom mentions, with Pearl Harbor looming ever in the background.

Guernica represents the destruction not only of those “small and tender things” in life, but also of something deeper still. Williams believed that we all suffer from a “true sense of dread,”

one which does not spring from thoughts of death or any of those things which are “parts of the visible, sensible phenomena of every man’s experience or knowledge” (*Where I Live* 44). This “Absolute Dread” (46) is a “kind of spiritual intuition of something almost too incredible and shocking to talk about, which underlies the whole so-called thing” (44). Moreover, it is the “desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art,” including the “*Guernica* of Picasso” (46). The references to the Spanish Civil War and Guernica help to date the action of GM. We know that it opens in the winter and spring of 1939 because of the “enormous headline” of the newspaper Tom reads in scene 5: “Franco Triumphs” (178). Franco conquered Madrid—and all of Spain—in the spring of 1939. Admittedly, Guernica was bombed in 1937, two years prior, but it is mentioned in such general terms in the opening speech that it could easily have taken place earlier.

For the most part, the imagery of falling fire builds gradually in GM, parallel to the seasons’ progression from winter to spring. In his opening speech, Tom establishes that war looms in the background, yet the mood is fairly tranquil. He makes it clear that though there was revolution in Spain, “[h]ere there was only shouting and confusion” (145). A fire has been kindled, but it is not yet an inferno. This is reinforced in the first scene of the play. There is clearly some stress in the lives of Laura and Tom, but it is not all bad, even becoming somewhat comic at times. At the end of the scene, however, falling fire imagery begins to emerge. There is the first instance of the imagery of storm: When Amanda, in her distraction, is told that Laura is expecting no gentleman callers, she cries out, “Not one gentleman caller? It can’t be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!” (150).

A storm does descend a few lines later, as the next scene opens. Amanda discovers that Laura has dropped out of business college, and she rips Laura’s typing chart in two as she

agonizes over the desperation of their circumstances. Scene 3 is even more tempestuous, pervaded by the imagery of storm, fire and war, clearly foreshadowing the end. As it opens, Amanda is selling magazine subscriptions over the telephone, telling an acquaintance that the narrative she is selling is as good as *Gone with the Wind*. The imagery of fire, war and storm is everywhere. *Gone with the Wind* is itself evocative of war, especially of the burning of Atlanta, and Amanda reminds her contact that it “took everybody by storm” (160). She goes on to claim that the story she is selling is “the *Gone with the Wind* of the post-World-War generation!—What?—Burning?—Oh, honey, don’t let them burn, go take a look in the oven and I’ll hold the wire! Heavens—I think she’s hung up!” (160). This is certainly comic, but the imagery of burning and fire inserted here is indicative of the Wingfields’ steadily worsening plight. Fire imagery recurs as the scene progresses, and we witness Amanda and Tom’s combusting relationship. Appropriately, the set reflects this: The “dining-room area is lit with a turgid smoky red glow” (162). Williams adds, “[G]esticulating shadows are cast on the ceiling by the fiery glow” (162). In this scene, there are other portents of the tumult of storm and war: “A chair lies overthrown on the floor.” Tom “tears the portieres open” and we are shown a “wild disarray of manuscripts.” This imagery serves to characterize Tom as a representative of flesh, but it also reinforces the falling fire imagery which is becoming more and more salient, made even clearer by Williams’ suggesting that the quarrel was “precipitated” by Tom’s labor.

In the opening speech of this scene, Tom insists that even when he “wasn't mentioned, [the gentleman caller’s] presence hung in Mother's preoccupied look and in my sister's frightened, apologetic manner—hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields!” (159). The image of the gentleman caller is cast to evoke otherworlds, while also paralleling the symbolism of the falling fire. The image of this fatal figure’s presence hanging over the family

is parallel to the pendulous doom looming over the world, which Tom observes early in scene 5, “[s]uspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden” (179). Ominous clouds are gathering above the Wingfields and the entire world. As the scene concludes, Tom, full of rage, heaves his coat across the room as he is leaving, shattering a glass figurine of Laura’s. She “cries out as if wounded” (164). In the next scene, scene 4, she again “cries out” as she attempts to leave the apartment, while descending the fire escape (169). Her mother immediately speaks of the possibility of her breaking a leg there. Both of these outcries from Laura—in addition to her limp—are indicative of the figurative shattering she will endure at the play’s close. Relative to the imagery of falling fire, Laura’s misstep is on the fire escape, which Williams himself has identified as a “touch of accidental poetic truth.” Just as she stumbles while attempting to leave, she will ultimately be unable to escape the figurative conflagration of her life in St. Louis.

Scene 5

Throughout GM, the imagery of storm, fire and war has intensified as the literal and figurative temperature has risen. In scene 5, it becomes particularly strong as the tragic end of GM draws near. After Tom produces the newspaper with the “enormous headline” reading “Franco Triumphs” (mentioned earlier), he steps outside and tells the audience,

Across the alley from us was the Paradise Dance Hall. On evenings in spring the windows and doors were open and the music came outdoors. Sometimes the lights were turned out except for a large glass sphere that hung from the ceiling. It would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbow colors. Then the orchestra played a waltz or a tango, something that had a slow and sensuous rhythm. Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash pits and telephone poles. This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure. Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain’s umbrella. In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows.... All the world was waiting for bombardments! (179)

The image which is most characteristically Laura's—a pendent, delicate glass sphere touched by light—takes a dark turn in Tom's speech, with the chandelier of the dance hall. First, it is merely associated with the vernal heat we have discussed, due both to the season—seen during “evenings in spring”—and to its appearance in a context of “sensuous rhythm.” Toward the end of the speech, the heat rises: The sphere revolves to the tune of “hot swing music” and is linked to the “sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier.” However, it takes on a sinister tone—more in line with falling-fire imagery—as Tom continues, mentioning how it “flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows.” Flooding is a darker instance of storm imagery, and the chandelier is deceptive because it lulls the inhabitants of its otherworld to sleep while an even more sinister presence gathers overhead, an image which echoes and amplifies the chandelier's ominous pendency: There is something “[s]uspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella.” At the beginning of the play, Tom told us of the storm's breaking over Guernica; here it is on the verge of breaking over the entire world. The drops of rain become explosions as Tom fairly shouts, “All the world was waiting for bombardments!” In scene 3, we had the vague threat of pendulous doom: The image of the gentleman caller “hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields!” Here that pendent imagery becomes something more universally ominous. Those hiding inside the deceptive otherworlds of “hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex” will find their otherworlds frangible, and their fate identical to the setting in which they kiss—the coming global conflagration will reduce their worlds to “ash pits.”

Naturally, this speech suggests the fate of both the world in general and of the Wingfields in particular. While “[a]ll the world was waiting for bombardments,” the Wingfields themselves were about to experience personal bombardments, and the conflagration of their lives is

particularly “imminent.” In the scenes to come, they will be sealed in the darkness and “gloom” to which Tom alludes, which will fall on them as surely as it is falling on the entire planet. Tom actually takes up his speech in this scene in response to a song played at the Paradise Dance Hall, entitled, “The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise!”—an ironic aubade, given that, figuratively speaking, it is an inferno the characters are seeing on the horizon, not the dawn. The lyrics themselves (written in 1919 by Eugene Lockhart) bring even greater poignancy to the irony:

Down in the lazy west rides the moon,
Warm as a night in June;
Stars shimm’ring soft in a bed of blue,
While I am calling and calling you.
Sweetly you are dreaming,
As the dawn comes slowly streaming;
Waken love in your bower,
Greet our trysting hour.

Dear one, the world is waiting for the sunrise;
Ev’ry rose is heavy with dew.
The thrush on high, his sleepy mate is calling
And my heart is calling you!

For a 1919 version of the song, performed by John Steel, click on the following link:



Though these lyrics are not made explicit in GM, Williams was almost certainly familiar with them, for they fit hand-in-glove with his symbolic system. First, they contain the classic Williams symbol of otherworldly preoccupation—somnolence. The speaker is calling for his love to awaken, parallel to the sun’s awakening from the “bed of blue” and to Tom and Laura’s awakening from their otherworlds. Laura appears at the end of this scene “faintly puzzled as if called out of sleep” (189). However, they are being awakened only to be greeted by their own broad destruction. There is heat in the lyrics—the action in the song is set in sultry weather, with

the references to warmth and “June”—but as far as GM is concerned, this is not a reference to the innocent rite of spring, nor to the sun, but to the imminent global inferno Tom speaks of. The song’s lyrics are, therefore, as illusory as the “brief, deceptive rainbows” Tom mentions as the song is being played. Like the image of the moon in both this scene generally and in the first line of the lyrics in particular, the song is both enticing and illusory. The title of the song, then, “The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise!”, is almost certainly meant to be contrasted ironically with the final line of Tom’s speech, which he makes as the song is playing: “All the world was waiting for bombardments!”

Incidentally, the lyrics the band plays here are parallel to the lyrics of the song it plays the following evening, in scene 7: “La Golondrina,” which we have discussed. The lyrics of both songs speak of male birds as essentially dynamic figures—figures in flux—while the female birds are static figures, reinforcing the flux/stasis contrast we have been examining. “La Golondrina” mentions a male bird flying “[h]igh in the sky at break of dawn,” with his “little mate [. . .] waiting / beneath the leaves where all his treasures lie.” Furthermore, both songs speak of the dawn, but the dawn the characters seem to see is a false dawn, indicative of the global burning.

The imagery of heat, storm and war intensifies just as Laura’s delicacy—and the delicacy of the entire family—is becoming more apparent. Clearly Amanda is distraught over the precariousness of their situation: As Tom delivers his speech, she has anxiously turned to gaze upon the face of the husband who has abandoned them, the one who fomented their personal crisis. Then, there is hope as delicate as ever: Tom announces the coming of a gentleman caller. The mood is especially tender as Amanda calls Laura from the kitchen and urges her to wish upon the moon with “her voice trembling and her eyes suddenly filling with tears” (189). The

imagery of the moon temporarily gives the impression that the fate hovering over them may be a positive one, that there will be a reprieve, particularly as Amanda takes Tom's newspaper, the one mentioning the war, spreads it out on a step, and sits down on it as "gracefully and demurely as if she were settling into a swing on a Mississippi veranda" (180). She actually evokes much of the tenderness, the very romance Williams is memorializing in this play, the primary casualty of the falling fire. In these latter portions of the play, Williams uses her to echo all that Laura represents, particularly when she greets the gentleman caller in the very dress she wore when she met a former gentleman caller, her husband, for the first time, so that both represent the delicacy of the past placed in "violent juxtaposition" to the war descending upon them (*Where I Live* 53). This violent juxtaposition is particularly evident in the drafts with respect to Laura. In drafts of "The Gentleman Caller," Williams writes,

There is a great delicacy and gentleness in her voice, her movements. She is one of the fragile creatures of the earth, like moths and violets, whose existence among the turbulence of nature, or society, is one of those brief and inconsequential little miracles which occur at the opposite end of tornados and social cataclysms such as war or revolution. (HRC 17.3)

In the final scene of the drafts, Laura even becomes prophetic of the doom descending upon the "fragile creatures of the earth" like her, though no one seems to believe her, a Cassandra figure. In drafts of "The Front Porch Girl," Miriam weeps for her figurines, but she tells Mr. Walland that she weeps "not just for them—you understand, Mr. Walland? Not just for the little glass objects but everything else in the world that—people break to pieces because they're—*easily broken!*—Don't you see?" (HRC 16.8). In HRC 16.5, she prophesies that her unicorn and "[a]ll the lovely things are going to die. / The time has already been set for their execution."

Scene 6

In scene 6, Laura's exquisite fragility is emphasized even further as the curtain rises on her mother's making her ready for the gentleman caller. Simultaneously, the heat continues to rise during this evening in "late spring" (191). When Amanda greets the gentleman caller for the first time, this is evident, as she tells him: "Let's sit down and—I think we could stand a little more air in here! Tom, leave the door open. I felt a nice fresh breeze a moment ago. Where has it gone to? Mmm, so warm already! And not quite summer, even. We're going to burn up when summer really gets started" (203). This is, of course, adumbrative, and she and her family will be burning up sooner than she supposes. She continues:

You know our blood gets so thick during th' winter—it takes a while fo' us to *adjust* ou'selves!—when the season changes... It's come so quick this year. I wasn't prepared. All of a sudden—heavens! Already summer!—I ran to the trunk an' pulled out this light dress—terribly old! Historical almost! But feels so good—so good an' co-ol, y' know....

Amanda's turning to her old dress in response to the heat is particularly significant. She and her daughter are oriented toward the past. She becomes conscious of this, and realizing that she and her daughter are in danger of being relegated to the past if she fails to act, she attempts to use the strategies of the past—like attracting a gentleman caller—to survive in the present. These older stratagems are signified here by her retrieving her "[h]istorical" light dress as the summer draws near. However, as we know, past methods will prove to be insufficient as survival tools, and she, like all signifiers of the delicate in Williams, will be engulfed by the flames of the modern world.

The heat imagery is simply amorous earlier in the scene, as she recounts to Laura the atmosphere of her girlhood. She says of her dress: "I wore it on Sundays for my gentlemen callers! I had it on the day I met your father. . . . I had malaria fever all that Spring. The change

of climate from East Tennessee to the Delta—weakened resistance. I had a little temperature all the time—not enough to be serious—just enough to make me restless and giddy!” (193). Her trip south brought her into closer proximity to heat, a symbol of flesh, and this occurred in the spring, appropriately enough. In response, she becomes characterized by other symbols of flesh we have discussed, particularly flux, as she “kept going, going! Evenings, dances! Afternoons, long, long rides!” (193-94). However, the heat gradually became more than she could bear. While wearing the dress, she met her future husband, a man who was pure flesh, a man unwilling to reconcile flesh and spirit. This made the heat unbearable, and her life was, in a sense, consumed: Instead of living in the genteel Southern home of her youth, she now lives in a tenement, a figurative ash pit that followed close upon the heels of her immolation. In a way, she was claimed by fire, just as her daughter will be, so that her reminiscences parallel the context in which they are spoken, as the heat of the play builds. Laura’s own burning is mentioned soon afterwards. She attempts to come to the table in obedience to her mother’s commands, but she collapses, and Amanda says worriedly to Jim, “Standing over the hot stove made her ill!—I told her that was just too warm this evening” (205). We know this is not literally true—Amanda is the one who did the cooking. However, this is a figurative indication that Laura is sharing her mother’s fate.

The drafts reinforce the imagery of fever where Laura is concerned. Though she is typically adorned there in Marian blue (her head is “resting on a pale blue pillow” at this point in GM proper), her “dark blue dress” at times has “feverish little red flowers sprinkled all over” (HRC 17.7, drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass”). The imagery of fever is particularly striking in drafts of “The Gentleman Caller.” Reinforcing the imagery of falling fire, the stage directions at one point speak of her “burning forehead” (HRC 17.1), and at another, as Amanda is adjusting

Laura's dress, she cries out, "Hold *still*, Laura, my *gracious!* You wiggle around as nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof!" (HRC 17.2). This last passage is also indicative of the symbolic role heat will play in future Williams narratives. It is significant that, for the most part, the fever Laura experiences seems to be inflicted upon her from without, rather than rising up from within: It obviously occurs in response to Jim's presence. In GM proper, there are virtually no traces of flesh evident within Laura. This is particularly surprising: Most of Williams' characters possess within them a duality not reconciled. However, Laura seems to be somewhat of an exception, perhaps so that she is purer in her signification.

Laura is struck by the falling fire's heat in this scene, but also by its storm. As Jim draws near, she becomes as agitated as her mother was in Blue Mountain. When to her horror she is forced to join Jim at the dinner table, "[t]he white curtains billow inward at the windows and there is a sorrowful murmur and deep blue dusk" (205). In fact, "[o]utside a summer storm is coming abruptly." Immediately afterwards, "Laura suddenly stumbles—she catches at a chair with a faint moan." Again, there is a reference to the primal elements of the "spring storm" we have been discussing, that brings maidenhood to an end and instigates new life, but the storm is also indicative of a much greater threat: Though the setting is "late spring" (191), this is a "summer storm." Significantly, the sky moans in tandem with Laura. Although the storm is a symbol of falling fire in general, it also reflects Laura's inner state, greatly magnifying the significance of all that she represents, that she is the icon of something truly immense and universal.

Amanda comments on the storm within her daughter (and herself) when she says, "[*despairingly*] Why, Laura, you *are* ill, darling! Tom, help your sister into the living room, dear! Sit in the living room, Laura—rest on the sofa. Well!" (205). However, when Tom

returns, she says, “What *is* that? Rain? A nice cool rain has come up! [*She gives Jim a frightened look.*] I think we may—have grace—now...” (206). The “cool rain” is a reprieve—as the epigraph of *GM* implies, it is almost as delicate as Laura herself (123)—but unfortunately, it proves to be as ephemeral as she. Despite Amanda’s comment to Tom, they will receive no lasting grace from above. They have been abandoned by heaven and the forces of spirit, and the imagery of the maidenly rite of spring here is merely a precursor to the final fire.

Tom

The heat is building for the entire family. Speaking privately with Jim, Tom insists, “I’m starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside—well, I’m boiling!” (202). The heat of his circumstances is becoming unbearable for him, just as it is for Amanda and Laura. However, as a representative of flux, heat is not all bad for him. In fact, because heat is a signifier of carnality, it is not surprising that the destination about which he fantasizes is “the South Sea Island” (201). His associations with the flesh also link him to another force associated with the falling-fire motif: war. As he tells his mother, “[m]an is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter” (174). His attraction to combat and war is somewhat clearer in this comment of his to Jim:

Hollywood characters are supposed to have all the adventures for everybody in America, while everybody in America sits in a dark room and watches them have them! Yes, until there’s a war. That’s when adventure becomes available to the masses! *Everyone’s* dish, not only Gable’s! Then the people in the dark room come out of the dark room to have some adventure themselves. Goody, goody!—It’s our turn now, to go to the South Sea Island—to make a safari—to be exotic, far-off! But I’m not patient. I don’t want to wait till then. I’m tired of the *movies* and I am *about* to *move*! (201)

Tom’s link to war is also established by his otherworld, which, as we have seen, he has patterned after his father’s, just as Laura’s is after her mother’s. Mr. Wingfield has abandoned his family, as Tom plans on doing, and this seems to have brought him the very paradise Tom hopes to reach: In his picture, he is “gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say, ‘I will be smiling

forever” (144). Tom makes it clear he believes his father to be inhabiting paradise: “I’m like my father,” he declares to Jim, “[t]he bastard son of a bastard! Did you notice how he’s grinning in his picture in there? And he’s been absent going on sixteen years!” (202). Significantly, in the photo, his father is dressed in a “doughboy’s First World War cap” (144)—perhaps a hint as to how warfare came to be part of Tom’s dreams.

A subtle dual message can be detected here in the last act. We are being shown the impact of the modern world on those “small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life,” but we are also being shown the impact of flesh upon spirit. After all, Mr. Wingfield, Tom, and Jim, all representatives of flesh, are the immediate sources of much of the tragedy of the play. Moreover, all are associated with heat, so in a sense, they are the ones responsible for the falling fire. The narrative here, then, parallels the narrative of other major Williams plays, as representatives of spirit ultimately succumb to the advances of flesh. (More will be said of this below.) However, Tom-as-narrator is different from Tom-as-character. In his capacity as narrator, he evinces a sympathy for spirit much stronger than it is in the 1939 Tom we typically see. Moreover, the eagerness for war one can sense in his dialogue with Jim seems to have been tempered, which is particularly evident in his address to the audience in scene 5 when he warns of the danger which is coming, that all the world is “waiting for bombardments.”

Scene 7: Storm and the Falling of Night

Scene 7, the final scene, is particularly full of symbolic import. At the end of scene 6, moments after Amanda expresses her hope that the reprieve of the cool rain will be permanent, the family sits down to eat. A few lines later, just as the scene 7 begins, the lights go out and the family is plunged into darkness. Amanda projects the significance: “Well, we got through dinner. Very considerate of them to let us get through dinner before they plunged us into

everlasting darkness, wasn't it, Mr. O'Connor?" (209). Obviously the night is falling on them, the "dark side of the moon," but the acting edition suggests something more specific. Charles Watson, in his article "The Revision of *The Glass Menagerie*: The Passing of Good Manners," points out that in that edition, Jim rises and says, "Well, Mrs. Wingfield, let me give you a toast. Here's to the old South." Amanda rejoins, "The old South"—and immediately, the lights go out (acting edition, *Glass Menagerie* 52). Of this event, Watson says, "By a decisive addition, Williams pronounces an end to the good manners and hospitality associated with the old South" (77). Thus the "small and tender things," signified by Laura and the menagerie, are explicitly extended to include the culture of the South, though there is this sense in the reading edition also. Years later, Williams would make it clear that the South is among those "small and tender things" represented by Laura and Amanda that are claimed, in the end, by the forces of falling fire: "It is out of a regret for a South that no longer exists that I write of the forces that have destroyed it ... the South had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember—a culture that had grace, elegance ... an inbred culture ... not a society based on money, as in the North. I write out of regret for that" (qtd. in Bigsby, "Tennessee" 50-51). Amanda, he says specifically, "represents the natural elegance in the Old South. My main theme is a defense of the romantic attitude toward life, a violent protest against the things that destroy it" (qtd. in Leverich 509). See also the presence of the South in "A Monday Breakfast," in appendix 1, where the [play](#) is reproduced in its entirety.

Candles and Lightning

The South and all "small and tender things" are signified too by the candelabrum Amanda hands Jim so that he can keep "Sister" company in the "parlor" (209). She says: "I'll give you this lovely old candelabrum that used to be on the altar at the Church of the Heavenly

Rest. It was melted a little out of shape when the church burnt down. Lightning struck it one spring” (209-10). The lightning struck during a storm one *spring*, parallel to the spring storm here, and to the inner storm Amanda experienced in her youth one memorable spring. Most importantly, the image of lightning marring the candelabrum is one repeated here in the last act as Jim, a force of lightning and the electricity of the modern age, inadvertently strikes down Laura, a creature of the past, and of candlelight.

Laura and the candelabrum, her symbol, parallel each other to a surprising extent. Just as she is being exposed to the falling fire, it has been “melted a little out of shape,” and is thus slightly “freakish” in appearance, just as she is with her crippled leg. These deformations are indicative of the alienation humanity often feels, so out of place in the modern world. Furthermore, they suggest Amanda and the candelabrum’s lightning-charged fate, which is figuratively established when Laura speaks to Jim of the sound of her limp: “[I]t was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg—it clumped so loud!”

JIM. I never heard any clumping.

LAURA. [*wincing at the recollection*] To me it sounded like—thunder! (215)

When the lights go out, it suggests Laura and Amanda’s dark fate, but in the short term, it becomes a positive thing, bewitching Jim with the mystery of the past, and with Laura, its representative. The candelabrum is a form of lighting associated with the past, and it helps them leave modernity behind. As Amanda says, “We’ll just have to spend the remainder of the evening in the nineteenth century, before Mr. Edison made the Mazda lamp” (209). The candelabrum as a symbol is echoed by the title of the yearbook Laura and Jim pore over by its light: *The Torch*. One of the most magical moments in this final scene occurs when she and Jim

look through the book together. Like the candelabrum, *The Torch* pulls the two back in time as they reminisce.

Jim is also pulled into the realm of the past and mystery, and away from the present and science, by Amanda's attitude toward the modern. When he checks the fuse box, she says, "Isn't electricity a mysterious thing? Wasn't it Benjamin Franklin who tied a key to a kite? We live in such a mysterious universe, don't we? Some people say that science clears up all the mysteries for us. In my opinion it only creates more!" (208). Here she attempts to lend romance and mystery to the modern age. However, it is not romance and mystery that will overtake the modern; the modern will annihilate romance and mystery. Modernity, signified by the very electricity of which she speaks, will destroy her and all she represents, as the lightning that struck Franklin's kite obliterated the candles of the world. That Jim represents the modern age is made clear here. He not only investigates the power failure when the electricity goes out, but also tells Laura, "My interest happens to lie in electro-dynamics" (221-22)—and his speech is suffused with imagery of electricity: "*Knowledge—Zzzzzp! Money—Zzzzzp!—Power!* That's the cycle democracy is built on!" (222). That representatives of flesh like him are signified by lightning and electricity is further established in the short story "One Arm," that Williams wrote while he was working on GM. Oliver Winemiller, the protagonist who is very clearly a representative of flesh, gets lightning in the end when he is executed by electric chair. However, Oliver is no candle; he is actually meeting up with his own substance. When the switch is thrown for his execution,

[b]olts from across the frontiers of the unknown, the practically named and employed but illimitably mysterious power that first invested a static infinitude of space with heat and brilliance and motion, were channeled through Oliver's nerve cells for an instant and then shot back across those immense frontiers, having claimed and withdrawn whatever was theirs in the boy whose lost right arm had been known as "lightning in leather." (*Collected Stories* 188)

Williams invests this event with an air of mystery appropriate to the destruction of nonconformists, more like Amanda, but Winemiller is otherwise parallel to Jim in terms of imagery. Note again the association between men and lightning in the last stanza of Williams' poem "This Hour," quoted above.

Jim represents lightning and the North. With great animation, he tells Laura of his excitement at visiting the Wrigley Building, "one of the sights of Chicago," and he speaks with great animation of the "Century of Progress" exhibition there, which actually identifies him with one pole of another dichotomy in addition to North and South: Present and Past (212). In fact, it casts him as a representative of the future, as we saw earlier when Amanda says, learning of his interests, "[R]adio engineering? A thing for the future!" (186). Furthermore, his dialogue with Laura is pervaded by references to the future. Telling her of the "Century of Progress," he says: "Well, it was quite a wonderful exposition. What impressed me most was the Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is!" (212). It is precisely this orientation toward the future which makes a match between him and Laura so promising. The Wingfields are steeped in the past. Amanda lives in her Blue Mountain memories, and uses the language of the past, particularly in the last act, when she refers to Laura as "Sister," and to the living room as their "parlor" (209). Laura, for her part, lives in her high school memories, as well as in the Limberlost and the world of her glass figures, an otherworld characterized by innocence, untouched by the maturity which comes with time. Her association with the past is reinforced in the drafts. In drafts of "The Gentleman Caller," the stage directions say that Laura "bears on her face a loveliness that is tragically foreign to the place and time in which she exists, that belongs in albums or poems of safely dead poets" (HRC 17.2).

Amanda and Laura's orientation toward the South and the past is charming to a point, but it seems clear that they are in need of a link to the North and the future for their very survival. Amanda herself confesses: "I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me" (204). Yet she seems to sense intuitively that they must begin to prepare for the future. She tells Tom, "You are the only young man that I know of who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it!" (185). It appears that their only hope is finding a suitor oriented toward the future, which is probably why she becomes so excited when she learns of Jim's interest in "radio engineering."

There is a great deal of literal and figurative promise where Jim is concerned. He is oriented toward the North, but sympathetic to the South, evident in the toast he proposes in the acting edition. In fact, in the acting edition, he almost seems to become a gentleman caller literally—a bona fide Southern gentleman. Watson says that the most important changes Williams makes in the acting edition "relate to Jim O'Connor. The alterations in his dialogue reduce his brashness and considerably increase his politeness, thus making him a model of good manners and a more sympathetic character" (76). Furthermore, his "silences and raucous laughter in the Library Edition are replaced by courteous remarks and a decided increase in 'ma'ams' in the Acting Edition" (76). Sympathetic to the South, yet living in the future, he feels a real tenderness toward the past and those who dwell there as they do. In the reading edition, after telling Laura about the Chicago exposition, he stops short, and suddenly says to her, "Your brother tells me you're shy. Is that right, Laura?"

LAURA. I—don't know.

JIM. I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Well, I think that's a pretty good type to be. (212)

His being drawn to the past can also be seen in “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” where he shows a true appreciation for Laura’s old records (*Collected Stories* 117). In GM proper, when Laura produces *The Torch*, and when Amanda confesses that they will be forced to rely on candlelight, he responds, in a line full of symbolic import, “Candlelight is my favorite kind of light.” She immediately responds, “That shows you’re romantic!” (209). Though a representative of lightning, he is drawn toward the tenderness of candlelight, and the romantics (like Laura, with her old records) that it represents.

At times, he makes it seem as if the modern age exists solely to serve the older world. After all, he produces the matches to light the candelabrum and uses the newspaper (public textuality) only to catch the wax falling from the candles, remainders of the more charming past. In fact, in his specifying candlelight as his favorite kind of light, he is almost symbolically indicating that he is attracted to Laura’s spirituality as she is awestruck at his worldliness and dynamism. John, the representative of flesh in *Summer and Smoke*, is attracted to this type of spiritual candlelight in Alma, the representative of spirit, though he is not attracted to this aspect of her personality at first: In scene 11, he strikes a match, and they both watch it burn for a while, and then he says of her spirituality: “I thought it was just a Puritanical ice that glittered like flame. But now I believe it *was* flame, mistaken for ice” (2: 246). In GM, there is a faint sense that in the last scene, amidst Jim’s praising Laura’s uniqueness, he is attracted to her for the same reason, her tender candle-lit spirituality.

The symbolism in scene 7 of GM offers a great deal of hope in other ways. When Laura asks Jim about his engagement to Emily Meisenbach, he calls her a “kraut-head” and claims that the announcement of their engagement was “propaganda” (219). In the war years, the word “propaganda” was primarily associated with Nazi Germany. The previous evening, Tom

establishes the imminence of the Nazi threat, in his mention of Guernica and Berchtesgaden, loci Williams uses as metaphors for the destructive impact of the modern world on delicate things like Laura and all she represents. Laura is here suddenly given access to hope as she is apparently delivered, metaphorically, from the German menace.

There are numerous indications of Jim's potential to complete Laura symbolically related to the candle. After all, it is he who produces matches and lights the candelabrum, her symbol, as well as the candles of her soul. When he makes it clear to her that his association with Emily has come to an end, he "lights a cigarette and leans indolently back on his elbows smiling at Laura with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly with altar candles." The stage directions in scene 6, however, emphasize the transient nature of this illumination of hers, that a "fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting" (191). As we know, the union between the two will not be effected; she will not be spared, and the candles he has lit will be extinguished.

The weather outside the Wingfield apartment continues to parallel the weather within Laura in the last scene. Although a "summer storm is coming on abruptly" shortly before the scene begins (205), the stage directions in scene 7 indicate that it is "slackening and soon stops" (207). Similarly, at the end of the scene, when Jim tells her about his engagement to Betty, she "struggles visibly with her storm" (230). The revelation strikes her like lightning. However, after it has done its damage, "[t]he storm abates a little and Laura leans back" (230). All is still well after she is kissed; the illumination imagery is again present: "When he releases her, Laura sinks on the sofa with a bright, dazed look" (228). A few lines later, "her look grows brighter even" (229). Nevertheless, darkness ultimately descends on a figurative level, just as it has

fallen on a literal level. When Jim finishes telling her of Betty, he “flops back on the sofa. The holy candles on the altar of Laura’s face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation” (230). Moments later, Williams uses the contrast between candles and lightning to conclude the play; Tom, in his final speech, says:

Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out!

[*Laura bends over the candles.*]

For nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura—and so goodbye. . . .

[*She blows them out.*] (237)

Incidentally, Williams himself felt, at times, as if he was a representative of the past, like Laura and her candle, so vulnerable in a world of torrential falling fire. While writing *Stairs to the Roof* in Mexico in 1940, before his big successes, a friend urged him to commit suicide off the coast of Acapulco, insisting that all he had was “the uncontrolled emotionalism of a minor lyric talent which was totally unsuited to the stage of life as well as the theater stage. I was, he said, a cotton-headed romanticist, a hopeless anachronism in the world now lit by super fire-bombs” (*Where I Live* 145).

Theomachy

The candlelit and electric worlds are also contrasted in the play’s distinction between Amanda’s domestic god and the god of the age. Both can be detected in her opening lines in the acting edition, when she speaks of the shockingly rude manners of Northern Episcopalians, so different from the loving and amiable behavior of Episcopalians in the South (*Glass Menagerie* 4). The distinction is even clearer, however, in her story in the reading edition regarding the disfigurement of the candelabrum, which was once “on the altar at the Church of the Heavenly Rest. It was melted a little out of shape when the church burnt down. Lightning struck it one

spring. Gypsy Jones was holding a revival at the time and he intimated that the church was destroyed because the Episcopalians gave card parties” (209-10). On the one hand, there is the quiet god of the Church of the Heavenly Rest; on the other, the inexorable, lightning-heaving god of Gypsy Jones.

Though Gypsy Jones is obviously a minister, he is no representative of spirit relative to the prime dichotomy we have been discussing—he is the cleric of a darker religion than that of the priest of Amanda’s rectory. He is, in fact, associated with the flux pole of the flux/stasis dichotomy we have been examining, inherent in his name. Gypsies and their associations with flux appear throughout Williams’ work and life—as late as *Camino Real* and as early as his childhood. The editors of his letters note that when Williams was younger, the Williams family even had a dog named “Gypsy” (*Selected Letters* 1: 90). Later, in 1939, when he began a life of wandering he would never abandon, he wrote, “This Gypsy life agrees with me marvelously” (*Selected Letters* 1: 152). The gypsy impulse as a specific feature of flux is established in *Spring Storm*, as we have seen: When Dick speaks enthusiastically of following the river to the sea, Heavenly says, “Oh. You’re speaking symbolically about the Gypsy in you or something” (*Tennessee* 1: 7). So Gypsy Jones of GM is a representative of the flesh/flux pole of the dichotomy. Moreover, both lightning and war—the falling fire—have been linked to representatives of flux, specifically Tom, Mr. Wingfield, and Jim, as we noted. Gypsy Jones, the man, is further linked to flesh/flux and to the destruction this brings as his fulminations condone the desolation wrought by the lightning which burns Amanda’s church down.

Amanda’s close proximity to her quiet, respectable Southern god is reinforced constantly throughout the play. Her dialogue is replete with religious exclamations, and she is perpetually making oblique references to the centrality of religion in her Mississippi home. When there were

too many gentleman callers, she would send someone to bring “folding chairs from the parish house” (148). Moreover, she claims that in her childhood home, when a gentleman caller was on the horizon and a family wished to inquire about his character, they would consult the minister of the church (185). When she asks Tom to bless the meal, saying, “I think we may—have grace—now” (206), “grace” refers both to their pre-meal prayer, and to the possibility that they will be granted mercy. However, Amanda’s god is clearly powerless to halt the advance of the modern world and the juggernaut deity which presides over it. This is indicated by events depicted just moments later, when they are all plunged into darkness. Despite the title of the tune at Paradise Dance Hall, the sun is setting, not dawning, on Amanda’s god. As critic Roger Stein says, this is “more than a social tragedy. It is a *Gotterdammerung*” (39).

Final Fire

The heat imagery which has been building for the entire play comes to a climax in the final scene. This is evident in the drafts: In “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” when the conversation over dinner dies down, the only sound is the “hiss of the radiator,” reinforcing the oppressive sense of heat (*Collected Stories* 116). There is also the mention of a “steam-heated parlor” when Jim and Laura are dancing (117). The heat is just as prevalent in GM proper: When Amanda returns, she exclaims, “Didn’t you hear me cutting up in the kitchen? I bet your ears were burning!” (232). Candle imagery is also somewhat present. When she first enters the room, she is illuminated, just as Laura was: Amanda rushes in “brightly” (231). Yet she and Laura are struck down by the very lightning that obliterated the Church of the Heavenly Rest, and both are cast into darkness.

When Amanda enters, she bears in her hands an “old-fashioned cut-glass pitcher” filled with lemonade, and an extra ingredient: She says, “I discovered we had some maraschino

cherries. I dumped them in, juice and all!” (231, 232). She also bears in her hands macaroons on a plate with a “gold border and poppies painted on it.” As we have seen, gold in GM is the symbol of a past-oriented otherworld. When Amanda brings in a specifically “old-fashioned” pitcher full of lemonade, it is the perfect image of a Laurine type, a glass-enclosed otherworld, which here, is associated with the past, with the gold imagery. Amanda believes she has brought everyone into her past-oriented otherworld—that everyone has been transported in spirit back to Blue Mountain.

The red indicates the innocent, vernal carnality she believes is present. Red functions here in one of its traditional symbolic roles, as an indicator of carnal desire. Williams often uses the color in this sense, as in his short story “Accent of a Coming Foot,” where the protagonist, Catherine, intends to lift her hands “to the bright red cherries on her hat as if to signify by their color something of what she had to offer this time”—that she is a grown woman and can offer the man of the story sex (*Collected Stories* 39). The cherries in GM here represent the same thing, as do the poppies on the plate—in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche is a spiritual character, but there are clear strains of carnality appearing in her character. This is paralleled by her clothing—in the drafts, though she is dressed in a kimono colored Marian blue, it is spangled with “poppies printed on it” (qtd. in Dickson 167). Amanda, however, is incorrect in her expectations. Vernal heat has become falling fire—the innocent heat of spring has become an inferno, one which will claim both her daughter and herself. When Amanda brings in the refreshments, she sings:

“Lemonade, lemonade,
Made in the shade and stirred with a spade—
Good enough for any old maid!”

Ironically, and tragically, it appears that she has, in fact, made lemonade for someone who will ultimately be an “old maid.” The lemonade and gold-bordered plate identify Amanda and her daughter with the past, and here in the last scene it is made clear that they will be permanently relegated to that past. Earlier in the scene, her method for fighting the heat was to run to her trunk and pull out her “light dress—terribly old! Historical almost! But feels so good—so good an’ co-ol, y’ know....” (203). She does the same thing here, as she lofts her lemonade to fight the heat—but the dress and the lemonade, both old-fashioned images of the past, will prove to be insufficient. She relies on techniques from the past for survival, but all things associated with the past will be claimed by the juggernaut of the present. Amanda believes she has made the drink in the shade—shaded from the figurative heat they are enduring, and the storm and bombardments which are descending. Again, she is mistaken, and the legend on the screen device—the last legend of the play—registers her destruction and Laura’s as “The Sky Falls”—perhaps the ultimate expression of the falling fire imagery which has been building since scene 1 (233).

Williams intentionally links the fate of the Wingfields with the fate of the world. He and his audience were well aware that shortly after lightning falls on the Wingfields, here in the late spring of 1939, *blitzkrieg* will descend on the rest of the world, beginning with the German invasion of Poland a few months later, in the fall of 1939, and two years later, the nation will collectively endure Pearl Harbor, which Williams describes as the “end of the world as we know it” (*Stairs to the Roof* xvii). He thus contracts the apocalypse overtaking the entire world onto his stage, focusing it on the desolation experienced by Laura.

Tom flees the scene of desolation. The fire escape appears very prominently in the last three acts and, as the play closes, he uses it. However, though he is concerned primarily for

himself, he will ultimately mourn the impact of his decision where his sister is concerned.

Though Tom-as-character is oriented toward the present, he eventually sees the importance of ties to the past when he becomes Tom-as-narrator, as Hadrian does. In the end, he is downcast by the temporal distance between himself and “small and tender things” like Laura, that the modern world has destroyed. As narrator in the drafts, he even castigates modernity, and electricity, its symbol, explicitly. In HRC 16.5, he says:

Our blood remembers how it used to be!—
the sun like an angel’s trumpet above the pines!

Broke ice to wash sleep from our eyes...

Western Electric says, It hasn’t changed!
Public utilities say—It’s just the same!

However our blood remembers something different—
Our blood says “No!” to the electric toaster—the drug-store corner—the down-
town bus—time-clock—file-cabinet—celotex interiors lit by fluorescent tubes!
Our blood says “No”—but the eyes have it!

The Falling-Fire Motif in Earlier Plays

Although there is a considerable heat imagery in GM, it is even more apparent in other Williams narratives written early in his career. *Battle of Angels*, the major play he wrote prior to GM, ends in holocaust: In the published version, Val, the protagonist, is burned alive with a blowtorch, and, in the original version, the entire set was to have been consumed by flames (“The History of a Play,” *Tennessee* 1: 280). It is more famously present in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, when the imagery of fire symbolically consumes Blanche as she is raped, and it devours Brick of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* when he locks the truth inside himself, described as “shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire” (3: 31).

The imagery of fire appearing in tandem with the imagery of apocalypse can be found in Williams’ work years before the completion of GM—as early as 1936, in his poem “Singer of

Darkness,” among his “Sonnets for the Spring,” as we have seen. In the same year, a journal entry projects his writing a short story about the impact of spring on college-student protagonists, under the title “The Apocalypse” (*Selected Letters* 1: 90). This imagery also appears in *Stairs to the Roof*, which he wrote in Acapulco, perhaps goaded by the antagonism of Nazi sympathizers from Germany he could not elude who were “jubilant over the fire-bombing of London which was then in progress” (*Memoirs* 58). Falling-fire imagery is particularly prominent in scene 2, entitled “No Fire Escape,” which opens with Warren B. Thatcher, consummate corporate lawyer, speaking from high atop his skyscraper:

Thatcher [*into the phone*]: Hello, my darling. I’m calling to give you some dreadful information. I’m way up high in a building that’s caught on fire. There’s no way out. There aren’t any fire-escapes, there don’t seem to be any fire-extinguishers even. —And as for the volunteer fire department, darling—it hasn’t volunteered! What am I talking about? —The state of the world we live in! It’s cracking up, it’s plunging toward destruction! What did we quarrel about last night, you and I? Oh, yes, I remember, I didn’t like dancing but you did! (15)

This tone of people callously dancing while the world burns is echoed by the patrons of a guided tour circling an Alcatraz-type island in *Not About Nightingales*. The final lines of the play are the tour guide’s, who says,

That’s the Island! Sort of misty tonight on account of the moon’s gone under. Them walls are *escape-proof*, folks. Thirty-five hundred men locked in there an’ some of them gonna stay there till Doomsday—[*Music.*]—Ah, music again! Dancing on the upper deck, folks, dancing,—dancing . . .
[*Musical theme up.*] (*Tennessee* 1: 188)

Thus far we have seen how the moon is used as a symbol to tantalize protagonists with escape they are ultimately denied. Here the moon is mentioned in the context of prisoners desperate to escape the island on which they are held, on which many of them have just died. The darkly comic tone of the tour guide’s mentioning music and dancing immediately after speaking of the desperate plight of the men reinforces the irony. In Williams, images of transcendence are often

juxtaposed with death, and destruction inevitably follows any hope of escape. He often gives the surface of his plays a comic veneer which makes the underlying horror all the more poignant. In GM Jim blithely enthuses about his girlfriend, oblivious of the Wingfields' horror. Williams uses this technique to effect the catharsis he sought to produce in all his tragedies.

The imagery of apocalypse is particularly evident in *Not About Nightingales*, which opens in much the same way that it ends—with a tour boat circling the island, and the guide speaking lightheartedly of “Doomsday.” The tension of the drama comes to a head when the nonconformists among the characters are sentenced to the “Klondike,” a solitary-confinement cell equipped with radiators which heat the room to 150 degrees. The heat, reminiscent of the heat imagery of GM, is unbearable, and destroys most of them. Before entering this cell, a Mexican begins making apocalyptic allusions, muttering, “*Jésus—muerto por nuestros pecados!*,” (“Jesus, slain for our sins!” 164). A few lines down, he says, “*Muerto—por nuestros pecados—rojo—de sangre es—el Sol!*” (165). “[R]ojo—de sangre es—el Sol” is Spanish for “red as blood is the sun,” a reference to the events of the Apocalypse itself, which works in tandem with a line above, when the guide calls attention to the fact that the moon’s light is gone. These are the images of the Apocalypse as it is described in the Book of the Apocalypse, known in English-speaking countries as the Book of Revelation. There, it is actually the moon which is “as blood”—the sun is as “black as sackcloth of hair” (King James Version, Revelations 6.12)—but though Williams confuses the two, he is definitely making apocalyptic references all the same.

The epigraph to “The Last of My Solid Gold Watches” is apocalyptic—for it, Williams uses Rimbaud’s line, “Ce ne peut être que la fin du monde, en avançant”—and consistent with GM’s theme, the story shows how the old order is dying, the end of the world for them (6: 91).

It appears this was actually taken from the epigraph to Crane's "White Buildings" in Williams' copy of *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane*, which never left his side (Crane 59, *Selected Letters* 1: 441). Apocalypse appears again in Williams' short story "The Malediction," when the narrator says that "this curious accident of matter, the earth, was whirling dangerously fast and some day, unexpectedly, it would fly apart from its own excessive momentum and shatter itself into little bits of disaster" (*Collected Stories* 156). Finally, the setting of "The Chalky White Substance," which was written after GM, is entirely, literally post-apocalyptic.

8. THE LAST ACT: SYMBOLIC ELABORATION AND METAMORPHOSIS

Scene 6

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the candles which are associated with Laura are ultimately consumed by the lightning of the modern era. However, there is incredible tenderness and promise in the air prior to this turn of events. It is the symbolism of these scenes which will be discussed here. A separate section is devoted to these last two scenes because like most of Williams' plays, the symbolism becomes particularly complex toward the narrative's end. Some symbols occur here for the first time, while others which were introduced earlier in the play are elaborated. Still others are transformed.

Wind through the Windows and the Opening of a Door

Amanda features prominently in the last act, but it is primarily about Laura's admitting someone into her soul for the first time. The vulnerability that this entails terrifies her, just as it terrifies Matilda in *You Touched Me!*: As Hadrian is coming, Matilda "touches her forehead and closes her eyes. Her perturbation is only understandable to the shy, for whom all intimacy is rich with danger" (15). However, though both Matilda and Laura are terrified by the prospect, it is the fulfillment of something deep in their natures. When Laura is finally left alone with Jim, we learn that though their reunion is "apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life" (210).

Jim's admission is signified by the wind blowing through the white-curtained open windows and into the apartment, as we have seen. This is one way she is being completed. There is another way—he is the singer, whereas she is the one who is forever listening to songs. Again and again, the text emphasizes his links to singing and speaking, and her propensity for listening to songs. Both these images—Jim as wind and voice—can be found in early drafts of

“The Gentleman Caller” (HRC 16.10). There the play opens on Christmas Eve, with Tom and “Rose,” the Laura figure, decorating their Christmas tree. Suddenly she exclaims, “Carolers!” and opens the window of their apartment so that the passing singers will see her candle and know that their presence is welcome. As she does so, the “white lace curtains blow in and the song is clearer.” This is a compact image of what Jim brings to Laura on a figurative level: breath and words, life and song. The imagery of wind filling Laura’s soul is particularly clear in another draft in the same folder. Rose fantasizes about the house they will live in when Tom becomes “successful.” She describes it as resting on a great hill “the color of *this!*”—holding up a “glittering green glass ornament.” “And on top of it will be a house like *this!*” she adds, showing him a “little toy manger under the tree.”

And all the windows are broken out of the house and the rain blows in and the leaves blow in the windows. And through the big hole in the roof.—And nobody ever repairs it, we leave it that way because we prefer fresh air!
Don’t we, huh, Tommy?

Laura’s ideal, then, is precisely what she receives in the last act, on a figurative and literal level, just before Jim tells her of Betty. She is finally delivered from the stifling confines of the apartment and of her inner world, as Jim comes in and transforms her.

The last act is pervaded by images reinforcing Laura’s openness, in addition to the open windows. At the beginning of this scene, as the wind blows through the open windows, the audience sees “[o]pen boxes and tissue paper,” “scattered on the floor,” echoing the open door and windows, Laura’s opening soul; they also serve to distinguish the potential here from Tom’s situation at the warehouse where he is surrounded by closed boxes. While those boxes represent the confinement Tom feels (like the shoe boxes surrounding Myra in *Battle of Angels*), the open boxes at home represent the liberation Jim will potentially bring to Laura. Even Laura’s eyes have opened to admit this new influence. When she is finally forced to join Jim at the dinner

table, she enters, “her eyes wide and staring” (205), and when scene 7 opens, she is seated alone, “her eyes wide and mysteriously watchful” (207).

At certain points in the drafts, this opening of Laura’s soul is even linked to the vernal imagery we have seen relative to the motif of falling fire. In drafts of “The Pretty Trap,” she flies from Tom and Jim after opening the door to them, but eventually she comes back in and it becomes clear that

[s]omething has happened to Laura. Something secret and lovely has opened up in her face like the long-delayed opening of a flower. Jim sees it as she steps between the portieres and stands graceful and hesitant and incredibly delicate in the light of the candles. He rises slowly to his feet and there is a pause in which they look at each other across the candelabra. (HRC 17.8)

Jim’s entry into Laura’s soul, then, is signified by the wind, by open boxes, by her eyes, by the opening of a flower (in the drafts) and, above all, by the door of the apartment which she must ultimately open to Jim. This symbolism is reinforced by the legends Williams projects onto the screen device: At the beginning of the scene, it reads “Accent of a Coming Foot,” but when Laura and Amanda really do hear the sound of Jim’s approach, it reads, “The Opening of a Door!” The drafts shed further light on the allusion: In HRC 17.2, the stage directions of “The Gentleman Caller” indicate that she feels the emotion “which the poet Emily Dickinson must have understood in writing the verse—

‘What fortitude the soul contains
that it can so endure
the accent of a coming foot,
the opening of a door!’”

The opening stanza of the poem is even more pertinent to the context:

Elysium is as far as to
The very nearest room,
If in that room a friend await
Felicity or doom. (Dickinson 162)

The Accent of a Coming Foot

This was an important poem for Williams. Almost a decade earlier, he had used its penultimate line as the title to one of the short stories we have discussed, that he wrote as early as March of 1935: “The Accent of a Coming Foot.” It concerns the reunion of a young man with a young woman, Bud and Catherine, similar to the events taking place here. As in GM, their reunion is in spring, a season that (in Williams’ poetry) figuratively seeks inroads into the chambers of the past (particularly into homes like Laura’s and Matilda’s) to invigorate them with new life. Again, vernal and emotional overtones are lent to the opening of the door and to the windows as well. As in GM and *You Touched Me!*, they represent the apertures of her soul. In *You Touched Me!*, the stage directions say that a

clinging antiquity, a withdrawn quality must be expressed in a way that will show why those things were attractive to a timid girl like Matilda. The house has grace and beauty as many things do which nevertheless are not in vital contact with the world. As Matilda observes at one point, the light through the vines that cover the windows “give such a cool, green color—like being under water.” (4)

The drafts of “The Accent of a Coming Foot” reflect this where the narrator notes, “The windows hadn’t been washed in heaven knows how long and the spring shower gave them a muddy look. But outside she could see the green freshness of the trees” (HRC 1.2). However, the spring will not be refused; it will enter whether she wants it to or not, like the wind rushing through the Wingfield apartment in GM. This was foreshadowed earlier, when she exited the train: The “air was so fresh and clean after that stuffy pullman” (*Collected Stories* 33). This is the type of life she anticipates receiving upon Bud’s arrival: After their reunion, “she would be able to hold the precious new life it had given her to an unburdened bosom and breath could go on” (40).

As with Amanda, Catherine recalls a time when men and women were more intimate, when stasis and flux were more in balance, the Williams ideal. She recalls that once Bud had “driven them, after their lunch had settled, down to the river, where the two girls and the boy had undressed behind separate bushes for a swim and stretched themselves afterwards on a stone-smooth log to get dry” (39). He had brought flux to her life, as well as balance. In this idyllic age, she enjoyed the flux he brought: he read poetry to her “or lay on his back talking quietly to himself or to her or to the trees, which seemed never to move quite softly enough to keep from jarring the drowsily delicate flow of his voice” (39). Now, however, she has been apart from him too long, and she is both apprehensive and eager for a reunion.

Laura’s Otherworld

There is an interesting difference between the short story and GM; in the former, Bud opens the door himself, whereas in the latter, Tom has lost his key—symbolically opportune because it means Laura must open the door to her heart herself. However, she is panic stricken when she realizes that she must do so. To bolster her courage, she first “darts to the Victrola and winds it frantically and turns it on” (197). A “faraway, scratchy rendition of ‘Dardanella’ softens the air and gives her strength to move through it. She slips to the door and draws it cautiously open” (197-98). A similar event happens in a parallel encounter in another Williams narrative; in “The Interval,” when Jimmie meets Gretchen, a nearby radio is playing music with “all the most melting tunes” (*Collected Stories* 194).

Jim is essentially entering Laura’s otherworld. She has begun playing her music because her otherworld is the only place where she feels comfortable, and the music brings both her there and, metaphorically speaking, Jim as well. The music “softens the air,” providing a medium that the breathless Laura and the breathful Jim (who has just begun whistling) can co-inhabit. That

she is inhabiting her otherworld as she opens the door is made even more explicit in the drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass” (HRC 17.7). There, Tom says that when she opens the door, her “eyes did not look at us as she appeared in the doorway. They stared between our shoulders with a trance-like expression.” It is even clearer in the drafts that music is being used to indicate Laura is in her otherworld, and that Jim is fully becoming Freckles, her otherworldly companion. The narrator recalls that when Laura discovered Jim’s freckles and that this was his nickname, she “snatched one of the records and put it on the victrola which Jim had wound up. All of the stiffness and awkwardness had dissolved from her body, her face had relaxed, and she was young and pretty.” A description of “The Gentleman Caller” in HRC 16.9 echoes this: “When she notices Jim’s freckles and he tells her that that is what his home-folks call him—Freckles—she comes out of her shell. He is like her dream-companion come to life.” This is reflected on a symbolic level elsewhere in the drafts where Laura associates him with glass, the imagery of her otherworld; in drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” (HRC 17.3) Laura and Jim begin dancing and, as usual, she is afraid that she will step on Jim’s shoes. He tells her not to worry, just as he does in GM proper (224): “I’m not made out of—glass!” However, she then replies, “Ha-ha! Aren’t you? I had an idea you were!”

Thus, there are signs that Jim is becoming like Laura, at least from her perspective, as she begins to identify him with her imaginary playmate. This occurs even as he complements her, inspiring her sealed soul with breath and wind. A parallel is found in another Williams narrative, the short story “The Interval,” written a few years later in 1945. The Jim figure is named Jimmie, and the Laura figure Gretchen. There is complementarity: Jimmie is pleased “to think that his charm was something that could be used to bring sunlight to dark places.” He is complementing Gretchen, a creature of moonlight and night. The same complementarity is

seen in GM when Jim complains that Laura is in the shadows while he is in the “limelight” (212). A moment later, he brings sunlight to dark places when he brings her into the light. This is further reflected by the emphasis placed on Laura’s large eyes—they are “wide and staring,” “wide and mysteriously watchful,” so that she is the receptive one, while Jim is the source of sun, an image parallel to the sealed space/wind symbol discussed earlier. Jim’s association with light complements her, but it also shows how much they truly have in common. Rather childlike, she is still playing with her little glass figures, and he is the same, playing in the light and remarking on the big shadow he makes on the wall (224). Jim and Gretchen share many of these same attributes: “Her simplicity and his boyish high spirits got them along quite easily together” (*Collected Stories* 193).

The Orient

The song Laura plays as Jim enters the apartment is entitled “Dardanella,” about a young woman living near the Dardanelles in Asia. Throughout his oeuvre, Williams uses the imagery of the Orient to evoke otherworlds. Just as in Williams the Limberlost and Blue Mountain are places to which the delicate can retreat, so the Orient is allusive of retreat, relieving characters from the austere and often sordid conditions of their lives, as in scene 2 of GM, when Laura appears in a “dress of soft violet material for a kimono,” vacantly washing her menagerie. Oriental detachment can also be sensed in a short story Williams wrote a few years later, “Two on a Party.” The two protagonists are touring in an old car which ultimately breaks down, and when this happens, Cora, the female protagonist, takes it in stride and begins drinking, but Billy becomes disgusted “with what he calls her Oriental attitude toward life” (*Collected Stories* 296). Williams often evokes the otherworldly aspect of the Orient with the imagery of Japanese paper lanterns: Amanda places one over the apartment’s broken light fixture in GM, as she is

constructing her otherworld. The image is used similarly in Myra's confectionery in *Battle of Angels*, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and other Williams plays.

There is an additional nuance to the metaphor of the Orient where it involves the Near East in particular. Williams is constantly holding out the possibility that two souls can truly come together, defeating the solitary confinement they have been sentenced to inside their skins. The Near East is often a symbol for the distance which must be traversed for this to be effected. For instance, in *You Touched Me!*, Hadrian reads a poem of Matilda's which conveys this: "How like a caravan my heart— / Across the desert moved toward yours!" (18). In GM, in scene 6, Williams almost certainly alludes to this distance via the lyrics of "Dardanella," a song Laura plays. Although the version of the song Williams had in mind could have been the instrumental one, its lyrics are so consistent with the symbolism of GM that Williams was surely familiar with them. The song speaks of a female beloved who is waiting restively on the Oriental side of the strait, looking out to sea, longing for her lover to close the distance between them. There is composite symbolism here, in that the lyrics reinforce the association of men with the imagery of the sea, and women with the static image of land which we have seen in GM. For a 1920 version of the song, performed by Gladys Rice and Vernon Dalhart, click on the following link:



The first verse and chorus of "Dardanella," written by Fred Fisher, are as follows:

Down, beside the Dardanella Bay,
Where oriental breezes play,
There lives a lonesome maid, Armenian.
By, the Dardanelles with glowing eyes,
She looks across the seas and sighs,
And weaves her love spell so Sirenian.

Soon I shall return to Turkestan,
I will ask for her heart and hand;

Oh sweet Dardanella, I love your harem eyes.
I'm a lucky fellow, to capture such a prize,
Oh Allah knows my love for you,
And he tells you to be true,
Dardanella, Oh hear my sigh, my Oriental.

Oh sweet Dardanella, prepare the wedding wine,
There'll be one girl in my harem when you're mine.
We'll build a tent,
Just like the children of the Orient.
Oh sweet Dardanella, my star of love divine.

Thus the flux/stasis symbolism is reinforced, particularly as we recall that “breezes” are actually blowing through the open windows of the Wingfield apartment. The mention of “wedding wine” reinforces the imagery of both weddings and wine in the last act of GM. Finally, the speaker calls Dardanella his “Oriental,” suggestive of Laura in her kimono.

Scene 7

After Laura admits Jim into the apartment, she is able to avoid him until dinner is served. Her mother then calls her to the table to eat with them, but this upsets her so greatly that she becomes faint and is forced to sit by herself in the living room. Then, early in the last scene, Amanda encourages him to keep her company there, and she hands him both a glass of wine and the “lovely old candelabrum” from the church of her youth. His hands at this point are full of sacerdotal imagery, reinforcing his status as a bridge between the old world and new. The entire last act is actually replete with religious imagery, which merits a discussion of its own.

Religious Symbolism in the Last Act

Rose

The religious symbolism in GM is principally focused on Laura, especially the color rose. As the curtains rise in the last act, the audience sees on stage a new lamp with a “rose silk shade”

above the sofa which unfolds to make Laura's bed, and in the next scene, when Jim joins her in her dining-room retreat, she is seated beneath this lamp "with its shade of rose-colored silk," giving "a soft, becoming light to her face, bringing out the fragile, unearthly prettiness which usually escapes attention" (191, 207).

In *Pageant of the Rose*, Jean Gordon says that Yeats "regarded the rose as a symbol of intense spiritual significance" (206). The same could be said of Williams. Early in his career, he wrote a poem entitled "Of Roses." Laura's delicate, crystalline nature, her goodness and otherworldly innocence—all seem to be encapsulated in its imagery, the epitome of much that he wishes to express in GM:

All roses are enchantment to the wise,
the veil of sophistry drawn from the eyes,
the heart washed clean of an accustomed stain
by gusts of memory as fresh as rain.

In the confine of gardens or grown wild
they are the crystal vision of a child,
unstained by craft, undisciplined by grief,
sweet as child's laughter, and as wild and brief . . . (*Collected Poems* 217)

The mention of "enchantment" and "crystal vision" are evocative of the otherworldly existence of Williams' characters, particularly of Laura. That the roses are "sweet as child's laughter, and as wild and brief" is evocative of the Laurine type, which is beautiful, but inevitably ephemeral. The images of purity—a "heart washed clean," a vision "unstained"—are evocative of the sanctity which is among Laura's attributes. Finally, there is the hint of a past-oriented otherworld here: when the heart is "washed clean of an accustomed stain / by gusts of memory as fresh as rain." In the mind of Tom-as-narrator, Laura is precisely this gust of memory as fresh as rain.

The mention of rain here is reminiscent of GM's epigraph: "Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands" (123). This line was taken from a poem by E. E. Cummings, one which may have been part of the inspiration behind Laura's characterization. Flowers are the controlling metaphor and these are explicitly roses in the last stanza:

LVII

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully,misteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me,i and
my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens;only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands (367)

Roses and the color rose are central to Williams' symbolism, for several reasons. First and most importantly, his sister's name was Rose. She greatly influenced his work, particularly GM. In fact, there are some drafts of the play in which Laura's name is actually "Rose," as in HRC 16.10. Williams and Rose were extremely close, and they depended on each other for support as they grew up together in the nightmarish conditions of the Williams home under the tyranny of their brutal father. Williams took his intimacy with his sister and artistically

transformed it so that roses and the color rose appear as symbols everywhere in his work, as in the very title of a later play, *The Rose Tattoo*. It also appears prominently here in the last act of GM: Jim brings Laura a glass of wine just before the climactic scene between them, and at the end of the scene, Amanda introduces two more rose-colored images: lemonade with maraschino cherries, and macaroons on a poppy-adorned plate. It is not aleatory that poppies are rose colored; in drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” the plate is specifically described as being a “*rose-colored* plate of wafers and macaroons” (emphasis added, HRC 17.7). The symbolism of this act of hers will be amplified toward the end of the chapter.

Rosemary

Williams’ sister Rose was actually named after his beloved maternal grandmother, Rosina Maria Francesca Otte Dakin. Her husband and others did not use her German given name: They called her simply Rose. She is another major reason why roses appear constantly in Williams’ work, for she and Williams’ sister made his bleak life bearable. He spoke of this on both a literal and figurative level when reminiscing of the garden his brother maintained at their home when they were children, a garden that relieved the bleakness of St. Louis only a little, for it had no flowers. Williams adds, “I can recall no roses in all the years that I spent in St. Louis and its environs except the two living Roses in my life, my grandmother, Rose O. Dakin, and, of course, my sister, Rose Isabel” (*Memoirs* 17). This affectionate language can be found earlier, in a journal entry in 1939, where he speaks again of his “dear ‘Two Roses’” (qtd. in *Selected Letters* 1: 184). True to his habit of transforming autobiographical elements, his grandmother’s name finds its way into Williams’ work just as his sister’s does, as Rosina Maria, or more simply, Rosemary. In drafts of “The Front Porch Girl,” Laura’s name is variously “Rosemary” or “Miriam,” the latter of which is the original Hebrew form of the name “Mary” (HRC 16.8).

The Virgin Mary actually appears throughout Williams' work, perhaps due, in part, to his grandmother's second name, but it is too pervasive for this to be the only explanation. She seems to have been the perfect evocation of all he was trying to convey when depicting representatives of spirit in a positive light. She is mentioned in his letters: While traveling by car in Mexico in 1940, he speaks of saying "an occasional prayer to 'Our Mother of the Highways' when the road becomes very exciting" (*Selected Letters* 1: 272). She also appears throughout his work—as in *Summer and Smoke*, "Portrait of a Madonna," *Camino Real*, and *Battle of Angels*. Regarding the latter play, the protagonist's very name is an anagram of Mary—"Myra"—and in Williams' revised version of the play, *Orpheus Descending*, this same protagonist is named "Lady," an abbreviation of "Our Lady." Myra is also the name of the protagonists of two shorter narratives: the girl who is roughly the Laura figure in "The Long Goodbye," and the main character of "The Field of Blue Children," a short story written before *Battle of Angels*. In the short story "Gift of an Apple," the narrator's sister is another anagram of Mary—"Irma"—who appears in the context of religious imagery (*Collected Stories* 67). Henry Schvey and Philip Kolin have both written of Mary's presence in *A Streetcar Named Desire* ("Madonna at the Poker Night" and "Our Lady of the Quarter," respectively). She is even set in the context of the color rose in *The Rose Tattoo*, as we shall see. Incidentally, the color rose is not always Marian, but where it represents (for example) carnality, it is easy to spot.

Both Mary and the color rose are associated with Laura in GM. This can be seen very clearly in drafts of "The Gentleman Caller." Tom says:

My sister believed in God. She had a simple heart and an attitude of acceptance.

It was she, not mother, who colored our home with the ruby glow of the holy candles in their crimson glasses.

It was a rich and tender light in a barren place.

I often came home late. As I set the key in the lock I would hear an awkward scuffling and enter to find her standing unsteadily and flushed with embarrassment before the little statue of the Virgin and the candle in the ruby glass. The living-room where I slept on a folding bed would be warm with the odor of burning tallow and though I was not a sentimental young man I found it easy to cry when the light was out and the folding-bed was down and my sister had withdrawn to the dining-room where she slept. (HRC 17.2)

This passage establishes a solid link between Laura and Mary. However, here, Laura is merely praying to Mary. In GM proper, she is herself given Marian attributes. For instance, in the production notes, Williams says, “The light on Laura should have a pristine religious quality, such as the light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas” (133-34). The most significant evidence is in scene 5. When Tom tells Amanda of the imminent arrival of the gentleman caller, the screen legend reads, “Annunciation” (178), an allusion to the archangel Gabriel’s appearing to Mary, announcing that she will give birth to the Savior: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the son of God” (New International Version, Luke 1.35). The screen legend thus lends deep mythic import to the meeting between Jim and Laura.

The drafts also help to establish the link between Laura, Mary, and the color rose. In drafts of “If You Breathe, It Breaks!”, the narrative opens with the depiction of an “old-fashioned hallway lit by a rose-shaded lamp” (HRC 17.6). “Rosemary” Wingfield—Laura—is mentioned almost immediately thereafter. A local woman recounts that Rosemary’s face had turned “crimson” when she was embarrassed—all on the first typescript page of the play. Williams began writing another play about this time, whose title indicates the religious connotations of the flower—HRC’s “A Liturgy of Roses.” In the play, roses literally precipitate the climax.

The link Williams makes between the imagery of roses and Mary would probably have been inevitable even if his grandmother's name had been different. For centuries, roses have been closely associated with the Virgin Mary, and because he was raised in St. Louis where the Catholic presence is strong, he would have had many early opportunities to see Mary adorned with roses, particularly given his close association with his High-Church Episcopalian grandfather. However, if he had missed such images in St. Louis, he could not have missed them during his frequent trips to Mexico, which began as early as 1939 (Leverich 302). He would have been unable to escape the iconography of the Virgin of Guadalupe, an image ubiquitous across the Mexican landscape, unfailingly festooned with roses.

When the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared for the first time in 1531, it was in the context of roses. Gordon relates the story of her first appearance: “[A] humble Indian, baptized Juan Diego, was on his way to attend Mass. Passing a small, bare hill, he saw a white cloud float down and turn into an arc of scintillating light which sent out the colors of the rainbow. In the midst of this resplendence appeared a beautiful Indian woman, the Virgin Mary” (156). She urged the man to go to the local bishop to tell him to build a church on the hill. After initially refusing his request, the skeptical bishop finally said, “[T]ell the lady she must send some token so I will know she is the Virgin.” She responded by asking Juan Diego to go to the top of the hill. He went and, to his surprise, found roses growing in profusion, which surprised him, as the hill had always been bare. He filled his apron with roses and took them to the skeptical bishop. When he poured them out before him, there was the image of Mary, miraculously adorning his apron. Gordon says that this image is “the most venerated object in all Mexico and is the reason for vast and strenuous yearly pilgrimages on the part of the deeply religious people.”

Williams visited Mexico for the first time in 1939, and the Virgin of Guadalupe almost immediately began appearing in his work, as in his play *Stairs to the Roof*, completed in 1941. In scene 11, Ben, roughly a Tom figure, is accompanied by “Girl,” roughly a Laura figure. The two find themselves at a parti-colored carnival where Ben wins at the roulette wheel. The stage directions then read, “Loud shouts and cheers. Ben has won the gorgeous Spanish shawl. He turns and drapes it about the Girl making her look like one of those resplendent Mexican madonnas—Our Lady of Guadeloupe” (*Stairs* 71). The representative of spirit, the Girl, is once again associated with Marian imagery, and the polychromy of the rainbow, which appeared both in the story of the Virgin and in Williams’ early play “Beauty Is the Word,” as we have discussed, is related to the Laurine type. It appears again in his poem “La Guadalupe” from the HNOC:

A friend has presented me with a small plaster statuette
of La Guadalupe,
and with it a gossamer cloth, violet-colored,
symmetrically crossed by strands,
the color, no, the colors
are various as the colors
you see
on a neon-lighted pavement
under rain. (mss 562, item 476)

The Virgin of Guadalupe always appears festooned with roses, but roses were associated with Mary long before the Virgin of Guadalupe’s first appearance. Gordon says that for centuries Mary has been known as the “Rosa Mystica” (53). Evidence for this can be found in a fifteenth-century painting by Stephan Lochner, *Madonna and Child in Rose Arbor*. In it, a “rose trellis, symbolizing heavenly joy and delight, stands behind the central figure. The roses in the Madonna’s crown signify divine love, while the brooch, featuring a unicorn, represents maidenly

purity” (199). The presence of the unicorn is particularly significant as we will note later in the section on the religious significance of the unicorn.

Williams and Religious Art

Williams would have been exposed to religious themes and imagery, particularly Catholic themes and imagery, from a very early age because as a child, and often in his later years, he lived with his grandfather, an Episcopal priest so High Church that he was virtually Catholic. Williams said in a 1981 interview, “I was born a Catholic, really. I’m a Catholic by nature. My grandfather was an English Catholic (Anglican), very, very high church. He was higher church than the Pope” (*Conversations* 333). Evidence for this can be found in the way his grandfather remembered events, recalling that his wife was “born on All Souls’ Day and that she died on the Feast of Epiphany” (*Collected Stories* 385). His grandmother had also been influenced by Catholicism. Her parents were German Lutheran emigrants, but they had sent her to school in a Catholic convent (*Collected Stories* 381).

His grandfather was probably also one of the sources of Williams’ knowledge of Christian art, particularly medieval and Renaissance art. Williams and his grandfather took a trip to Europe together when Williams was young, and they spent so much time in the art galleries there that Williams quickly tired of them (*Memoirs* 21). Nevertheless, he was deeply influenced by the symbolism of Christian art, and incorporated these symbols into his own art. For this reason, he speaks of his work as being “full of Christian symbols. Deeply, deeply Christian” (*Conversations* 334). The impact of art on Williams should not be too surprising, given his predisposition toward the visual, which he mentions in his essay “The History of a Play”:
“Writing since I was a child, I had begun to feel a frustrating lack of vitality in words alone. I

wanted a plastic medium. I conceived things visually, in sound and color and movement”
(*Tennessee* 1: 275).

The fact that he includes Mary in his work could be attributed in part to Hart Crane, his favorite poet, who based an entire series of poems on her, but Williams would also have been influenced by the art museum in St. Louis’ Forest Park, mere walking distance from his home (*Selected Letters* 1: 98). It actually features in GM, when Laura developed the habit of frequenting it (155). Fortunately for the impecunious Williams family, admission to the museum has been free since its removal to Forest Park during the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904. It houses rooms of Renaissance and medieval religious art and, naturally, much of this type of art which was on display during Williams’ youth featured depictions of Mary. Laura herself mentions one of these when she tells her mother, “[W]hen you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum!” (155). Many of these objets d’art specifically feature Mary as Madonna, perhaps the inspiration behind Williams’ directing that the lighting on Laura have the “pristine religious quality” of the “light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas” (133-34).

Blue Roses

The color rose is not the only color associated with Laura; after all, her nickname is *Blue* Roses. This is another color linking her to Mary: Blue is even more commonly associated with Mary than the color rose, a fact attested throughout the world in depictions both modern and ancient. In *The Lady and the Unicorn*, Sutherland Lyall says that “in late mediaeval and Renaissance arts it is very obvious who the Virgin is in a painting because she wears a blue cloak” (36). Williams would have had many early opportunities to make the connection between Mary and blue: Several works among the medieval collection of the St. Louis Art Museum

depict a young Mary dressed in blue, and they were acquired early enough so that Williams would have been likely to have seen them—works such as the *Adoration of the Magi*, acquired by the museum in 1926, painted by a follower of Hugo Van der Goes, and the *Marriage of the Virgin*, painted by the Master of 1518, a Flemish artist, acquired in 1929. In the same year, a stained-glass depiction of a blue-robed Mary at the empty tomb was installed in the sanctuary of his grandfather’s church in Clarksdale, MS, which Williams would have had the chance to see during visits.

Marian blue occurs specifically throughout Williams’ work. In *The Rose Tattoo*, the stage directions mention that in the house of Serafina, the protagonist, there is a “little statue of the Madonna in a starry blue robe and gold crown. Before this burns always a vigil light in its ruby glass cup” (2: 270). With the “ruby glass cup,” the color rose is again present, just as it is in the “candle in the ruby glass” in the GM draft mentioned above. Within the play, these images, the blue Madonna and the candle in the ruby cup, are emphasized again and again (2: 315, etc.). Marian blue also appears in a Williams poem entitled “Those Who Ignore the Appropriate Time of Their Going.” A female character “wanders among a multitude of the unsleeping” and implores them “to accept absolution and to be sweetly enfolded / in the blue robe of Mary” (*Collected Poems* 21).

In GM, blue is most obvious in Laura’s nickname, which she and Jim discuss in their first moments alone together in the final scene, but it first appears in the scene moments before. Laura is huddled on the couch beneath the rose-colored lamp, “her feet drawn under her, her head resting on a pale blue pillow, her eyes wide and mysteriously watchful” (207). The drafts reinforce her association with blue. In HRC 17.7, Tom says, “She had on a blue chiffon that belonged to Mother. Through it her shoulders looked like the wings of a sparrow”; in HRC 17.1,

she appears in “her pale blue wrapper, with her soft brown hair hanging about her shoulders, her faint, troubled smile and extraordinary clear eyes.” In the first draft above, the “blue chiffon” belongs to her mother, but we have already seen that in the last act, Amanda and Laura become symbolically parallel to each other, both representing the tragic fate of romantics, reflected in the symbolism Williams assigns them, as both are given this Marian blue; Amanda wears a “blue silk sash” in the last act of *GM* proper (193).

Laura rests her head on a “pale blue pillow” just moments after the “deep blue dusk” has echoed her tumult in scene 6 (205). Ties between her and the sky further reinforce her link to blue, for the blue of the sky in Williams is quite often Marian. In *The Rose Tattoo*, blue is obviously Marian in relation to the Madonna, just as it is in relation to Serafina’s clothes, when she goes to Mass. Father De Leo, a friend, reminds her of when she “dressed in pale blue silk at Mass one Easter morning, yes, like a lady wearing a—piece of the—weather!” (2: 341). The starry sky in the play is spiritual as well: The “night sky [. . .] is like the starry blue robe of Our Lady” (2: 405). In *Summer and Smoke*, a play Williams began in 1945 immediately following *GM*’s big success, he dedicates an entire paragraph of the production notes to the sky, directing that it be the color of the sky in Italy “as it is so faithfully represented in the religious paintings of the Renaissance” (2: 119). Associations between the sky and the color blue are further reinforced in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, another play written at this time. In the final scene, the building where the Kowalskis live “is framed by the sky of turquoise,” and toward the end of this scene, Blanche is handed a “pretty blue jacket” which she insists is “Della Robbia blue. The blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures” (1: 403, 409). The direct source of this color may be housed in the St. Louis Art Museum. During a recent visit, I actually came across a life-sized Della Robbia sculpture of the *Mater Dolorosa*, cloaked in rich blue, acquired in 1932—early

enough for Williams to have seen it. (Williams left home and began his lifetime of wandering in late 1938.)

The Annunciation

Laura is associated with Mary at a very specific point early in her life. Whereas Amanda is compared to Mary as she was when she was older, at the foot of the cross, Laura is compared to her at a younger stage, during the “Annunciation” (178), immediately prior to her conceiving a child by the Holy Spirit, a Mary chaste and sequestered from the world and its influences.

Williams attempts to imbue the latter half of GM with a sense of the Annunciation by charging the atmosphere with mystery, as the characters wish quietly on the moon in scene 5, and as Amanda makes Laura ready for the advent of Jim in a “devout and ritualistic” manner in scene 6 (191). As we have seen, white imagery complements the scene, with the curtains at the window, etc. Preparations seem to be underway for a holy wedding, the union of the queen of heaven with heaven’s king. It may seem strange for Jim to be described in this way, given the recurring links Williams’ symbolism establishes between him and carnality, but Williams introduces this allusion all the same, presumably to give the ending greater emotional force.

Williams was obviously familiar with medieval and Renaissance art and, as a symbolist, he was clearly attracted to the symbolism which pervades it, as we can see from his use of the colors rose and blue. Pat Boulware, collections information assistant at the St. Louis Art Museum, has helped me establish that the museum possessed a number of depictions of the Annunciation which would have been on display during Williams’ childhood and early adulthood. This is significant because Williams seems specifically to have used the Annunciation iconography he would have seen in St. Louis and elsewhere when he was writing the scene of the Annunciation (scene 5), and in the scenes of the following evening (scenes 6 and

7). It may seem strange that he would have included symbols of the Annunciation and Incarnation on an evening following the Annunciation, but in the tradition of art, these two events happen simultaneously, whereas in GM, the Annunciation occurs in scene 5, while the Incarnation—Jim’s arrival—occurs later. My own familiarity with the iconography of religious art, particularly of the Annunciation, is indebted to Gertrud Schiller’s magisterial *Iconography of Christian Art*, in which there is a rather lengthy section dedicated to the Annunciation. The following are the symbols Williams may have drawn from this tradition.

Windows and Wind

One symbol for Jim’s mythic advent into Laura’s soul is the wind blowing through the open windows of the apartment, as we have seen. Jim’s association with wind, breath, and life is supported by the classical tradition; the Greeks had a single word for all three: “πνευμα” or, in the Latin alphabet, “pneuma.” However, there is another use of this Greek word which is germane. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is the “πνευμα ἅγιον” or, often, simply the “πνευμα,” and at times he comes as breath or wind. He came as breath when Jesus breathed on his disciples shortly before the Ascension, telling them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (New International Version, John 20.22). A few weeks later, on Pentecost, he came as wind: “[A] sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where [the believers] were sitting. [. . .] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2.2, 2.4). Earlier, Gabriel made his role in the Annunciation/Incarnation clear, telling Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you”—effecting the Incarnation (Luke 1.35). This in turn influenced the iconography of Christian art, which may well have influenced Williams’ decision to associate Jim’s advent with wind. Williams actually took Greek at Washington University in St. Louis (*Notebooks* 63, 67, etc.). Though he did not do very well in the course, he would not have had to learn much to have

come across this word. He was certainly familiar with Pentecost through his church attendance and his grandfather, and he may well have learned of the symbolism of wind relative to the Annunciation through his exposure to medieval and Renaissance art.

The receptivity of Laura to the influence of the holy is reminiscent of another representative of spirit Williams created just a year or two later—Alma, of *Summer and Smoke*. At the beginning of the play, though she is only ten, “there is a quality of extraordinary delicacy and tenderness or spirituality in her, which must set her distinctly apart from other children. She has a habit of holding her hands, one cupped under the other in a way similar to that of receiving the wafer at Holy Communion. This is a habit that will remain with her as an adult” (2: 125). Her cupped hands work in tandem with the other symbols of receptivity we have discussed in relation to Laura—her wide eyes, the open boxes, open doors, open windows, all characterizing her as the figure in stasis, open to the advent of the holy.

Candles

As Schiller says, candles and candlesticks are often “symbols of Mary or Christ” (50), and they are also traditional symbols of the Annunciation. The tradition of their significance is varied and complex, but in one version, a lamp of three candles is depicted. They are unlit: It is the coming of the Holy Spirit which lights them. In GM, there is a parallel image—the candelabrum, Laura’s symbol, which is holy, taken from a church. Jim is the one who lights these candles, just as he lights her “inwardly with altar candles.”

Glass and Light

Medieval artists, in their depictions of the Annunciation, often included a glass vessel which was full of water, transfixed by a beam of light. The light passes into the water without breaking its glass container, representative of the Holy Spirit’s causing Mary to conceive without

the loss of her virginity. Laura is depicted similarly in GM. As we have seen, she is associated with both glass figures and water contained, with the “bowl of ornaments” in which she washes her glass figures in scene 2 (151). In “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” she “washed and polished” her glass figures “with endless care” (*Collected Stories* 111)—evocative too of the sacrament of baptism, which Amanda refers to directly in scene 7 (232). The vessels of water connote purity, and with the imagery of the Laurine type, characterized by beams of light passing into glass spheres, we have the imagery of the Incarnation almost exactly. This can be seen in Laura as she is described at the beginning of the last act, where we learn that a “fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura: she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light” (191). Later in the act, after she hands Jim her unicorn, a symbol of hers, she says, “Hold him over the light, he loves the light! You see how the light shines through him?” (223). Jim himself is the source of this light; he “lights her inwardly with altar candles” (219).

A Book

In representations of the Annunciation, when Gabriel appears, Mary is typically shown reading a book, often a Bible open to the passage where Isaiah prophesies the Christ’s conception in a virgin, just as the prophecy is being fulfilled. Similarly, a book features prominently in the last act of GM—Laura’s high school yearbook, *The Torch*. Moreover, just as the Spirit fulfills the prophecy in the book Mary is holding, so Jim comes and signs the program in the book Laura holds, a signature she has been wanting for years, another species of fulfillment and an image of consummation. In the drafts, Amanda even refers to this book as being like scripture: In draft fragments of GM, she says to Laura: “The way you pore over that high school yearbook, you’d think it contained the wisdom of the ages!” (HRC 17.5).

Conception

There are several images allusive of holy consummation within the last act of GM, aside from Jim's signing Laura's playbill. To summarize, he brings:

- light to Laura's darkness (via his lighting the candles, both literal and figurative),
- warmth to her coldness (with his comment on her cold hands),
- images to her wide-eyed wonder,
- breath to her breathlessness (via the symbolism of his voice and the wind through the windows),
- music to her silence (he the singer, she the hearer of songs), and
- kisses to her unknissed lips.

Jim figuratively completes Laura while keeping her Marian virginity intact. However, midway through our discussion of GM's religious symbolism, it is important to note that, despite all the religious symbolism, Jim is making Laura more worldly, even as he enters her world and takes on deeply spiritual attributes on a figurative level. She is bringing him into the realm of innocence and imagination, which he responds to avidly, playing with his shadow, and asking about the loneliness of the glass figures. Meanwhile, he introduces her to the temporal realm. The more time she spends with him, the more she seems to emerge from her otherworld, indicated especially by her growing loquacity and her acceptance of Jim's gum, which he casts as an icon of modernity. This reconciliation is particularly clear when he breaks off the horn of the unicorn and kisses Laura—presumably making her feel more at home in this world, “more at home with the other horses, the ones that don't have horns” (226). In our discussion of the symbolism of Jim, we have seen two things happening almost simultaneously. First, Laura comes to see Jim as similar to her, an innocent—Freckles. Simultaneously, however, he is

completely different from her in many ways, and he begins reconciling her to temporality, even as he is cast spiritually. This is how the host of religious imagery in the last act can coexist with the images of vernal fertility, with the sexual metaphor of Jim's coming through Laura's open door, signing her program, and so forth. In spite of the religious symbols featured in this scene, it is important to bear in mind the movement of Laura from an unhealthy sequestration toward congress with a world exterior to the cloisters of her heart. All in all, there are several levels of significance where the events of the narrative are concerned.

Christological Allusion

To return to the religious symbolism of the play, Jim is, on a symbolic plane, all three members of the Godhead: both the divine force which breathes life into Laura (the Father and the Holy Spirit), and the Messiah who is engendered by this process (the Son). The Wingfields most certainly expect him to be their Messiah; in HRC 16.9, Williams explicitly asserts that the preparations for Jim's coming "are suitable only to something of the magnitude of a President's visit or even another Messiah" (description of "The Gentleman Caller"). In HRC 17.2, Amanda becomes excited at the prospect of Jim's coming, and Tom responds, "The way you act, you'd think it was Christ's Second Coming!" (drafts of "The Gentleman Caller"). Finally, in the drafts of the play at the HNOG, Tom asserts that the narrative concerns only one thing regarding the Wingfields: "The coming into their scene of a gentleman caller: / his annunciation: / his advent: / that is all..."

One of Jim's first tasks as Laura's savior, we have come to understand, is to bring her into the modern world by helping her to speak, loosing her from the quietness that binds her by giving her a piece of gum, a symbol of modernity, inasmuch as Jim associates it with all things modern. Surprisingly, this is actually an element of Communion. Because Williams was raised

as an Episcopalian, the experience of the Eucharist would have been very central for him. Also heavily influenced by Catholicism, which places even more emphasis on Communion, it was an experience he was particularly drawn to. In a 1965 interview, he admits, “I’m not a Catholic myself, but I love the Catholic mass” (*Conversations* 109). Evidence for this can be found in the drafts of GM. In HRC 17.2’s drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” Amanda claims to have been so exhausted by her gentlemen callers that “father once had to give me a half a glass of the sacramental wine. To pull me back together!” In GM proper, Jim comes to Laura with other elements of the Mass—wine, and even the candelabrum from the altar of an old Episcopalian church. All that is lacking is the wafer, which he introduces by way of the gum. Just as Christ brought the elements of the first Mass to his disciples, and just as—in the Catholic tradition—we are brought salvation by means of the wine and bread (in part), so Jim is bringing salvation to Laura by means of the wine and this token of modernity which is redeeming her from her unhealthy seclusion. Laura’s reticent receptivity in this matter further reinforces the other images of her openness—her large eyes, her letting Jim through the door of her home, and the imagery of the open windows. Alma of *Summer and Smoke*, a character Williams created a year or two later, parallels this receptivity, as we have seen.

The Hortus Conclusus

In the Middle Ages, one of the most common means for representing the Annunciation/Incarnation was the depiction of Mary in an enclosed garden, full of flowers. This is known as the “hortus conclusus” tradition, Latin for “enclosed garden.” It originally came from a centuries-old tradition of reading Song of Solomon allegorically, particularly 4.12, which reads: “You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; / you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.” In the Middle Ages, the bride of the poem was seen as being Mary, the groom as God, and the

wall enclosing her as her virginity. This visual motif—a young woman in a walled garden—eventually came to dominate depictions of Mary in Christian iconography. Moreover, Williams was almost certainly familiar with this tradition: Late in his career, he used this very verse in *The Two-Character Play*, featuring a brother and sister, strongly reminiscent of Williams and his sister Rose. The epigraph reads: “‘A garden enclosed is my sister...’ / *Song of Solomon*, 4:12” (5: 303).

When Williams wished to convey the innocence of Laura, he turned to this tradition, evoked when she seeks out the park during her wanderings and visits the “Jewel Box,” “that big glass house where they raise tropical flowers.” It is also evoked in earlier versions of GM, which allude to Jim’s introduction into Laura’s garden on a figurative level. In HRC 17.7, when Laura opens up to Jim and begins to speak, the narrator says, “[The] quality of thin, transparent glass was in my sister’s speech. A gentle tinkling of pendants in the sunlight. Rainbow colored prisms of girlish laughter. Pauses. Soft beginnings. Graceful endings. . . . The hard iron gates of isolation which she had lived behind came open on a secret garden.” This passage casts Jim as walking directly into the Laura’s Laurine-type otherworld, and it is doing so in language reflecting the Song of Solomon tradition.

Williams’ familiarity with this iconography could have begun during one of his frequent visits to New York City. He was often there; in 1942, he reports making his eighth trip (*Notebooks* 331). With his attraction to religious art, he would have been particularly drawn to the Metropolitan’s medieval art museum, The Cloisters, which opened in 1938. Most intriguing of all, he would have had access by 1942 to the “Unicorn Tapestries,” one of the most popular attractions at the museum, and one which had only recently been acquired. These tapestries

illustrate in great detail the medieval iconography of the unicorn in the *hortus conclusus*—the enclosed garden.

The Unicorn in the *Hortus Conclusus*

The unicorn in the *hortus conclusus* is central to the iconography of the Annunciation. However, the unicorn and the unicorn hunt were not always associated with religious themes. The unicorn hunt as a secular occupation is far older in the history of art. In the early Middle Ages, when many believed in the actual existence of unicorns, it was thought that they could only be captured by a virgin. A unicorn, seeing a virgin, would immediately become tame and approach her, resting its head in her lap, after which the animal could be captured. Later in the Middle Ages, artists began depicting the unicorn hunt allegorically. Traditions varied, but in the primary version, the virgin came to represent Mary, the only one holy enough to induce the white unicorn, Christ, to dwell with men, obviously evocative of the Incarnation generally. As time progressed, it came to represent a specific point in the Incarnation: its inception, the Annunciation.

Jim as Unicorn

In GM, the ancient allegory of the Virgin capturing the unicorn is enacted before our eyes, and symbolically speaking, it is happening in the *hortus conclusus* of Laura's soul, consistent with the ancient tradition. Just as the unicorn is attracted to the innocence of the Virgin, so Jim is attracted to Laura, evident as he learns how singular she is, by her reserved nature and childlike relationship with her glass companions. Like Christ, Jim himself reveals an innocence to some extent, by becoming a child with Laura, playing with his shadows, and conducting himself in a manner sympathetic to her relationship with her glass figures. Until the

final moments, it appears that, like the Virgin, she has lured this unicorn into the enclosures of her heart.

Furthermore, within the tradition of the unicorn hunt, there was often an element of deception, even after it began to be interpreted allegorically. Typically the unicorn is unaware that he is about to be snared. Lyall says that “simply as a virgin, the Lady has the power to tame the savage beast, to lull it into a sense of security in which it may be captured” (8). This deception is evoked in GM when Tom confides to Amanda that Jim is unaware of their “dark ulterior motives.” Later, Amanda even speaks of Laura’s being a “pretty trap.”

Laura as Unicorn

As the play unfolds, though, it becomes clear that Jim is no unicorn, no messiah, despite what the Wingfields had hoped. It is Laura who is the unicorn, consistent with another version of the medieval tradition. Though the unicorn was often associated with Christ, it was commonly the Virgin herself, with its whiteness representative of her innocence and purity. In GM, the event linking Laura most strongly to the unicorn occurs when she shows Jim the unicorn and he responds, “Unicorns—aren’t they extinct in the modern world?” Laura and her type are precisely the ones becoming extinct in the modern world. She is about as rare as a unicorn, which is made explicit in drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” (HRC 17.2), where Laura says, “I’m like the unicorn, just one of a kind that doesn’t exist anymore except in the Limberlost.” In HRC 17.7’s drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” Tom observes that his sister had “[t]he quality of a delicate piece of glass, the unicorn of sapphire who lived with the horses after his kind were vanished.” Finally, in HRC 17.3, Laura shows Jim the unicorn, and associates it with Marian innocence, explaining that it is a “horse with a horn that doesn’t exist

anymore. In the grown-up world. He lived when the world was—younger. Now he's—what do you call it?

JIM. —Extinct?

LAURA. [*sadly*]—*Extinct!*
Extinct—like me!

JIM. Why do you say *you*?

LAURA. Because I'm a horse with a horn! Ha-ha! I'm a unicorn horse that doesn't exist anymore!

In GM proper, Laura's identification with the unicorn is confirmed for the last time when Jim breaks off its horn; obviously it is ultimately Laura who is broken. This too is consistent with the medieval tradition: The unicorn often has its horn shorn off after being brought into captivity, which destroys its power: After all, as Schiller says, the horn is the "sign and seat of the creature's supernatural power" (53). In GM, the breaking of the horn initially seems merely to indicate that she has been snared by this cunning man, cast as a positive thing. Nevertheless, in time, it becomes clear that she has been broken completely, destroyed, a victim of the fate of all nonconformists in the modern world. This concludes (for the most part) our discussion of religious symbolism in GM. We will now return to the last act.

Reconciliation of Opposites

Above, we discussed briefly how Laura is being drawn into the temporal world, even as Jim is associated with images of the eternal, a critical indication of the way the two complement each other. Thompson expresses this well:

Jim's breaking of the unicorn, medieval symbol of chastity and innocence, [. . .] signals the beginning of Laura's healthy sexual and emotional development and the divestment of her symbolic dimensions as virgin, saint, and child. As the unicorn divested of its horn is now "just like all the other horses" (p. 226), so Laura no longer feels freakish and estranged from vital human experience. [. . .] Laura's emergence into Jim's world of dynamic optimism is dramatically

expressed by her cavalier reaction to the broken unicorn, her private world of imaginary animals having become less important than the real one of human relationships. (*Tennessee* 22)

Jim too is transformed: “Just as Laura’s sexuality is awakened by Jim’s natural exuberance, so his finer sensibilities are aroused by Laura’s vulnerability and virginal beauty. Thus, for the brief moment of their kiss, the symbolic fusion of experience and innocence, flesh and spirit, or reality and dream is achieved” (22).

“Oriflamme”

This emergence of Laura’s, a representative of spirit, into the realm of experience and carnality is closely paralleled by the experiences of Anna, the protagonist of a short story Williams wrote as he was composing GM, entitled “The Red Part of a Flag” and later published as “Oriflamme.” Actually, many of the symbols we have discussed reappear in the person of Anna. Her spirituality is represented symbolically by the color white, the same blue-white we have seen associated with the unicorn in GM drafts: Her body “was white but not white. It was blue spilled delicately over white” (*Collected Stories* 129). Significantly, there are also “glints of silver and rose.” The rose here, decidedly not Marian, signifies the strains of carnality which are rising up in her. This is further reflected by a decision she makes: She has been sick for weeks, but suddenly feeling full of life, she immediately leaves the house and begins walking, indulging in an impulse toward flux. When she first woke up, sensing that her transcendent feeling “couldn’t be trusted” to her friends, she decided not to try to express it to them, and turned away from the phone (128). The telephone had “warned her against” such “speech,” a clear instance of her association with private/artistic textuality (129). As she walks, she reminisces about a representative of flesh, the only person who ever learned of the rose-colored tints of her flesh, of the strains of carnality within her—a “red-faced boy” whom she met at a high school dance, who

had given her body the same rush she is feeling now. They had first danced together in their school's "yellow gymnasium" under "beautiful paper lanterns"—with the gold typical of past-oriented otherworlds, and the paper lanterns characteristic of Laurine types. This "red boy" led her to the locker room and gave her a riot of sensations as "his hands explored her body" (130).

Laura Drawn into Public Textuality

In the passage above, Anna maintains her private textuality, so that she is becoming more like Tom of GM, a representative of flesh who is characterized by private—or artistic—textuality. However, Laura is being drawn toward Jim, and her transformation entails a reconciliation with public textuality, as she is coaxed from her silence and into the broader world of words. Thomas Van Laan speaks of this, identifying Jim's encouraging her to "talk more freely and self-expressively than ever before," so that by the end, when she reassures Jim after his breaking her unicorn, her voice is not that of a "shy girl, withdrawn from reality and obsessed with a grossly inferior substitute for genuine experience. It is, rather, the voice of someone wholly at ease with reality and quite capable of accepting the less pleasant facts of life" (248).

Laura's reconciliation with public textuality is figuratively underscored here in the last act, where lips, the mouth, and speaking are repeatedly emphasized. First they page through their yearbook together, recalling Jim's voice, as we hear offstage the sea chantey he once sang, and they discuss his lead role in their high school's operetta. Jim asks permission to smoke in her presence, and later he offers her a "mint," a "[p]eppermint," a "[l]ife [s]aver"—constantly emphasizing the mouth. He talks to Laura about self-confidence and public speaking, and earlier in the act, he offers Tom a "bill of sale"; the imagery of textuality is everywhere. Finally, and most significantly, he kisses her on the lips, the ultimate symbol of his endowing her with speech.

Jim is bringing Laura into the world of words and, as we have seen, there is promise that he is bringing her out of the past and into the future (as Hadrian does Matilda). In the last act, there is an event where both of these transformations—her modernization and her entrance into the public world of words—are signified. In the final scene, he offers her gum, figuratively offering to help her loosen her tongue and join the verbal flow of the quotidian. When she turns down his offer, he proceeds to describe the gum as an icon of the march toward the future, associating it with the Wrigley Building and—indirectly—with the types of items on display in the city where the building was built—those at Chicago’s Century of Progress exhibition. Almost immediately thereafter, when he calls her an “old-fashioned type of girl,” she requests the gum, signaling both her eagerness to join the future and her willingness to participate in the larger verbal world, to close the distance between her and those characterized by public textuality. The marriage of past and present is being effected.

We have already seen how spiritual and secular symbols are found in this last act, side by side—particularly with Jim’s association with the symbols of Christ, even while he draws her out of the atemporal, toward the temporal. It will come as no surprise, then, that he is becoming her word messiah relative to public textuality. He is the one who will pierce her solitude. He comes in accompanied by a mighty rushing wind, and just as it was during Pentecost, so is it here: Jim brings speech to Laura, just as the Holy Spirit caused the believers to speak in new languages, so that everyone outside the building, in downtown Jerusalem, people from all over the world, could both hear and understand them—public textuality (Acts 2). Jim comes in bringing tongues of fire, lighting Laura’s altar candles, and inspiring her to speak so that she is verbally joined to the outside world.

Moreover, in the last act, this messiah is essentially giving her Communion. He has already brought the wine, and the candelabrum from a church altar, and the sacrament is made complete by his offering her the gum, which stands in as the symbol of the body of the Lord—the wafer. Just as Christ gave his body to his disciples via the elements of Communion, so Jim is giving Laura his body—his textuality, his ties to the present and future, and above all, his corporeality, in contradistinction to her silence, her orientation toward the past, and her spirituality. Afterwards, when they begin discussing their attending high school, Jim asks, “But we did have a speaking acquaintance, huh?” Laura responds, “Yes, we—spoke to each other.” This is remarkable after the absolute predominance of symbolism casting her as listener and him as speaker. Since being given the sacramental wafer—the gum—her tongue is being loosed. She is speaking comfortably, almost as comfortably as he. When he eventually asks her why she did not say anything when she let him in, she replies “breathlessly,” “I didn’t know what to say, I was too—surprised!” However, this reserved stage she evinced earlier is for the most part behind her. Later, the promise of their union grows even greater as he encourages her growing loquaciousness while simultaneously repudiating the textuality of her imagined rival, his former girlfriend, denigrating her textual production—her claim regarding their engagement—as “propaganda.” Comically, just as Laura is entering the broader world of words, Jim is moving in the opposite direction, as he comes up against something eternal in her, something ineffable. He actually becomes tongue tied: “You make me feel sort of—I don’t know how to put it! I’m usually pretty good at expressing things, but—this is something that I don’t know how to say!”

There are other images reinforcing his bringing her out in the last act aside from her advance into public textuality. For instance, we have seen that originally he was in the “limelight” while she sat in darkness, gazing upon his brilliance. However, not content to let

these differences stand, he encourages her to leave the darkness of her reclusive existence by asking her to join him in the “limelight”—and she accepts.

Freakish / Normal / Special

Laura is as different from the rest of humanity as the unicorn is different from the horses of her glass collection. Examining the unicorn, Jim perceptively suspects that it “must feel sort of lonesome,” presumably because it is different from the others. She laughs and says she never hears him complain. However, despite what she says regarding her symbol, it appears that she, at least, does seem to feel lonely, based on her whole-hearted emotional and physical response to Jim’s presence. Amazingly, instead of trying to eradicate all these differences completely, he spends the next few moments transforming her from feeling “freakish” to feeling normal, and then to feeling special. First, he addresses her feelings of freakishness. She believes that her limp is a wall which bars her from the world at large. Physically, it is, for her, the horn of the unicorn. In response, he assures her that *everyone* has a limp, their own, peculiar problems. She and he are similar precisely because he too has had problems, but that he has compensated for these by discovering positive things which distinguish him—for example, his voice and his aptitude for public speaking and science. He then invites her to dance, which is calculated to tear down the barriers between her and the rest of the world, bringing her into contact with reality and—corporeally—him. She initially turns him down because she insists she does not know how, but he says, “There you go, that inferiority stuff!” Gradually, he helps her to relax, to relinquish her iciness and warm to his presence completely. As this occurs, her feelings of freakishness melt away as the horn from her unicorn is literally snapped off, as they dance. Though this is initially disappointing, she almost immediately realizes that this will make the unicorn feel as she is beginning to feel—not so “freakish,” relievedly “just like all the other

horses” (226). In the acting version, she almost passes over the event without comment. The music comes to an end when it is broken, but the dialogue continues almost without a pause.

With her feelings of freakishness removed, he begins telling her how she is not just normal—she is special: “[O]ther people are not such wonderful people. They’re one hundred times one thousand. You’re one times one! They walk all over the earth. You just stay here. They’re common as—weeds, but—you—well, you’re—*Blue Roses!*” It is at this point, as he is valuing her for being a unicorn of sorts and attempting to instill this pride in her, that he kisses her. Knowing as we do that this act will ultimately shatter her when he later tells her of Betty, it is hard not to see the event teleologically, as evil in and of itself. However, bear in mind the emotional response of an audience seeing this event for the first time. At this point there is every indication that Jim and Laura’s coming together is a beautiful thing, the answer to prayers both spoken and unspoken. First audiences usually see it as such, and Williams was probably writing principally for them.

The Perfect Otherworldly Companion

Just before the kiss, immediately after the dance, she calls him “Freckles”—and there is a world of significance in the appellation. Just as she is leaving her isolation, he has, for her, fully entered into her otherworld. He has taken on the qualities of the ideal spiritual companion she has envisioned for so long. Speaking of this scene in “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” the narrator says they

danced round and around the small steam-heated parlor, bumping against the sofa and chairs and laughing loudly and happily together. Something opened up in my sister’s face. To say it was love is not too hasty a judgment, for after all he had freckles and that was what his folks called him. Yes, he had undoubtedly assumed the identity—for all practical purposes—of the one-armed orphan youth who lived in the Limberlost, that tall and misty region to which she retreated whenever the walls of Apartment F became too close to endure. (*Collected Stories* 117)

So many events in this act serve to transport them to an otherworld and effect an atmosphere of magic. When Laura produces their old high school yearbook and hands it to him, “[t]hey smile across the book with mutual wonder.” This moment is lit by the candelabrum Amanda brought them, evoking the romantic past. When Laura reveals that she has spent the last few years in a relationship with glass figures, Jim responds in sympathy with her innocence, asking if the glass unicorn does not get lonely. Afterwards, he becomes as innocent as she, playing with his shadow on the wall. By joining in the fun rather than ridiculing her, the mood remains magical; his innocence accords perfectly with her otherworld. For his part, he speaks of the marvels of the modern age, which are magical: As Amanda says earlier, “We live in such a mysterious universe, don’t we? Some people say that science clears up all the mysteries for us. In my opinion it only creates more!” Amanda’s daughter responds to science and technology similarly: She is transfixed, “even her shyness eclipsed in her absolute wonder.” Finally, as he is drawing her into the real world, he is imaginatively drawn into her fantasy world as they pretend to be at a formal dance. Spirit and flesh have been reconciled and her spiritual companion, Freckles, is now incarnate.

The Kiss and *You Touched Me!*

The two then kiss, the most tangible emblem of the joining of two sovereign worlds, terrestrial and celestial. He kisses her to bring her into the real world, even as she has brought him into an enchanting, imaginary world. The kiss is an instance of one of Williams’ most important metaphors, that of touch, which he may have taken from the D.H. Lawrence story “You Touched Me,” the basis for the play. There, Matilda inadvertently touches Hadrian’s forehead one night, and the entire course of the narrative changes as a result. Touch in Williams is a metaphor for the onset of a relationship where spirit and flesh are in balance. Though

representatives of spirit and flesh are often in conflict, at times they unite, so that the representative of spirit becomes willing to accept the carnal component of a relationship, and the representative of flesh becomes willing to connect on a deeper level than just the physical.

Williams is not always a believer that such profound communion between people is possible. In an earlier play, *Battle of Angels*, he gives Val, the protagonist, lines he would continue to quote for the rest of his life:

VAL. How do you get to know people? I used to think you did it by touching them with your hands. But later I found out that only made you more of a stranger than ever. Now I know that *nobody* ever gets to *know* anybody.

MYRA. Nobody ever gets to *know* anybody?

VAL. No. Don't you see how it is? We're all of us locked up tight inside our own bodies. Sentenced—you might say—to solitary confinement inside our own skins. (1: 50)

Elsewhere, Williams reaffirms his belief in the impossibility of true contact, of truly breaking down the walls between one's cell and another's. In a later essay, "Person-to-Person," he describes this as "a lonely idea, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don't. And so we talk to each other, write and wire each other, call each other short and long distance across land and sea, clasp hands with each other at meeting and at parting, fight each other and even destroy each other because of this always somewhat thwarted effort to break through walls to each other" (*Where I Live* 93).

At other times, however, he seems to believe that true contact is possible. Actually, it would appear that this is the very reason for his drive to write plays: In the final lines of his essay "History of a Play," he says, "I have never for one moment doubted that there are people—millions!—to say things to. We come to each other, gradually, but with love. It is the short

reach of my arms that hinders, not the length and multiplicity of theirs. With love and with honesty, the embrace is inevitable” (*Tennessee* 1: 286).

In an interview with Studs Terkel, he mentions such contact in the context of the symbolism of his plays:

[T]he drama in my plays, I think, is nearly always people trying to reach each other. In *Night of the Iguana*, each one has his separate cubicle but they meet on the veranda outside the cubicles, at least Hannah and Larry Shannon meet on the veranda outside their cubicles, which is of course an allegorical touch of what people must try to do. It’s true they’re confined inside their own skins, or their own cubicles, but they must try to get out as much as—they must try to find a common ground on which they can meet because the only truly satisfying moments in life are those in which you are in contact, and I don’t mean just physical contact, I mean in deep, a deeper contact than physical, with some other human being. (*Conversations* 86-87)

Such profound contact is something he admits witnessing in his maternal grandparents’ relationship with each other. They were “so close together they were like one person,” he adds. “They remained so close they were like that old Greek legend, [. . .] Baucis and Philemon, yes, that’s what they were like, and it’s been a great inspiration to me” (87). In legend, Baucis and Philemon were an elderly couple who were transformed into a pair of intertwining trees, so that they were in deep contact—in Williams’ words, “one person.” Their solitary confinement was certainly at an end.

In Williams, characters representing spirit and flesh often come close to being reconciled, but they usually fall short in the end, as with Alma (spirit) and John (flesh) of *Summer and Smoke*, and Brick (spirit) and Margaret (flesh) of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The only contact made is between the audience and (perhaps) Williams. However, contact does take place in some plays, as in *You Touched Me!*, between Matilda (spirit) and Hadrian (flesh); in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, between Stella (spirit) and Stanley (flesh); and here, however briefly, between Laura and Jim.

Stairs to the Roof

As Jim and Laura make contact, entering each other's respective worlds, it becomes clear how parallel they are to the two protagonists at the end of *Stairs to the Roof*. Ben and Girl's final moments together are just as childlike and magical as they are in GM: Alluding to *Alice in Wonderland*, she calls him Rabbit, while he calls her Alice (*Stairs* 90). Just as Jim is moving into Laura's otherworld, so Ben is moving into Girl's: Girl says that wherever man and woman meet, the place "becomes Wonderland to the woman the very instant that she can stretch out her hands and with the tips of her fingers touch the tips of his!"—evoking the metaphor of touch we are discussing (91). For his part, Ben is as eager to redeem her as Jim is eager to redeem Laura. "What a little idealist you are," Ben says. "You almost make me think it might be worth my while."

GIRL. [*scattering grain*]: Worth your while to do what?

BEN. To undertake your further emancipation. (91)

Glass Figure Broken

Obviously there are very strong indications that men and women have considerable potential for bringing balance to one another, especially men hoping they will be able to save the female characters from distancing themselves from reality. Ultimately, of course, Jim destroys Laura rather than saving her, revealing that the hope they had invested in him was misplaced. Though the kiss was the culmination of so much that was foretold in Laura's symbolism, everything falls apart thereafter. The kiss—the touch, the symbol of the reconciliation of spirit and flesh, the end of the solitary confinement to which Laura had been sentenced—proves to be illusory, and she is abandoned to her isolation, like Blanche, like Brick.

Jim had been drawing her into public textuality as he bolstered her confidence, and she had responded by emerging from her shell and speaking freely. This is why it is so devastating

when he then tells her he will not be relieving her of her private textuality in the future— “I can’t take down your number and say I’ll phone. I can’t call up next week and—ask for a date” (229). Regressing to her former state, she is wordless again after he tells her about Betty. He emphasizes this regression: “I wish that you would—say something” (230). She says nothing, however, and she will say only three more words for the remainder of the play, another indication of the finality with which she is returning to her otherworld.

Failed Marriage of Past and Present

When Amanda joins the young couple after the kiss, she refers to them as “[y]ou modern young people.” It is a shock to hear Laura referred to in this way; Amanda clearly thinks the marriage has taken place and that Laura has been brought into the modern world. However, as we know, she is tragically mistaken, and what C. W. E. Bigsby has said of Blanche could be applied to Laura, that “being denied the vivifying effect of marriage to the future, she is trapped in the past” (“Tennessee” 50). On a deeper level, Jim, who is within the flux of time, had been bringing Laura into this flow, away from the stasis of relative atemporality, the shore she is stranded on. When they first begin talking, he speaks of all the changes in his life, that he is fighting to get ahead, that he is taking public speaking, etc.—solidly within the flow of time, with all the changes he is effecting, and with his determination to remain a going concern, to thrive in the here and now. However, Laura makes it clear that time has stood still for her since high school. She has primarily been in the atemporal world of her glass figures, and for the most part, there has been no change. Like the denizens of the Paradise Dance Hall, she is living “without any change or adventure” (179). She had been responding with every inch of her being to his attempts to bring her out of this atemporal realm. However, as is typically the case in Williams, temporality shatters atemporality, and flux destroys static figures. This is all

encapsulated in the tragic musical theme of GM, which Williams describes in the production notes: “When you look at a piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken. Both of those ideas should be woven in to the recurring tune, which dips in and out of the play as if it were carried on a wind that changes.” The wind here is time, the flux of time, which changes things—with destructive ramifications.

In the last scene, other instances of symbolism become dark as well. Just as vernal warmth increases to the point where it incinerates romantics like Laura—as we have seen relative to the falling fire—so the wind which is breathing life into Laura grows stronger to the point that it leaves nothing but shards of her vitreous existence. HRC 17.2’s drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” reinforce this. Laura says, “The wind has blown over the shelves! My glass is broken! All of my little pieces of glass are broken!”

MRS. W: Laura, Laura, Laura!
Don’t cry, little sister, don’t cry!

LAURA. I’m not crying, Mother.
I knew. I always knew.

Violent Juxtaposition

The image of the light and dark sides of the moon, the symbolism of transcendence and death in horrifying juxtaposition which often pervades Williams’ work, appears here in the last scene of GM: “There is a steady murmur of rain, but it is slackening and stops soon after the scene begins; the air outside becomes pale and luminous as the moon breaks out.” The night before, the moon had appeared in a context which was just as magical, yet just as touched with destruction, as Tom speaks of Paradise Dance Hall, with its “brief, deceptive rainbows” concealing the doom which is building just overhead: “Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain’s umbrella. [. . .] All the world was waiting

for bombardments!” In scene 7, this fire actually falls, and it does so, typically, in the ironic context of the beauty of the moon which appears with sublime indifference to the suffering taking place beneath it. Like Williams’ “violent juxtaposition” of moral values in GM (flesh and spirit), there is a similar juxtaposition of emotions at the conclusion of the play. Much of the power in Williams derives from this irony.

Here it is very palpably in the foreground. Elation and destruction—the symbolism of the moon—are evoked in the context of Jim’s enthusiastically speaking of Betty, devastating Laura all the while (229-30). As soon as Laura understands the truth about his and Betty’s relationship, she is crushed—and at this very moment we hear “another gay laugh in the kitchen” from Amanda (229). Happiness and death are further juxtaposed when Amanda enters the room “brightly” a few moments later, commenting on the fact that the “moon’s so pretty” (231, 232). Ironically, as she speaks of the beauty of both the moon and Jim and Laura’s new relationship, so paradisiacal, so full of promise, her daughter is reduced to the ashes of annihilation.

Another juxtaposition of beauty and destruction occurs immediately after Jim looks at Amanda and says “Betty!”: “The band at the Paradise Dance Hall goes into a tender waltz” and there is an “ominous cracking sound in the sky.” He adds that Betty is “just a girl. The girl I go steady with! [*He smiles charmingly. The sky falls.*]” The legend on the screen reads: “The Sky Falls” (233). Beauty—the “tender waltz”—and destruction are juxtaposed as the “sky falls.” Powerfully, Amanda does not react negatively to the news. She contains *within herself* both the light and dark sides of the moon, with the transcendence of Southern charm on the outside, and complete desolation on the inside. Though she has just been devastated, she persists in retaining her politeness, wishing him “luck—and happiness—and success! All three of them, and so does Laura! Don’t you, Laura?” Laura: “Yes!”

Certainly, the audience experiences dramatic irony intensely at this point, knowing the desolation Jim is causing, though he is oblivious. This is magnified still further after Jim expresses his gratitude for the evening; Amanda replies, “It really wasn’t anything at all” Jim then speaks of his need to leave immediately to meet Betty, and she responds: “Yes, I know—the tyranny of women!” (234). She then calls Tom in, and though she knows him to be ignorant of Jim’s fiancée, as Jim has just explained, she pretends that Tom knew all about it and accuses him of playing a trick on them—the irony of her accusing him in a polite, playful tone of something deeply malicious. Tom is harrowed by the suggestion as the audience is harrowed by her genteel viciousness. The grinding intensity of the climax is being fuelled by the juxtaposition of both emotions and facts, the source of the irony. The whole is becoming a mass of illusion while death waits outside the door: Tom rushes out of the apartment and is confronted, full in the face, by the moon which “breaks through the storm clouds, illuminating his face”—a final image of the juxtaposition of forces here.

Immediately after Jim tells Laura of Betty, before Amanda’s entrance, there is moonlight in Laura as well, a sense that her cheerfulness is juxtaposed with immense internal psychological devastation. When she “bites her lip which was trembling and then bravely smiles,” and gently “places the unicorn in the palm of his hand, then pushes his fingers closed upon it,” her gentleness and smile conceal oceans of desolation, as she turns to her Victrola immediately afterwards and winds it up (231). The sense is the same a few moments later, when she wishes him luck, happiness, and success, and then crouches beside the “Victrola to wind it” (234). A deep—and this time, irreparable—fracture has formed between her and reality, the Victrola a sign that she is turning with chilling finality to her otherworld. Reality has destroyed her, so she is rejecting it forever. The production notes speak of Amanda’s failure to “establish contact with

reality,” and that “Laura’s situation is even graver,” that her “separation [from reality] increases” to the point that she is unable to re-establish contact with it—a prediction fully realized here in the last act (129).

Schizophrenia: The Sealing of the Sphere

GM proper differs from many earlier versions of the narrative precisely in this matter of Laura’s return. In older drafts, she apparently never leaves her otherworld at all, so that the climax is not as emotionally violent. For instance, in “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” Laura hardly seems affected by Jim’s confession and sudden departure: “Wasn’t he nice?” she asks. “And all those freckles!” (*Collected Stories* 118). Unfazed, she merely fits him into her otherworld, without ever truly entering the real world. Her emphasis on his freckles is significant, a sign that she assumes that the Freckles of her fantasies has made a temporary visit to her in earthly form. Earlier in the story, Tom says he would often approach Laura and find the novel *Freckles* in her lap. She would then

gravely remark that Freckles was having some trouble with the foreman of the lumber camp or that he had just received an injury to his spine when a tree fell on him. She frowned with genuine sorrow when she reported these misadventures of her story-book hero, possibly not recalling how successfully he came through them all, that the injury to the spine fortuitously resulted in the discovery of rich parents and that the bad-tempered foreman had a heart of gold at the end of the book. (113)

Later in the story, Freckles discovers love—he ultimately becomes “involved in romance with a girl he called The Angel”—but Laura merely “stopped reading when this girl became too prominent in the story” rather than accepting her existence. There is a sense that this is what occurs on a literal level in the short story, that Laura has begun treating reality as she treats the fictional world she inhabits, which she feels free to manipulate, halting or reversing time at will. In HRC 17.1, drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” make this explicit: She responds to Jim’s

confession regarding Betty by identifying her with “The Angel.” Then, just as in her private reading of the novel, she rejects the narrative she is faced with and returns, in her mind, to the time when she was unaware of any affiliation between Jim and another girl. She does not like reality, so she alters it to suit her. In GM, Laura does emerge from her otherworld, but she seems to be returning to the same otherworld that the Laura of “Portrait” enjoys, evinced by her preternatural smile. Heretofore, we have seen that many characters in Williams inhabit the Laurine type, an inner world associated with the imagery of a glass sphere which they have entered, forsaking the real world. In the last act, it appears as if Laura is returning to—and being sealed in—this sphere.

I have called this withdrawal a species of death, which is precisely how Williams saw the growing schizophrenia of his own sister, Rose. In 1937, he wrote in his journal, “Tragedy. I write that word knowing the full meaning of it. We have had no deaths in our family but slowly by degrees something was happening much uglier and more terrible than death. Now we are forced to see it, know it. The thought is an aching numbness—a horror! I am having final exams but can’t study. Her presence in the house is a—” (*Selected Letters* 1: 93). His mother also referred to Rose’s schizophrenia as a type of death:

It is sad to see a loved one die physically. But I think it even sadder to see a loved one die spiritually and mentally. I had to watch this in Rose. They say a flowering tree is most beautiful the year before it dies and it seemed the last year Rose spent at home, dying spiritually, when I was fighting to keep her out of a sanitarium, she never looked more beautiful. Her face held a faraway expression as she sat on the ground for hours, her lovely eyes reflecting the blue of the sky, that cloud of auburn hair falling softly around her shoulders. (E. Williams 87)

This casts a particularly tragic light on the vernal atmosphere of the last act of GM, where it is Laura who is associated with floral imagery. Death is also evoked by the Dickinson poem Williams quotes at the beginning of the last act, as we have noted.

Bert Cardullo, in his essay “The Blue Rose of St. Louis,” says, “‘The accent of a coming foot,’ is, of course, Jim’s, but it is also that of the Grim Reaper, who awaits Laura, his ‘friend,’ in ‘the very nearest room’” (88). Tragically, when Laura admits Jim into her heart, she invites not felicity but doom. This same sense of doom can be detected in a letter Rose wrote to Williams from the institution where she lived, further establishing the association between schizophrenia and death:

If we have to die I want to be cremated my ashes put in with yours.
Go to Church for the sacrament & pray for your sister’s body that it will
become thin & strong & given a husband as good as I am.
If I die you will know that I miss you 24 hours a day.
“Sweet Heart If you Should Stay a Million Miles Away I’ll Always Be in Love
With You!” (qtd. in Leverich 508)

The Eucharist

Rose’s letter juxtaposes the Eucharist—the “sacrament”—with her body in the context of death. In the final scenes of GM, Laura suffers a species of death, so that when Amanda re-enters with fruit punch and macaroons, she is, in effect, bringing in pieces of Laura herself—the elements of the Eucharist, as it were. This allusion becomes clearer when we look at the drafts, which are explicitly replete with such imagery. In HRC 16.5’s drafts of GM, he uses it sardonically: The narrator mentions the local cinema’s enabling glamorous actresses to pass “without stain” through the sordid neighborhoods surrounding Tom’s St. Louis home. The tone is even more bitter in HRC 17.7’s drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass,” where the narrator says,

The only brilliance that stained our block was that which spilled around the corner from Grand Avenue on which were located most of the first run movie-houses. Within the bastard elegance of these temples there was performed for twelve hours daily a miracle of transubstantiation by which the holy and luminous flesh of such idols as Hedy Lamarr or Tyrone Power or Betty Grable was turned into spiritual wafers and wine for the people. I partook of this sacrament almost nightly while I was staying at home, during the three years following my graduation from high-school until my escape from St. Louis.

Clearly Williams had this imagery in mind when he was completing GM proper, for we have precisely such “wafers and wine” in the last act of GM. As we have seen, they first appear at the beginning of scene 7, and they reappear at its end, as Amanda brings in the fruit punch and macaroons, simultaneously mentioning another sacrament, that of baptism. Accidentally spilling lemonade on herself, she exclaims, “Oooo! I’m baptizing myself!” (232). That she is, at this point, holding the sacrament of Communion in her hands is indicated in the drafts, where, in addition to macaroons, we have the “wafers” mentioned above: “Mother returned to the room with some lemonade in a cut-glass pitcher and a rose-colored, gold-bordered plate of wafers and macaroons” (HRC 17.7, drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass”). Williams was so determined to include wafers here that elsewhere in this folder Amanda brings in not macaroons and wafers, but simply “vanilla wafers.” It is particularly appropriate that she serves these things in an “old-fashioned *cut*-glass pitcher” just moments after the unicorn has been shattered and Laura has become little more than shards of glass (emphasis added, 231).

The elements of the Eucharist here are evocative of a larger theme in GM. As we have seen, Laura represents spirit. In fact, with her unearthly innocence, she is figuratively depicted as being Mary herself. Her death, then, is almost mythic, like the death of a god, slain by the modern world, by original sin. When she experiences figurative death, it is like the crucifixion of an innocent. The implication, then, is that the last act, which occurs on a Friday (183), is indeed Good Friday. We know Williams was in the habit of thinking liturgically in this way from an offhand remark in his *Memoirs*, that his eviction from a friend’s apartment occurred on a “bitterly cold Friday which was not Good” (71). Furthermore, Jim and the Wingfields’ meal together is their Last Supper, Jim’s bringing wine to Laura is the first Eucharist which took place during the Last Supper, and like Christ and Judas, Laura is betrayed with a kiss. Finally, Tom

abandons her to her fate, just as the disciples abandoned Jesus on the night of His arrest, prior to his crucifixion. When Tom says that the “cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches,” the colored leaves torn from branches seem almost like the body of a god, the pieces of Laura herself. In “Temples to the Red Earth Shook,” a poem Williams wrote circa 1935, he speaks of “Beauty above the whole world crucified” (*Collected Poems* 180). There is a sense of this here, reinforced by the drafts. The night of Laura’s anguish is described as follows:

The dark was full of gentle, whispering voices.
The faint and sorrowful radiance of glass.
The womanish, weeping head with the crown of thorns.
 (“The Gentleman Caller” drafts, HRC 17.1)

This is in reference to an image of Christ which hung above Laura’s bed. HRC 17.7: “Over the bed was a remarkably bad religious painting, a very effeminate, doleful head of Christ with visible tear-drops just below the eyes” (drafts of “Portrait of a Girl in Glass”). Williams was particularly drawn to introducing the imagery of the Savior into his symbolism, as he says in 1981: “[M]y work is full of Christian symbols. Deeply, deeply Christian [particularly] the image of Christ, His beauty and purity” (*Conversations* 334).

The Name of Laura

Turning from the Biblical to the Classical tradition, we have Laura’s name, which is an adaptation of the Latin word for laurel—“laurus.” As a poet, Williams would certainly have been familiar with the significance of laurel, a prize which in the classical tradition is awarded to poets and heroes. It features prominently in the Greek legend of Apollo and Daphne. Eros shoots Apollo with an arrow, inciting desire in him for Daphne. As she runs from him, she cries out to the gods, and having mercy on her, they turn her into a laurel tree—in fact, the word “Daphne” in Greek means “laurel”—roughly parallel to our narrative here. Laura is an eternal,

much like Galatea, as we have discussed above. In Laura's resistance to opening the door to temporality and change, she is parallel in spirit to Daphne. Temporarily, she enjoys being pursued by Jim to a certain extent, but ultimately, temporality—with its pain—horrifies her, and she grasps atemporality, just as Daphne does. When faced with the desolation wrought by desire, she turns so that that the mutations brought on by time do not affect her. Just as Daphne cries out to the gods, so Laura returns to the gods—to her tragically spiritual isolation, far from the temporality that threatens her heart.

Tom and the Dilemma of Those in Pure Stasis or Flux

Extremes are virtually always a tragedy in Williams, as in the case of Tom, who, at this point, becomes characterized by extreme flux. While Laura is abandoned to a life of confinement—physically in the Wingfield apartment and, mentally, in the imaginary world she will never leave—Tom feels driven to a life of flux, unrelieved by stasis. Throughout the play, he has fantasized about oceanic escape. In his final monologue, however, he reveals—as narrator—that pure flux has not proven to be the paradise he had anticipated. In fact, it sounds as though it has become a curse.

The Kindness of Strangers

Often characters in Williams escape to otherworlds associated with the past in order to escape the distress of the present. Ironically, Tom tries to immerse himself in otherworlds of the present in order to escape the distress of the past: He says to Laura's ghost, "I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out!" (237). This is reminiscent of Tom's roster of false otherworlds unassociated with the truly transcendent, which also includes movies and

alcohol: “hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies” all of which are “brief, deceptive rainbows.”

In Tom’s concluding words, the final otherworld he mentions, in addition to alcohol, is, ironically, the company of strangers: In attempting to escape his memories of Laura, he speaks to the “nearest stranger.” This otherworld can actually be found throughout Williams’ oeuvre. In the final moments of *Spring Storm*, Arthur leaves Heavenly for the company of strangers, telling her, “I’ve got to be off by myself for awhile. With strangers, Heavenly. They’re—they’re a sort of—catharsis. Like cold water on your face and hands. They make you feel clean” (*Tennessee* 1: 94). It is to strangers that Alma turns at the end of *Summer and Smoke*. She abandons her spiritual existence and takes up with a young traveling salesman who is visiting from out of town, a relationship which is a species of otherworld: They experience “[t]hat mysteriously sudden intimacy that sometimes occurs between strangers more completely than old friends or lovers” (*Theatre 2*: 254). Finally, there is, of course, Blanche, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Turning to the doctor who has come to take her away, she says, “Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers” (1: 418). As early as 1928, Williams found the company of strangers to be soothing. When he was enduring a horribly distressing panic attack in Amsterdam, he finally found in strangers a deep measure of solace, which he recorded in the following poem:

Strangers pass me on the street
in endless throngs: their marching feet,
sound with a sameness in my ears
that dulls my senses, soothes my fears,
I hear their laughter and their sighs,
I look into their myriad eyes:
then all at once my hot woe
cools like a cinder dropped on snow. (*Memoirs* 22)

Last Act Summary

Immediately after leaving the apartment, Tom quickly positions himself outside the inner narrative, joining the audience in looking in upon the desolation of the women. He then speaks of attempting to escape the specter of his sister, but that when he makes this attempt, she “touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes” (237). Earlier in the act, her eyes were cast as the door to her soul, which Jim was beginning to enter. Here, Tom is entering her soul through her eyes. This time, though, the entry is torment, enclosing, as her soul does, so much desolation. Laura’s last act is to blow out the candles which represent her, as she is instructed by Tom, who is killing off something inside himself that is a burden precisely because it resists change, precisely because it is so heart-rendingly fragile. In symbolic terms, it is not Tom alone who is obliterating her. Her death is brought about by the modern world of falling fire—for “nowadays the world is lit by lightning!”

At times, Williams was uncertain that his foregrounding private worlds and delicate things was appropriate. In a letter he wrote in November of 1944, just a few weeks after learning that *GM* was to be produced, he reports seeing a war film, *The Rainbow*, which was a

powerful study of hatred and horror! I suppose this is an authentic picture of what is happening outside “the belvedere” [i.e., in the “real world”] and I felt quite shaken by it. If you have a strong stomach, see it! It is really an apology for hatred. With such savagery unleashed in the world I don’t see how there can be peace again for hundreds of years. Those are the things one should be writing about. How to reconcile my world [of] tender or private emotions or rare, esoteric fancies with what’s going on outside. Micro with macro cosmos! Should one even try? Or blandly assume [. . .] that we are the really important ones with the significant concerns? (*Selected Letters* 1: 537).

GM actually does contain such reconciliations, as we are surely convinced at this point.

Nevertheless, emphasis is placed predominantly on Laura at the expense of the larger world. In 1942, Williams wrote a poem which speaks of his dedication to combating this lightning—these

forces, and everything which would counter the presence of those delicate things which “relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive”:

Lament for the Moths

A plague has stricken the moths, the moths are dying,
their bodies are flakes of bronze on the carpets lying.
Enemies of the delicate everywhere
have breathed a pestilent mist into the air.

Lament for the velvety moths, for the moths were lovely.
Often their tender thoughts, for they thought of me,
eased the neurotic ills that haunt the day.
Now an invisible evil takes them away.

I move through the shadowy rooms, I cannot be still,
I must find where the treacherous killer is concealed.
Feverishly I search and still they fall
as fragile as ashes broken against a wall.

Now that the plague has taken the moths away,
who will be cooler than curtains against the day,
who will come early and softly to ease my lot
as I move through the shadowy rooms with a troubled heart?

Give them, O mother of moths and mother of men,
strength to enter the heavy world again,
for delicate were the moths and badly wanted
here in a world by mammoth figures haunted! (*Collected Poems* 17)

CONCLUSION: THE MEANING OF *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

It has been said that once a person steps on stage, there is instant symbolism. The person becomes a protagonist, someone we vicariously follow, and thus, to a certain extent, they represent ourselves. This is certainly less true of unsympathetic protagonists, but it stands as a general rule, and it is particularly true of GM's characters. Of course, each one of us is drawn more to one character than another. Those who have become caught in a cruel situation they are desperate to escape may identify more with Tom, while those who are intimidated by the outside world might identify with Laura, and those who are desperately attempting to keep the particles of their world together, despite the odds, may identify with Amanda.

The play focuses our attention most on Laura's plight. Because of this, as the narrative progresses, we all inadvertently become champions of delicate human beings like her because we are cheering for ourselves as we experience the events of the play through her eyes. We all, then, become de facto champions of the things she represents, things such as delicacy confronted by adversity, and perhaps the plight of woman in a patriarchal society. However, having familiarized ourselves with Williams's symbolic system, we can be more specific; she represents those "small and tender things" which "relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive," a theme elaborated in many ways: She is the South overwhelmed by the culture of the North, the agrarian superseded by industry, the past which is perpetually overtaken by the present and future, and what Williams calls the "sensitive, non-conformist individual" being crushed by the status quo (*Selected Letters* 1: 220). Properly speaking, she also represents emotion; before speaking of "small and tender things," Williams writes, "By poetic association [the glass figures] came to represent, in my memory, all the softest emotions that belong to recollection of things past. ("Author" 68).

The play encourages us to identify with both Laura and her brother, and it is difficult not to identify also with Amanda, at least somewhat. It could even be said that our vicarious experience is filtered through the eyes of the family as a whole, as though it were a single protagonist, as it makes itself a slave to protect that which it holds dear even as time, the river, pulls everything inevitably apart. Although the balance of our allegiances shifts as the narrative progresses, and we sympathize more with one person's struggle than another's, rarely do we relinquish our identification with any one family member altogether. And what does the family as a whole represent? One could say it represents our efforts to reconcile a cruel, barbarous world with those tender things within us which we attempt to preserve, as well as our almost inevitable failure in this regard, and our efforts to go on living afterwards. Expressed differently, it is about our innocent hopes that we will be able to reach our dreams—and about the death of those dreams, after which we are forced to deal with life without them. It is also about the alienation of humanity in the modern world; as Thompson says, the story is not simply of “one shy crippled girl, a neurotic mother, and a dreamer of a son, not the story of just one more broken family, but an analogue of modern humankind's [. . .] existential isolation of each from the other” (*Tennessee* 23).

Autobiography of the Soul

There is another, stronger reason why the family might be seen as constituting a single character. In virtually all Williams' major narratives, he uses characters to depict his own early passage from spiritual innocence to carnal self-awareness. This is the case in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Via reminiscences, we can trace the passage of the protagonists, Blanche and Brick, from the complete innocence which they possessed in the past, to their growing awareness of carnality within them in the present, carnality which they

desperately attempt to hide because it is so deeply inimical to their old nature and all they hold dear. In Williams, this sudden awareness inevitably results in a species of death. When Stanley confronts Blanche with her carnal past, she endures the same species of death as Laura, as she loses touch with reality altogether. When Margaret, and ultimately Big Daddy, confront Brick with his carnality, Brick is similarly disturbed, but because they do not have the indisputable evidence Stanley has, Brick is never forced to acknowledge his carnality outright, and endures a prolonged, living death as a result. Carnality wells up also in Alma of *Summer and Smoke*, so that the original, more spiritual Alma dies, while the new one immerses herself in carnality. Williams is explicit regarding the parallels between her passage and his own. In a 1972 interview, he says, “[T]he character I like most is Miss Alma.[. . .] You see, Alma went through the same thing that I went through—from puritanical shackles to, well, complete profligacy” (*Conversations* 216).

In GM, Williams traces this passage from spirit to flesh in a special way, by taking each force within him and assigning it to specific family members. For this reason, the characters are not as internally divided, though they obviously are if the family is seen as a single unit. Laura is essentially Williams as he once was, the grandson of an Episcopal clergyman and the son of a pious mother, completely innocent and pure. She is his childhood, as can be seen by her childlike ways: her refusal to grow up and become employed, and her persistence in playing with toys and (in “Portrait of a Girl in Glass”) reading juvenile literature. This is emphasized in HRC 17.2’s drafts of “The Gentleman Caller,” where Tom tells her, “[Y]ou can’t always be so childish.” She responds, “Let me stay like I am, don’t make me change!” She is paralleled by her unicorn; in drafts of “The Pretty Trap,” she explains that it is “[s]omething that doesn’t exist

in the world anymore. [. . .] It used to, though, when the world was in its childhood” (HRC 17.8). Originally, Williams was this child—he was Laura.

However, he then experienced what he calls the “corrupting rush of time” (*Where I Live* 52). Time forced puberty upon him, and strains of flesh began rising to the surface and his carnal side emerged: Tom-as-character (rather than Tom-as-narrator). This force brought him into conflict with the spirituality of his upbringing. In his narratives, the onset of this stage is often associated with immersion in night, perhaps a metaphor for the inception of troubled introspection and a growing darkness. When Alma reaches this point, she begins leaving home in the middle of the night to wander about, over the objections of her father (2: 225), and in GM, Tom-as-character begins leaving home to go to the movies at night, over the objections of his mother. During Williams’ adolescence, he ultimately began bridling against the constraints of morality (Amanda), desperately seeking to sate his new hunger, despite spirituality’s injunctions. Part of him (Amanda) did wish to soften these drives, so that somehow spirit and flesh (Laura and Jim, the “emissary from a world of reality”) could be reconciled, but ultimately spirituality and reality proved to be relatively irreconcilable, with the pull of flesh so strong, and Tom-as-character leaves home after the union between Laura and Jim fails to hold. Williams may have been alluding to this when he wrote that the glass figures of the play represent the “fragile, delicate ties that must be broken, that you inevitably break, when you try to fulfill yourself” (qtd. in Siebold 96). Earlier, Williams himself left home, in late 1938, beginning, a few months thereafter, a lifetime of intense and almost indiscriminate homosexual activity.

In Williams’ symbolism, flux signifies flesh, but it often signifies, additionally, the flow of time, which is precisely the force responsible for the onset of carnality pulling Williams from

his innocence. He speaks explicitly of these dueling forces in journal entries written in 1937.

First, stasis/spirituality is strong, but then flux/flesh becomes more pronounced:

Sunday—July 4 [. . .] This morning had odd experience—wakened by a bird call—gave me a strange, delightful sensation—an atavistic emotion from my early childhood—So clear and pure—the delight of an early morning in childhood—pure, spiritual delight—made me realize what a muddy stream my adult life has become—If only I could regain that lost clarity and purity of spirit! (*Notebooks* 95)

Tuesday—July 6—Yesterday [went out with friends and discussed] Tallulah Bankhead’s alleged perversion and promiscuity—“Gable is good but Garbo is better”—an obvious lie—So much filth nowadays—No one is left untouched—Or is it filth? Perhaps it is only robust, natural life boiling up to the surface—It is all in the way you look at it. But I want something clean—Something that is pure without being false or squeamish—is there such a thing? (97)

Weds. [July 7] Suffering torments of the damned with an awful burning skin eruption on face and arms. Also blue devils. No sleep tonight. Am I losing my mind? Recent entries sound so chaotic—like the product of a diseased mind. No delusions but certainly not a normal state of mind—feel trapped tonight—frightened—have taken a sleeping pill but little effect—If only I had something definite to do with myself I might save myself. Well, I am not going to give up the fight yet. I want to [. . .] visit Memphis or the Ozarks—Have something in the way of genuine experience—My life is entirely too internal—I need action on the outside—in the world! Tonight I would gladly enlist in the Loyalist Army in Spain—and might even relish the sounds of an aerial bombardment. Wish I were going somewhere new and exciting—I wish that something would happen—And something *will*—I can feel it coming! (99)

These passages highlight the very forces represented by Laura and Tom-as-character. We can see Williams’ strong proclivity to remain within himself and resist the corruption of the world, but also his inclination to get out, like Tom-as-character, and become engaged in the outside world, which will ultimately result in homosexual love. (We can even see sentiments that will become Tom-as-character’s impetus toward war—specifically toward joining the conflict associated with Guernica, and the forces of falling fire.) Williams speaks again of this conflict in his journal two years later: “I feel strangely remote from everything—insulated—cut off from the main stream. Home—the attic—the literary life—the creative trance—it makes you feel like

you have practically stopped living for a while. I want life and love again—and a swift flow of significant experiences” (*Notebooks* 169).

Despite Williams’ ultimately abandoning a life characterized by spirituality, it is clear that throughout his career he yearns for the purity he felt he had forsaken, just as Tom-as-narrator is haunted by his desertion of Laura (innocence) and Amanda (the determination to reconcile innocence with experience). Tom-as-narrator, who more closely approximates Williams in his totality, is allied with carnality just as Tom-as-character is, but his nostalgia for spirituality and innocence, his horror at having to walk away from them, reveals that there are strains of spirituality within him still. He evinces his longing for this innocence, this spirituality, in one of his “Blue Mountain Ballads,” in a poem he began in 1941: “Heavenly Grass.”

My feet took a walk in heavenly grass.
All day while the sky shone clear as glass.
My feet took a walk in heavenly grass,
All night while the lonesome stars rolled past.
Then my feet come down to walk on earth,
And my mother cried when she give me birth.
Now my feet walk far and my feet walk fast,
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass. (*Collected Poems* 63)

A longing for spirituality remained in Williams and Tom-as-narrator, so that a duality which is not reconciled persists. It is this duality which dominates Williams’ life and work. The drive toward flesh is inexorable, but the persistent yearning for spirit in Williams is undeniable. Because of this, Williams sings, like Blake, of both innocence and experience.

Mr. Wingfield, who is called the “fifth character in the play,” is also important to this discussion (145). He is almost an echo of Tom-as-character, behaving similarly in many respects. Williams often invests forces within himself into characters and then uses other characters to mirror these forces. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Allan Grey is an echo of the

young, horror-stricken Blanche dealing with the carnality within her, which ultimately kills off her spiritual side. Stanley is certainly a character in his own right, but he is also the personification of the carnality inside Blanche which she is combating. Mary Ann Corrigan sees the play similarly: “[T]he external events of the play, while actually occurring, serve as a metaphor for Blanche’s internal conflict (90). Williams began depicting characters in this way relatively early in his career. For instance, in a 1941 letter regarding *Battle of Angels*, he says that one of the characters, the “woman from Waco,” mirrors forces within Val, one of the protagonists. She is the “personification of the animal sexuality side of his nature which has always dogged him and interfered with his idealistic pilgrimage through life” (*Selected Letters* 1: 320). Furthermore, carnality again disrupts the life of a relatively spiritual character—which ultimately kills Val in the play—reflecting Williams’ own experience. In a 1981 interview, he said, “My work is *emotionally* autobiographical. It has no relationship to the actual events of my life, but it reflects the emotional currents of my life” (Williams’ emphasis, *Conversations* 342).

GM as External Autobiography

GM is so autobiographical in the more usual sense that some may question my reading it as autobiographical of forces within Williams. Admittedly, there are innumerable parallels between the lives of the Wingfields and the Williamses. For instance, early on, Williams’ father worked for a phone company, just as Mr. Wingfield did (*Theatre* 1: 145, Leverich 28). Williams’ mother, Edwina, actually shouted “Rise and shine!” in the morning, just as Amanda does (*Theatre* 1: 168, Leverich 141). In GM, Amanda says that going south “weakened resistance” so that she developed malaria. This was Edwina’s experience, except that it occurred after her marriage rather than before (*Theatre* 1: 193, Leverich 33). Finally, during Williams’ early adulthood, she conducted literary purges, just as Amanda does (*Theatre* 1: 161, *Selected*

Letters 1: 215). Naturally, there are also many parallels between Williams and Tom, his namesake, which we have discussed in the introduction. Williams even had a friend named Jim Connor.

There are also several parallels between Rose and Laura. Aside from their both developing schizophrenia, Rose did go to Rubicam's Business College. The editors of Williams' letters write: "Ezzie Mayes, who joined TW and Rose for summer classes, has recalled the intimidating experience: 'For retyping we sat in a pool and practiced phrases such as "All good men come to the aid of their country.'" If there was one mistake the OGRE who ran the class humiliated you in front of the entire class. It almost killed Rose'" (*Selected Letters* 1: 54). Of course, she ultimately dropped out, just as Laura does (*Theatre* 1: 154, Leverich 116).

GM as Internal Autobiography

Because of the many parallels between the two families, few have seen the presence of Williams in GM's characters, other than Tom. However, he invested himself in all of them, both in terms of the psychological forces within him, as we have seen, and in other respects. First, it appears that Laura's limp is parallel to a handicap Williams temporarily endured. Speaking of the trials he suffered at the first school he attended in St. Louis after moving there from small-town Mississippi, Edwina wrote, "The boys at the Eugene Field Public School made fun of Tom's Southern accent and manners. They taunted him as 'sissy' because he would not take part in their games—I am sure he never told them that less than a year before, his legs had been paralyzed and he could not even walk, much less run" due to his contracting diphtheria (28-29). The episode in scene 7 where Jim teaches Laura to dance is probably patterned after Rose's teaching him to dance (Leverich 143). Furthermore, when Laura sees Emily Meisenbach as a rival where Jim is concerned, this may well be a projection of Williams' seeing a man named Ed

Meisenbach as a rival where his girlfriend Hazel Kramer was concerned; Kramer ultimately discouraged Williams' declarations of love after they went to college, and began seeing Meisenbach instead (Leverich 99).

Laura is patterned after Williams in more important ways. She is shy and quiet, characteristics which link her to him rather than Rose, who was outgoing, as Edwina recalls:

Rose is supposed to be the model for Laura, the pathetically shy sister of *The Glass Menagerie*. Perhaps she was; only Tom [Williams] knows how much of Laura is Rose and how much his imaginative portrait of a sister he never knew. But, unlike Laura, Rose was never a shy child, for she was the ringleader in games, and very spirited; perhaps too spirited at times as far as her father was concerned. (17)

Edwina later adds that "Rose showed plenty of temper and temperament while Tom was usually quiet and calm and still is, in spite of the violence of his plays" (22). In his *Memoirs*, Williams even says that when Rose was on a date, she "would talk with an almost hysterical animation which few young men knew how to take," so different from the personality of Laura (119).

Elsewhere in his *Memoirs*, he speaks of his own shyness:

My adolescent problems took their most violent form in a shyness of a pathological degree. Few people realize, now, that I have always been and even remain in my years as a crocodile an extremely shy creature—in my crocodile years I compensate for this shyness by the typical Williams heartiness and bluster and sometimes explosive fury of behavior. In my high school days I had no disguise, no façade. (17)

Thus, on an internal level, Laura is actually more like Tom than Rose. Leverich confirms this: "Although the surface details of Laura resemble those of Rose, the character traits of Laura are also those of Tom Williams: his shyness, his reticence, his fears" (564). Williams himself believed that there was only one characteristic Rose and Laura shared—both were nonconformists, resisting the status quo. In his *Memoirs*, he writes, "Laura of *Menagerie* was like Miss Rose only in her inescapable 'difference,' which that old female bobcat Amanda would

not believe existed. And as I mentioned, you may know only a little bit more of her through ‘Portrait of a Girl in Glass’” (*Memoirs* 125).

Williams invested himself into the other characters as well. For instance, he sold subscriptions over the telephone, just as Amanda does (*Selected Letters* 1: 51). His mother was not similarly employed. Moreover, he left home and traveled to Acapulco, a Mexican coastal town, just as Mr. Wingfield leaves home and travels to Mazatlan, another Mexican coastal town. Williams’ own father Cornelius never abandoned the family, though Williams probably wishes he had; it was not until the success of GM that Edwina could afford to throw him out for his alcoholism and brutal nature generally. Williams also invested himself into the character of Jim. Williams did have a friend named Jim Connor, but his personality sounds much different from O’Connor’s (Leverich 218). Shockingly, Williams used an earlier version of himself as the source of O’Connor’s enthusiasm for business and commerce—so far removed from Williams as he was later in life. Essentially, he was once Jim, in terms of interests. On November 22, 1928, he wrote to his grandfather,

Have any of your investments been affected by these fluctuations on the stock market? My economics teacher was saying yesterday that periods of great “inflation” were often followed by panics and that people should invest very cautiously. I suppose, however, that you have got your fortune invested just as securely as possible. It’s generally wise, though, to investigate now and then.

Economics is a subject I just started this term and it interests me a great deal.

I have always before been so ignorant about business, finance etc. It is considered a very difficult subject but so far I have done well in it. (*Selected* 23-24)

Here he even predicts the great stock market crash of 1929! One can also recognize Jim in a letter Williams wrote earlier in 1928. His grandfather was taking him on a trip to Europe, which departed from New York. While there, they dined in style, as one can gather from his letter home:

We have just concluded dinner with a multi-millionaire, one of Mrs. Watson's partners, in this seven room suite at the end of the hall. Dinner served in princely style by the foreign waiter!

Grandfather is perfectly thrilled. And of course I am! This man is a partner of *Wrigley's*! The first thing he did was to offer us some chewing gum. (*Selected Letters* 1: 11).

It is interesting to see how the drama of this gift made its way into GM. Williams even loved going to big world fairs, parallel to Jim and his enthusiasm for Chicago's Century of Progress exposition. In 1939, one of the main reasons Williams traveled to San Francisco was to attend the Golden Gate Exposition, and in the same year, he traveled to New York to see the World's Fair (*Selected Letters* 1: 178, 208, 234).

Williams invested much of his personality in all GM's characters, but the character who matches him best is Laura. There is a particular reason why this is so; he saw his own nature as containing a great deal of the traditionally feminine. In his *Memoirs*, he wrote,

I was a very slight youth. I don't think I had effeminate mannerisms but somewhere deep in my nerves there was imprisoned a young girl, a sort of blushing school maiden much like the one described in a certain poem or song "she trembled at your frown." Well, the school maiden imprisoned in my hidden self, I mean selves, did not need a frown to make her tremble, she needed only a glance. (17)

R. B. Parker quotes him as saying, "I am Blanche DuBois. [. . .] I think that more often I have used a woman rather than a man to articulate my feelings" (qtd. in "Circle" 131). Parker says Williams elaborated on this "in an interview with the *New York Times* in 1975, in which he said he believed there was no person living who 'doesn't contain both sexes. Mine could have been either one. Truly, I have two sides to my nature'" ("Circle" 131). This belief was so influential in the composition of GM that Leverich has said that the play can be seen as "a study in the duality of male and female in his nature, symbolized by brother and sister" (564).

Williams and Rose

Above, I indicate the many differences between Laura and Rose and the many similarities between Laura and Williams. Williams was certainly unlike his sister in many respects.

However, they were extraordinarily close. Francesca Hitchcock writes,

Throughout his literary career, when asked about “love,” Tennessee Williams almost always answered with an explanation about his relationship with his sister, Rose. He called their love “the deepest of their lives,” a love that precluded the need for “extrafamilial attachments.” Various friends of Williams saw the connection between Tom and Rose as so close that they appeared as “two halves” of a whole person. Harry Rasky, author of *Tennessee Williams: A Portrait in Laughter and Lamentation*, writes that “Just as Siamese twins may be joined at the breast bone, Tennessee was joined to his sister, Rose, by the heart. The blending of two souls was so complete that they could have occupied a single body.” Tom and Rose, called “the couple” by their maid Ozzie, had such a “psychological affinity . . . that when Rose had a cold or tonsillitis, or mumps, Tommy was convinced he, too, was ill.” (595)

Hitchcock adds: “According to Williams, his and Rose’s relationship was an exclusive one: ‘My sister and I grew so used to being company for each other that we tended to rely on each other’s companionship rather than seeking friends.’” Williams’ brother Dakin “remembered how devoted Rose and Tom were to each other and said that, while Rose was always affectionate toward him, it was Tom she truly loved” (Leverich 143).

Perhaps they were so intimate because they endured such a traumatic childhood together and perhaps because, on an internal level, they had experienced the same tumultuous passage from innocence to carnal self-awareness. If this is true, the portrayal in Williams of the conflict between flesh and spirit is a portrayal of Rose’s nature as much as it is Williams’. Initially, Rose was as spiritually innocent as Williams. However, strains of carnality began appearing in her so strongly that they virtually broke her. In Williams’ short story “The Resemblance between a Violin Case and a Coffin,” he wrote,

My mother and maternal grandmother came of a calmer blood than my sister and I. They were unable to suspect the hazards that we were faced with, having in us the turbulent blood of our father. Irreconcilables fought for supremacy in us; peace could never be made: at best a smoldering sort of armistice might be reached after many battles. Childhood had held those clashes in abeyance. They were somehow timed to explode at adolescence, silently, shaking the earth where we were standing. (*Collected Stories* 273)

Leverich says Rose could not secure a job because of a “timidity diagnosed by [her] psychiatrist [. . .] as a fear of sex, stemming from her mother’s own puritanical abhorrence” (141). (It would be difficult to overstate the impact of this “abhorrence” on Rose and Williams, and his work.

This is, for instance, precisely why carnality entailed insanity for Blanche: because she was based on Williams *and* on Rose.) Ultimately, the carnality within Rose became so strong that it began to overcome her fear. Williams accompanied her on a date once, and he heard her openly propositioning the young man. Williams himself was desperately fighting carnality at the time, and told her, “Rose, I heard you offer yourself to Colin, and I want you to know that you disgusted me” (qtd. in Leverich 142). Her mother tried to stem this carnal tide by having her attend a Sunday school convention, to get her involved in church work, as part of her strategy to “take her mind off sex” (145). However, her carnality would not be gainsaid, and the beginning of her institutionalization coincided with carnality’s mastery over her: When she was hospitalized in early 1937, Edwina reported that Rose was “raving on the subject of ‘sex’” (qtd. in *Selected Letters* 1: 93). In 1939, Williams visited the institution, and wrote in his journal that the experience was “horrible, horrible! Her talk was so obscene—she laughed and talked continual obscenities. [. . .] It was a horrible ordeal” (qtd. in Leverich 335).

In his *Memoirs*, Williams speaks of Rose’s believing herself to be the “Queen of England” (243). She and her brother experienced the same traumatic metamorphosis from spirit to flesh, and in a sense, they both took up the same occupation, immersing themselves in the

production of illusory worlds, in defiance of the real world. Williams once wrote to his agent, “You know me, how I drift through the world and nothing that happens to me makes much difference except the odd little world that I make on paper!” (*Selected Letters* 1: 494). Amanda’s line to Tom could be used of him and Williams both: “You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!” (*Theatre* 1: 235). Similarly, Williams describes Rose as living in a “dream world” (*Memoirs* 243), and he says that when he is writing, he lives in a “dreamworld”—the “dreamworld of a new play” (*Where I Live* 141). Williams himself saw his and his sister’s mental habits as related: “It appears to me, sometimes, that there are only two kinds of people who live outside what E. E. Cummings has defined as ‘this co-called world of ours’—the artists and the insane” (*Where I Live* 43). It is perhaps for this reason that he “half seriously” called his studio “The Madhouse” (*Where I Live* 170).

Williams even feared that his sister’s fate would become his own, as can be seen in his description of Matilda in a letter written in 1942:

Anent Matilda—

Her danger *is* psychological. Without intervention, she would drift into that complete split with reality which is schizophrenic. The fear of the world, the fight to face it and not run away, is the realest in all experience to me, and when I use it in my work, I am always surprised that it does not communicate clearly to others. Perhaps that is the trouble with writing one’s self too much. The great psychological trauma of my life was my sister’s tragedy, who had the same precarious balance of nerves that I have to live with, and who found it too much and escaped as Matilda is in danger of escaping. [. . .]

It is hard for a person with so many problems regarded as “special” (they are not really so) to address audiences which are necessarily composed largely of extravert personalities—to talk to them about what is vitally important and clear to himself without bewildering and offending them with a sense of exaggeration. This, I suppose, is my great creative problem, if I may be permitted to assume one; if I take the easy way out and simply not deal with things I know best, I am being cowardly about it and really precluding what might be an individual, special contribution. But this problem is ubiquitous in my work. And the more I write from my inside, the more it will emerge. (*Selected Letters* 1: 401-02)

Clearly, then, when Williams invested himself into the character of Laura, he was also investing his sister. In fact, his protagonists are almost typically a reflection of both himself and his sister. Speaking of Rose and her tragedy in his *Memoirs*, he writes, “Nowadays is, indeed, lit by lightning, a plague has stricken the moths, and Blanche has been ‘put away’” (125). This justifies a comment made by Maria St. Just regarding *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*:

A lot of people, Tennessee included, have said that I was the inspiration for Margaret, Maggie the Cat. Tennessee had shown me the manuscript and with a sly, sideways glance had told me, ‘Read this. You’re in it.’

I was terribly thrilled at first. But I read the thing with mounting fury. I exploded, “But I wouldn’t have said that! Tennessee, she isn’t even *Russian!*” Tennessee said, “But honey! I’m writing about your spirit—your tenacity to life.”

It’s silly to say that I was his inspiration. Artists don’t work like that. Maggie is like all the rest, a composite, from within Tennessee. There are bits of me in her, of course: my daughters, seeing *Cat* much later, were doubled up with the laughter of recognition. But if Tennessee had never met me, it wouldn’t have made any difference. His only real inspiration was Rose: everlastingly so. (107-08)

Conclusion

When Williams experienced the “continual obscenities” of his sister, he took it as a revelation of that which underlies the surface of all humanity. Her behavior altered his perception of the world, inspiring him to write that “everything seems ugly and useless now—hideously smirched. After all, her naked subconscious is no uglier than the concealed thoughts of others.” Williams would go on and fill his plays with this truth about human nature. GM is actually somewhat of an exception in this regard. Though it does have traces of the “human animal” which we have discussed relative to Amanda, Williams primarily depicts the tragic beauty of spirit, represented by Laura and the glass menagerie. This reverence for spirit was heartfelt, but we know from his correspondence that it was difficult for him to write a play where the other pole of the prime dichotomy played such a relatively minor role. For this reason, he was happy about the positive reception GM was given, but uneasy about what the response to

future plays might be. Leverich writes, “Although pleased with the critical response, Tennessee questioned in a *Time* interview whether ‘the critics will like my future plays as much as this one. In this play I said all the nice things I have to say about people. The future things will be harsher’” (587).

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GLOSSARY

Falling Fire: Often Williams uses heat to represent passion, particularly when it occurs in the spring. However, at times this heat imagery is heightened to become fire, storm, rain, and lightning, and ultimately to the imagery of global war, with bombs falling from the holds of aircraft, causing the earth to become an inferno, culminating in apocalypse. This is falling fire imagery, which, in its simplest form, is the union of storm and fire, so that fire is falling from the sky instead of rain. It signifies various things, most associated in some way with the carnal pole of the prime dichotomy: For instance, it represents the destructive power of carnal passion, the impact of the modern world on romantics and nonconformists, the horror and alienation felt by twentieth-century humanity generally, etc.

Flux: Throughout Williams, a central image is that of objects in motion, in classic opposition to objects in stasis. There are several types of flux: motion in the abstract, movement across land, wind, flight, space flight, water in motion, and most significantly, the imagery of rivers, particularly when emphasis is placed on their entering the sea. Temporality is also a species of flux, where individuals moving forward in time are paralleled by the imagery of passengers on a river. In terms of symbolism, flux represents the carnal pole of the prime dichotomy.

Laurine type: An otherworld usually associated with a sense of doom, typically signified by some or all of the following instances of imagery: glass, often a glass sphere, which is polychromatic, set in darkness yet illuminated by beams of light, and set in a musical context, one often evocative of nostalgia.

Otherworld: Defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as a “world or existence beyond earthly reality.” In Williams, there are two primary kinds—worlds which characters create using their imagination, and worlds based on memory. Laura’s otherworld is primarily of the first kind, given her relationship with her figures in glass, though it would appear that she also reminisces about her high school, a locus in the past. Her mother’s otherworld is firmly oriented toward the past, with her frequent internal flights back to her girlhood in Blue Mountain.

Private Textuality (or Artistic Textuality): Characters who are concerned with ideals, or eternal truth, and less concerned with the sordid demands of survival, form a distinct class in Williams, and are represented symbolically by stasis (see below). Williams seems to be using the analogy of rivers and islands, so that those in this class are like verbal islands, hesitant to speak publicly or receive language from the outside, whether this be via telephone, the newspapers, etc. They often choose to orient themselves toward relatively self-referential and self-contained verbal worlds, such as works of literature—artistic textuality.

Prime Dichotomy: Most symbols in Williams can be identified as belonging to one of two related concepts: spirituality or carnality. The classic symbol of spirituality is stasis, whereas the classic symbol of carnality is flux. Speaking generally, protagonists in Williams’s major plays move away from spirituality and toward carnality.

Williams is an expert at characterization, and his protagonists are always finely nuanced, but in terms of symbolism, he treats the vast majority of his characters as binaries, predominantly aligning them with the poles of either spirit or flesh. In this work, these characters are called “representatives of spirit” or “representatives of flesh.”

This has little bearing on their personalities. Representatives of flesh may be relatively mild (as Jim is), but Williams typically associates them with countless symbols of carnality nevertheless, establishing their place in his symbolic system. The same could be said of representatives of spirit, who are often overbearing and manipulative (as Amanda is).

Public Textuality (or Commercial Textuality): Characters in the flow of life, characters who are concerned with surviving and dominating the verbal contexts in which they find themselves, are typically characterized by verbal proficiency. On a symbolic level, these survivors are associated with the imagery of textuality, of this there are two kinds—verbal: references to rumor, reports, conversations, etc.—and written: in-depth mention of lists, catalogs, newspapers, attendance records, etc. Often this concern is joined with their practical efforts to thrive—their interest in commerce—so that there is repeated mention of sales records, bills, advertising—or even wills, etc.—commercial textuality.

Secondary Dichotomy: The two poles of the secondary dichotomy are life and death. There are several incarnations of this—tenderness and harshness, intimacy and violence, etc. Often the two dichotomies collapse into one, as when representatives of spirit die, either literally or figuratively, because they discover carnality within them (as with Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire*), so that spirit is life, and flesh is death. The reverse is also sometimes true—representatives of flesh can literally or figuratively die if subjected to spiritual strictures which are too harsh—though this is less common.

Often the life pole is a very specific moment, when the prime dichotomy is reconciled—when representatives of flesh and spirit form intimate relationships with

each other. When this occurs, or when it is about to occur, the second pole obtains—the protagonists almost invariably are subjected to a species of death.

Stasis: In opposition to flux, there is the pervasive presence in Williams of the imagery of stasis.

There are several classic types: the imagery of land, the imagery of water contained, ice (as in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), or an image which is parallel to ice—glass. Eternity, or atemporality, is also a species of stasis, where individuals who are frozen in time, associated with eternal ideals, or caught in their memories or other otherworlds, are linked to the imagery of figures sealed in a glass sphere, unchanging, the counter to the imagery of travelers on rivers. In terms of symbolism, stasis represents the spiritual pole of the prime dichotomy.

APPENDIX 1. THE DISCOVERY OF THREE COMPLETED ONE-ACT PLAYS

While conducting research among the Williams typescripts in the summer of 2005, I came across three completed one-act plays by Williams which are unknown to Williams scholars and the world at large (in HRC 17.1). They were all found together, one succeeding the other, distinct from the random typescripts surrounding them. Each is preceded by a handwritten title page and their narratives proceed uninterrupted until the final curtain. They are entitled “The Poetry Prize,” “A Monday Breakfast,” and “‘With Grace and Dignity’ or ‘The Memorial Service.’”

The only one of these to have been previously mentioned by name is “With Grace and Dignity.” R. B. Parker, in his article “The Texas Drafts of *The Glass Menagerie*,” speaks of finding it among drafts of “The Gentleman Caller” (57). However, he seems to have been unaware that Williams completed it as a one-act; it is mentioned in the context of uncompleted one-acts, with there being no indication he found it in its full and complete form. There are random bits of “With Grace and Dignity” scattered throughout the folders, and he may well have come across some of these. He also describes finding two other scenes which he believed were merely parts of “The Gentleman Caller.” Of the first, he says, “Williams introduces a young vagrant, Tom Lee, whom Amanda invites to breakfast when she finds him stealing milk bottles, then dismisses to the fire escape again for ‘Bolshevik’ opinions, only to find that Tom prefers to join him there” (57); and earlier in his article, he describes a scene in which “one of [Tom’s] wanderlust poems wins a \$10.00 prize from the Ladies Wednesday Club” (54). These are the one-acts “A Monday Breakfast” and “The Poetry Prize,” respectively. However, he seems unaware that these are one-acts, and again, he seems to have found only random sections of these

plays, for he speaks of them as being only scenes of the larger play, and he does not mention their titles.

To understand how clear it is that these plays are completed one-acts, the typical state of Williams' drafts should be described. The vast majority of typescripts at the HRC take up scenes in the middle, drop them shortly thereafter, and do not read as narratives from page to page at all. They are repeated attacks at particular scenes, as Williams struggled with his material and with all he was trying to express. Willard Holland, who directed some of Williams' early plays in the late 1930s, says,

There was this amazing thing about [him]: he could sit down at a typewriter and write a characterization and dialogue for a character that wasn't part of any play. I'm sure any writer would give his arm to be able to do that, or to write the way Tom could write reams of dialogue. He had no sense, in those days, of plot construction or story line whatsoever. But his people were really fantastic. You could take a page or pages of dialogue he wrote, give them to an actor, and just put a spotlight on him, and anyone who just happened to walk into the theater couldn't turn away from the strength of it. (qtd. in Leverich 208-09)

This is why the narrative line among the drafts is weak or nonexistent, but the individual scenes are very strong. Williams speaks of his technique in a letter he wrote in 1939, when he was working on *Battle of Angels*:

My method of writing is terrifically wasteful. I have already written enough dialogue for two full-length plays, some of the best of which will have to be eliminated because it flies off on some inessential tangent. [. . .] My attack is purely emotional: under good direction could prove very effective but without it is in danger of spending itself in a lot of useless explosions. (*Selected Letters* 1: 214).

The HRC is essentially a repository of these "explosions" of Williams'. He excelled at writing dialogue, but was chagrined by the effort to fit the dialogue into a continuous narrative. This is precisely why it is so surprising to find three crisp one-acts which read continuously from beginning to end. When I brought these to the attention of the senior curator and suggested that

they be put in separate folders in accordance with their status as distinct plays, he became animated and enthusiastic, and suggested instead that I publish my findings. I take the opportunity to do so here.

Notes on the Text

The three one-acts below are in a particularly finished state, but in a few spots, words are inserted in pencil, and others are struck through. I have adopted all of these changes into the text below. Moreover, obvious mistakes in spelling and punctuation have been silently corrected, and the whole has been formatted so that it resembles the format of Williams' plays as they are usually printed. For instance, stage directions in all caps have been italicized, etc.

1. “With Grace and Dignity”

This play pokes tender fun at Amanda’s staid sensibilities although, unfortunately, it uses a stock African-American character to do so. It is apparently based on a true story; Leverich says that in the fall of 1935, when Williams was twenty-four, the Williamses moved to a beautiful new home, and because it required more maintenance than his mother Edwina could perform on her own, she hired a

“colored” servant, Susie Sanders, who was remarkably durable; she remained with Edwina for nearly all of the following thirty years. Susie had not only to withstand “Miz Williams’s” eternal fussing and fuming over household chores but also had to bring some semblance of order to the chaos that was left in the trail of “Mister Tom,” no small job by itself. (154)

Leverich adds that a few months after this move, Williams wrote to his grandparents “that his mother and Susie were in the throes of spring housecleaning in preparation for a DAR tea” (163). During this tea, the D. A. R. commemorated an officer of the group who had recently passed away. In the 1944 preface to his collection of poems, Williams wrote that he “composed an elegy to her which was read aloud at the services and resulted in a very moving catharsis” (*Where I Live* 2). He may have included this elegy of his in “With Grace and Dignity” when the regent pro-tem says, “in a vibrant contralto,”

“Here was a woman—of whom we could only say—
Her *dust* has *enriched* the *earth*—
But her *sprit* has set—a brighter *star*—in *Heaven!*”

(Williams often mocks work he composed early in his career, as we shall see in “The Poetry Prize,” below.)

In *Tennessee Williams and Friends*, Gilbert Maxwell speaks of an event which transpired during this tea. Describing the day he first met Williams in 1940, before the latter became famous, he writes,

We drank beer, not booze, [. . .] and Tenn and I made out just fine, straight from the start.

I told some stories about a few droll characters in my home town, and T.W.'s incredible laughter rose shrill, sliding down from a high, spontaneous *who-o-o* to a shaking guffaw.

He told me then, "You should've been at my house in St. Louis the day Mother had a tea for the late regent of the D.A.R. She'd asked our colored maid to get into the spirit of the occasion—and the maid did, with a vengeance. She triumphed in a physical struggle with the D.A.R. chapter's regal secretary out in the hall, seized the regent's memorial candle, and marched in holding it high while the secretary sat and wept piteously on the stairs."

All of us there in the room laughed long and loud at this anecdote—and since it's the sort of story any Deep South man with a sense of the morbid-absurd adores, I felt an instant rapport with Williams. (x)

Williams transformed this event into "With Grace and Dignity."

With Grace and Dignity
or
The Memorial Service¹

Mrs. Wingfield, the newly-elected Regent of the D.A.R., is entertaining the chapter at a memorial service in honor of Mrs. Wingfield's predecessor who has recently passed into the great beyond. Mrs. Wingfield has more family than funds: this newly conferred office is the greatest thing in her life and she is bending every effort to make the memorial service a thing of beauty if not a joy forever.

When the curtain rises, we discover her in full regalia—a wide red, white and blue satin band diagonally swathing her deep bosom—in the kitchen making the final preparations. The negro cook, engaged for this single occasion, has just arrived, and Mrs. Wingfield is somewhat taken aback by her formidable proportions.

MRS. W: Clarissa—is that your name?

CLARISSA: Yes'm.

MRS. W: Get into this little white apron!
Everyone's here.
You've—uh—served at entertainments before?

CLARISSA [*comfortingly*]: Yes'm. I've served at loads of entertainments before.

MRS. W: Well, please remember that this is a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution and everything has to be carried off with all the grace and dignity we can manage!—Do you understand that?—It's especially important for two reasons.—I have just had the honor of being appointed the new Regent of the Blue Mt. Chapter and the meeting today is to be a memorial service for the former Regent who passed away last month—Mrs. Oscar Plummery—strangled to death on a chicken-bone at the D.A.R. convention in Washington, D.C.—right in the presence of Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt!—*Horrible?!—Well-ll....*
Do see that you serve things nicely!—Remember the solemn nature of the occasion!—and-uh...
Where did I place the little silver tea-spoons?
Oh! [*lifting one*]—Souvenir of the Chicago World's Fair, 1904!
I love dainty things, don't you?

CLARISSA: Yes'm.

¹ These one-acts are reproduced by permission of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas in Austin, and by Georges Borchardt, Inc., the literary agency representing Williams' estate. See appendix 2 for more details.

[A chubby little Boy Scout with a bugle suddenly dashes into the kitchen, shoving Clarissa aside.]

BOY: *Gangway, Mammy!*
Got to wet my whistle before I can blow!

[Seizes and drains punch-glass]

Thanks, Mizz Wingfield!

[Dashes out again]

MRS. W: Gracious!
That's the boy who's going to blow taps on the bugle!
One of Mrs. Turner's foolish ideas.—Her son, of course.

[Peeks out—Polite buzz of conversation.]

Everyone's seated and ready to start the service!
Where's Rosemary?—*Rosemary!*

[A very plain girl in glasses enters from back porch.]

Doesn't she look nice, Clarissa? Isn't she a vision in that awgundy dress?
Hold your shoulders up, honey, don't hunch like a dwarf in front of the D.A.R.!

ROSEMARY [*in a desperate whine*]: Mother, can't you get somebody else to do it?
MRS. W: *Why?*

ROSEMARY: I'm *scared!* I've got butterflies in my stummick, I'm so scared!

MRS. W: Less of that nonsense! Less of it!
How many times have we gone over this thing?
You've rehearsed it so often you simply *couldn't* go wrong!
Be *graceful*—be *dignified!*—That's all there is to it.

CLARISSA: Mizz Wingfield?

MRS. W: Yes, Clarissa?

CLARISSA [*staring dubiously at her reflection in a little mirror over the sink*]: —I don't believe this little white lace cap is *becomin'* to me.
It makes me look like a—monkey!

[Giggles.]

MRS. W: You're much too large, Clarissa, to look like a monkey.
Oh!—The Marguerites!

[*Snatches them out of the oven*]

Remember, Rosemary—Mrs. Nugent is going to recite a little eight-line poem in memory of the dearly departed—
Mmm! Slightly *scorched!*
Then Miss Carter will start to play the elegy on the violin.
That, my dear, is the signal for you to come in—Marching slowly—With grace and dignity!—
Bearing the lovely white taper.
Where is it now?—Oh, here!

[*Produces a tall and slender white candle with a lavender satin bow and a spray of lilies-of-the-valley near the base.*]

[*Places it tenderly on a shelf—out of sight.*]

All on earth that you do is advance to the acting Regent's table—

ROSEMARY: How will I know which is which?

MRS. W: You couldn't possibly miss her.
She has on a huge straw hat with a bushel of violets flopping over the brim!
You hold the end of the taper—the *lighted* end, of course—just about on a line with the tip of your nose.
Now don't look *cross-eyed* at it, *whatever* you do!
Look up at the *sky*—the *ceiling*!
And don't you *trip*—don't stumble an' fall over something, for that would be *dreadful!*

ROSEMARY: What do I do when I get to the Regent's table?

MRS. W: You just stand there till the violin solo is finished, holding the lighted taper in both your hands—but *not* like a *baseball* bat! Then the Regent takes the candle from you.—You make a curtsy—With grace and dignity, darling!—Then you kneel. Everyone kneels together—The Chaplain leads in prayer for poor Mrs. Plummery's spirit—When that is finished you merely rise and turn and gracefully withdraw—To the kitchen, and help Clarissa get the refreshments ready!—Is that all straight in your head?

ROSEMARY: It's straight in my head but it's all mixed up in my stummick!
I've always been scared to death of the D.A.R.—Just to think of them gives me swarms of butterflies in my stummick!

MRS. W: Heavens!—They've finished the minutes!—I'll have to rush back in!
Remember!—The Regent's announcement—The poem—The *violin!* THEN ----- *ENTER!*

Now be a brave little girl and make Mother *proud!*
Make her the proudest daughter of the whole American Revolution!
The spirit—of SEVENTY-SIX!

[*She assumes a glittering smile and rushes back to the battle front.*]

[*As the door opens we hear the regent pro-tem declaiming in a vibrant contralto—*]

REGENT:

“Here was a woman—of whom we could only say—
Her *dust* has *enriched* the *earth*—
But her *sprit* has set—a brighter *star*—in *Heaven!*”

[*The trumpet sounds. The last note is terribly sour.*]

[*There is a round of decorous applause.*]

CLARISSA [*crouching at the door*]: Miss Rose, Miss Rose—I think the ladies is pretty nearly ready fo’ the candle!

[*Rose clutches her stomach and backs in panic against the kitchen table.*]

CLARISSA: Oh, my God, Miss Rose you’s back yo’ self right into the floating *island!*
Here, turn aroun’ an’ let me try my best to get it off yo’ dress befo’ they—

CHAPLAIN [*dramatically, from the parlor*]:

“Sunset—and evening star
And one—clear call—for *me-uh!*
And-uh may there be—no moaning—at the bar-uh—
When I-uh—put out-uh—to *sea-uh!*”

[*And so forth through complete verses.*]

[*During this reading there is a frantic dumb-play between Clarissa and Rosemary.*]

[*Rosemary, with tight shut eyes and clenched fists, mumbles a prayer for courage.*]

[*Clarissa crouches panting at the kitchen door.*]

[*As the last verse commences, she remembers the candle—*]

CLARISSA [*panicky*]: Oh, my Lawd, where’s de *can-dle!*
Dey’s neahly—
Where did ah lay dat—*can-del?!!*
Oh, my God—Oh, my ----- *GOD!*
Miss Rose, where did I—?

[*Notices Rose's virtual collapse.*]

Pull yo'self together, child! You's white as goat's milk!
Honey, you got a *chill*!

Oh, my God, I shoulda known—

[*Snatches up a dingy white stub of a candle from the table drawer.*]

Dis ain't de candle Mizz Wingfield meant to use but—
Ah guess it'll *have to do*!
Here, Miss Rose, you take dis can-dle now!
Dey's just about—
Wait a minute, I'll scrape dem *grease*-spots off it!
Lawd, where's de knife? Ev'ything's gone wrong right at de las' minute like it always do!
MISS ROSE!

ROSEMARY [*suddenly convulsed*]: I'm SICK—at the *STUM*-mick!

[*Clutching her middle, she rushes out the back door.*]

CLARISSA [*frantic*]: Miss Rose—Miss Rose—MISS ROSE!

[*Violin elegy starts in the parlor.*]

[*Pauses and starts again.*]

[*Clarissa wrings her hands.*]

[*Gasps.*]

[*Then with sudden resolution she grasps the white candle stub and starts out the door.*]

[*Gasps and returns to the stove to light it.*]

[*Then plunges out to the parlor after knocking over a pitcher of fruit punch and oversetting a chair.*]

[*The violin continues sweetly for a few moments.*]

[*Then suddenly screeches like the startled outcry of a tomcat.*]

[*There is an audible ripple and buzz that rises to an irrepressible gale of D.A.R. laughter.*]

[*Clarissa plunges back into the kitchen, glittering with sweat.*]

[Behind her comes Mrs. Wingfield, blanched with horror and desolation.]

CLARISSA [*shakily*]: What did ah *do*, Mizz Wingfield?—What did ah *DO*?

REGENT PRO-TEM [*pounding her gavel*]: Ladies!—*Ladies!*
Please to remember the solemn nature—of this service!

[Mrs. Wingfield throws up her arms and covers her face. A gesture of monumental grief—of cosmic despair!]

[Blackout and curtain]

Discussion of “With Grace and Dignity”

In 2005, New Directions published a collection of Williams’ one-acts entitled *Mister Paradise and Other One-Act Plays*, edited by Nicholas Moschovakis and David Roessel. The three one-acts I include here are neither published in the book nor even mentioned in the extensive preface in which the editors discuss Williams’ early one-acts at length, further establishing the novelty of this discovery. However, there is an intriguing letter they publish which almost certainly alludes to “With Grace and Dignity.” In “Notes on the Text,” the editors say,

In an unpublished letter to Audrey Wood dated October 28, 1941, filed at HRC (54.16), Williams enclosed an unidentified “short sketch” that, he said, was “removed from the long comedy... ‘A Daughter of the American Revolution.’” Williams predicted that the sketch “should serve to leaven any one-act program, if directed with sufficient legerdemain,” and noted in a postscript: “New Theatre League offers \$50.00 prize for a 15-minute skit – This might do – (the comedy).” (226)

This “unidentified ‘short sketch’” is almost surely “With Grace and Dignity.” The editors have unwittingly included perhaps the only time Williams spoke of the play. The description fits—“With Grace and Dignity” is a one-act which could easily have come from a larger play featuring Amanda and her involvement with the D. A. R.—and the timing is right also. In 1941, Williams had just been dealt a severe blow when his play *Battle of Angels* failed in Boston. It was his first play to be produced by professionals and it had been bound for Broadway, so its demise was devastating. Theatergoers in Boston were conservative at the time, and were shaken by the play’s sexual elements, and perhaps also by its tragic and violent conclusion. Williams responded by writing several rather innocent and light-hearted comedies in an attempt to survive professionally. Many of these were one-acts, such as “The Case of the Crushed Petunias” and “The Front Porch Girl” which we have discussed. Though we do not have a complete version of

the latter, the fragments we do have (HRC 16.8, 17.6), combined with Williams' correspondence (*Selected Letters* 1: 330, 335-36), confirm it as a milder, happier version of the "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" material which was to become GM. Williams introduced his agent to the play in late August, and only two months later, in the excerpt above, he tells her of a similarly light-hearted play, almost certainly "With Grace and Dignity." Incidentally, there is some evidence that Williams was trying to incorporate the play into "The Gentleman Caller," perhaps in early 1943, when he began working on "The Gentleman Caller" in earnest. Amanda says in draft fragments that she has not been able to return to the D. A. R. "since that awful scene we had[:] That horrible maid coming in with a stump of a candle!" (HRC 17.2).

All of the characters in the play are stock characters, but obviously when minorities are so depicted, the inherent racism is troubling. Did Williams see African-Americans in this way? Probably not. Though he was obviously not averse to drawing on the tradition of minstrelsy for the sake of humor, the treatment of minorities here is actually atypical of depictions of African-Americans in his work, and he almost certainly saw minorities in more rounded terms. His character Val of *Battle of Angels* and *Orpheus Descending* is a champion of minority rights, and in 1945 Williams criticized a Southern drama critic who believed "you are not supposed to have negros on the same stage with whites! – and all that sort of hog-wash" (*Selected Letters* 1: 561).

However, it does seem that he was influenced by popular culture in the early twentieth century, which perpetually claimed that there were deep "jungle" roots in African-Americans. In his symbolism, Williams perpetually uses race to represent the carnal side of human nature. When he wishes to emphasize this lightly, he uses Irish characters, as with Jim in GM. When the emphasis is to be heavier, he uses Polish characters, as with Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Hispanics are symbols of carnality concentrated still further, as in *Baby Doll*, and

African Americans are the most concentrated carnal symbol of all, as in the short story “Big Black: A Mississippi Idyll” and scattered instances in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Rose Tattoo*, etc. Williams did not see this as being negative—he was a self-proclaimed sensualist and was often celebrating carnality—but the image is certainly reductive all the same.

Editing the Play

Across a blank page preceding the play, Williams has written:

Mrs. Wingfield is entertaining the D. A. R.

Scene = the kitchen

Between this one-act and the two that follow, a random page of typescript occurs. It is clearly one which Williams discarded in the process of composing “With Grace and Dignity,” for it is an alternate version of Clarissa and Mrs. Wingfield’s exchange above, regarding Rosemary’s “awgundy” dress. In it, Clarissa’s name is consistently “Reba,” and Rosemary is called “Rose,” almost certainly because these were earlier names for these characters. In the first half of the play itself, Williams consistently crosses out “Reba” and inserts “Clarissa,” though in the last half, Williams errs in the stage directions and calls these characters by their original names. (I have corrected all such instances.) In the dialogue of the play, Mrs. Wingfield always calls her daughter “Rosemary.” Clarissa calls her “Miss Rose,” but I have not changed this to “Rosemary,” for Williams may have intended for Clarissa to informally call Rosemary “Rose.”

2. “The Poetry Prize”

In 1952, Williams wrote, “I was christened Thomas Lanier Williams. It is a nice enough name, perhaps a little too nice. It sounds like it might belong to the son of a writer who turns out sonnet sequences to Spring. As a matter of fact, my first literary award was \$25.00 from a Woman’s Club for doing exactly that, three sonnets dedicated to Spring. I hasten to add that I was still pretty young” (*Where I Live* 59). “Sonnets for the Spring,” the sonnet sequence which brought Williams the prize, is extant, surprisingly, and has been reprinted in his *Collected Poems* (180-81). Hayman, in his biography of Williams, includes a particularly comic photograph taken of the prizewinner and judge (39). Leverich speaks of this event, writing that on March 25, 1936, the day before Williams’ twenty-fifth birthday, Williams was notified that he had won twenty-five dollars in a local poetry contest sponsored by the Wednesday Club in St. Louis (164). Prior to the event, Williams was anxious, but “[t]he award ceremony was not as grueling as he had anticipated. He said that it could not have been made easier for him. ‘No stage. No speech. Just a room full of tired, elegant old ladies, a couple of priests and some very young poets. Lovely sunny place. Nevertheless palpitations for about five minutes. Afterwards tea and talk—nervous but felt okay’” (165). This is the material Williams transformed into the two scenes of “The Poetry Prize.”

The Poetry Prize

Spot a dais banked with ferns confronting an imaginary audience of an exclusive women's club, the sort that have various creative or cultural groups such as the Browning Study Group, the Ladies' Parnassus, etc.

On the dais is a lectern with a goose-neck lamp and a little stand for a silver water pitcher and glasses and a vase of roses. There are three empty chairs portentously arranged along the back of the dais.

The president of the women's club is standing on the dais. A description of this character would be redundant to anybody who has seen the cartoons of Helen Hokinson in The New Yorker. This is a Middle-Western club but the type is universal. She is imposing, she is fluttery, she is grimacing, and her massive body supports clothes and jewels of a value that would provide comfort as well as the necessities of life to such a family as the Wingfields for possibly ten years.

MME. PRESIDENT: And now, ladies, the major event of our cultural season! For the benefit of our guests, let me speak a word or two about the Annual Poetry Awards of the Tuesday Club of St. Louis. Each year we have this splendid competition. It is open not only to members of the club but to mute, inglorious Miltons and—unsuspected Sapphires—Sapphos!—throughout the state of Missouri. Three prizes are conferred when the contest closes. A first prize of fifty dollars. A second prize of twenty-five dollars. A third prize of ten. It is unnecessary to say how much these notable awards have done to advance the whole poetic movement in America!

The poems submitted are judged by a committee of our own club members, especially trained for their responsible yearly task by long and devoted activity in the Poetry Study Group.

Now, without more ado, without any fanfare of trumpets but with that earnest accolade of respect which is certainly due their important contribution—Let me now introduce this year's three winners, who will rise from the body of the audience to take their seats on the dais—receive the wreaths of laurel—and read their own poems to us.

I am happy and proud to say that two of this year's prize winners are members of our own society.

Will Mrs. August Meredith and Mrs. Otto Diesselhorst kindly step forward and take their seats on the dais!

[In a burst of enthusiastic applause the two honored matrons step into the lighted area.]

[Mrs. August Meredith is a gaunt and moribund type of Sappho, austere but richly gowned in black satin and pearls, a face of the hatchet type wearing an expression which more than suggests the high seriousness of her muse.]

[Mrs. Otto Diesselhorst, on the other hand, is all sweetness and light, a Mrs. Five-by-Five of the lyric avocation, short and bouncing and very smartly and flirtatiously gowned and hatted for the early spring season.]

[They grimace at the audience and still more brilliantly, and menacingly, at each other.]

PRESIDENT: Our remaining prize-winner this year is an outsider. I am pleased to say this poet is a young *man*.—Isn't that *nice*?—Unfortunately this young man has a responsible position in the commercial world which prevents him from attending the meeting this afternoon. He is represented, however, by his mother who has graciously consented to take his place on the dais and receive his honor by proxy. This is something more than a mere substitution. For after all, a mother whose son is a poet is also a poet herself, for all of us who are mothers know how our offspring are molded and tempered in our care as much as if they were living poems, conceived not only of our flesh but our—loving souls! Will Mrs. Amanda Wingfield, mother of Thomas Wingfield, please take her honored place between our two member poets!

[Mrs. Wingfield—after a burst of applause—edges somewhat awkwardly into the lighted area.]

[She is got up in her D.A.R. outfit, the long dinner gown of turquoise velvet which steaming and brushing can never restore to its original bloom.]

[There are tears in her eyes and the ribboned scroll is shaking in her clasp. In spite of the badly fitting and inappropriate gown she sits between the two lady poets with a dignity which they lack. As she is seated, a faintly audible ripple of laughter is heard from the unseen audience. Having achieved the ascent of the dais, her face relaxes into a beatific smile.]

PRESIDENT: And, now—Now, ladies!—
The winner of the *first prize—fifty dollars!*
Mrs. August Meredith—will read her poem!

[This announcement comes as an obvious and disagreeable shock to Mrs. Otto Diesselhorst. The smile which had wreathed her countenance is maintained but all the joy is gone from it and it is a very poor mask of the outraged sense of injustice with which her ample bosom is suddenly agitated.]

[Mrs. Wingfield's disappointment is hardly less palpable though borne with better grace. The fifty dollars would have been very convenient. She looks down shyly and rearranges the lace of her sleeves.]

[Mrs. Meredith, risen to her coldly Gothic height, assumes a place at the lectern, slowly and portentously unwinds the scroll on which her poem has been transcribed in illuminated letters.]

[She knows the work by memory and begins to recite it with closed eyes and gravely knitted brow.]

The poem:

“I see them lying sheeted in their graves—
all of the women poets of this land!
Each in her own, inscrutable, small cave,
song reft from lip—and pen purloined from hand.
And no more vocal now than any stone,
Less aureate in fact than any weed,
this thing of witherèd flesh and bleachèd bone,
That patterned once—Beauty’s—immortal—creed!
[a sobbing intake of breath]
Rudely you seized and broke Proud Sappho’s lyre—
Teasdale and Wylie went—your songless way!
You do not care what—hecatomb of fire—
is spilt when shattering—the urn of clay!
Yet, *Death*—
[opening her eyes in a baleful stare]
I’ll pardon all you took away—
[with a sorrowful nod]
While still you spare me—*Glorious—Millay!*”

[*There is an awful hush as she turns and resumes her seat. The president steps forward.*]

PRESIDENT [*breathlessly*]: Wasn’t that a lovely—*lovely*—poem!

[*Applause*]

PRESIDENT [*referring momentarily to her notes*]: The muse—has many moods. Like a gem exposed to light and shadow, sometimes She is somber—Again She is gay—and dancing!
[*turning*]

Our winner of the second—twenty-five dollar prize—Mrs. Otto Diesselhorst!
A poem entitled—*THE KISS!*

[*Mrs. Diesselhorst still outraged comes fussily forward. Her voice is high and squeaky and her disappointment has not given it a much more pleasant timbre.*]

MRS. DIESSELHORST [*roughly unwinding her scroll*]: By way of a slight correction, Mrs. Kammerer, the title of my poem is not “The Kiss.”
It is called—“*Il Baccio!*”

PRESIDENT [*fluttering*]: But doesn’t that mean—The Kiss?

MRS. DIESSELHORST: In a sense, yes, but something is always missing in translations!

[*takes a sip of water*]

Il Baccio

A kiss—brings pain!
[*This effect is represented by a painful grimace.*]
Approvingly I quote
These words some ancient lover wrote—
And yet—
[*pain is erased by rapture*]
I'll kiss—again!
[*She nods briskly and bounces back to her chair.*]

PRESIDENT [*catching her breath*]: *Ohhhh!*
What a gay and delightful little sonnet!
Ohhhhhhhhhhh!

[*Applause*]

PRESIDENT [*addressing someone at side*]: Usher!
Why don't we raise that window and let in a little bit more of this glorious spring air?
Now ladies—
Our third prize poem—read by the poet's Mother—
Mrs. Amanda Wingfield!

[*Mrs. Wingfield has unwrapped her scroll during the last reading and is staring at the poem with tearful eyes and one hand touching her throat.*]

PRESIDENT: Mrs. Wingfield?

AMANDA [*rising awkwardly and speaking in a hoarse whisper*]: I'm terribly sorry—
but I can't read this poem!
I just—can't!

PRESIDENT: Oh, Mrs. Wingfield!
Why *not*?

AMANDA: It isn't a—happy poem. It's—too *sad*!
Will you be kind enough to read it for me?
I mean—for my son...

[*Begin to dim out.*]

PRESIDENT [*accepting the scroll*]: We must remember—that sadness is the privilege of
the young!

[*Blackout*]

A Prayer

Late that night.

Spot Mrs. Wingfield sitting on the edge of her bed in her white muslin night gown, plaiting her hair.

The reedy sound of Laura's Victrola is heard very faintly.

Mrs. Wingfield clears her throat and dips a finger into a jar of Vick's Vap-O-Rub and begins to massage it into the skin of her collar-bone.

Her expression is troubled.

She stops all at once, hastily dries her fingers on a tissue of Kleenex and picks up the ornamented scroll from the bedside table.

[*Reading aloud:*]

"I see the road at night
stretching above my bed.
How long the road and white
above my troubled head!

I hear the wind at night
calling down the lane.
It's calling *me* tonight—
Shall I refuse again?

The room is narrow, the house
is locked with little keys.
My soul's a nibbling mouse
and life's a bit of cheese!

The moon is very white
and, oh, the road is long!
I'd go with them tonight
were I less weak—or strong!"

[*Her expression is very grave as she carefully wraps the scroll up again and replaces it on the table. She steps out of the light spot and is heard calling.*]

MRS. W: Tom!—Tom?

TOM [*off, drowsily*]: Yes, Mother.

MRS. W: Are you in bed?

TOM: —Yes—Mother...

MRS. W: Laura, turn off that Victrola and also the light in your bedroom—It's nearly midnight!

LAURA [*faintly*]: Yes, Mother.

[*Music stops.*]

MRS. W: Tch, tch.

[*pause*]

Tom?

TOM: Yes, Mother?

[*pause*]

MRS. W [*sighing*]:

Oh, well—nothing....

Good night.

[*She returns slowly to the edge of her bed. Gets awkwardly down on her knees and begins to say her prayers.*]

MRS. W [*hoarsely*]: God—be merciful—to all in this house....

[*Blackout*]

Discussion of “The Poetry Prize”

This play is essentially a travesty of many of Williams’ own themes, and each one of them is represented by a character. Mrs. Kammerer says that the “muse—has many moods. Like a gem exposed to light and shadow, sometimes She is somber—Again She is gay—and dancing!” These two moods of the muse are the polarities of life and death, that which I call the “secondary dichotomy,” the light and dark sides of the moon, discussed above. This “light and shadow,” which appears throughout Williams, appears in this play in the persons of the first two women to the podium. Their names as well as their attire signal their relationship to the dichotomy. Mrs. August Meredith, the first character, is the symbol for death. She is certainly august, described as a “gaunt and moribund type of Sappho [with] a face of the hatchet type wearing an expression which more than suggests the high seriousness of her muse.” Her clothing and deportment also indicate her ties to death; she is “austerely but richly gowned in black satin,” and when it is her turn to recite her poem, she rises to “her coldly Gothic height, assumes a place at the lectern,” and “slowly and portentously unwinds the scroll on which her poem has been transcribed in illuminated letters.” She recites the poem with “closed eyes and gravely knitted brow.”

The poem she reads is much older than this play. Williams originally composed it as a serious attempt at art, but here he uses it to satirize himself and the poetic milieu he was once a part of. He began deprecating this piece as early as 1944 in a preface to his poems (*Where I Live* 1), and he satirizes it as late as his *Memoirs*, published in 1975, where he recalls of the 1930s, “During the weekdays I would work on verse: quite undistinguished, I fear, and upon one occasion I knocked out what is probably the most awful sonnet ever composed. It strikes me,

now, as comical enough to be quoted in full” (37). He then inserts the poem, virtually the same, word for word, as the poem of Meredith’s above.

After the advance of death, vernal life is the next to appear at the lectern, in the form of Mrs. Otto Diesselhorst. Her name is a comic means of introducing “get up” and spunk, with references to autos, diesel, and horses (with sexual connotations pertaining to the latter). The stage directions confirm her vitality, stating that she is “all sweetness and light, a Mrs. Five-by-Five of the lyric avocation, short and bouncing.” She is “very smartly and flirtatiously gowned and hatted for the early spring season.” Her association with fertility and life is also indicated by her physical person; she has an “ample bosom.”

The poem she reads is, of course, lyrical, concerning kissing. This is another instance of Williams’ mocking an early work of his, for it is another poem originally written as straightforward art, and was published in 1932, at the University of Missouri. (It and Meredith’s poem are both reprinted in Williams’ *Collected Poems* 217-18.) Williams emphasizes the vernal resonance of the poem by having Mrs. Kammerer say after the conclusion of the recitation, “Why don’t we raise that window and let in a little bit more of this glorious spring air?”

Finally, there is Mrs. Wingfield. She represents another constant obsession of Williams’, the past, which is indicated by her clothes: “She is got up in her D.A.R. outfit, the long dinner gown of turquoise velvet which steaming and brushing can never restore to its original bloom.” This dress is in its essence the very dress “resurrected” by Amanda in scene 6 of *GM* (193). In “The Poetry Prize,” her ties to the past are poetically evoked also by her “sitting on the edge of her bed in her white muslin night gown, plaiting her hair” in the second scene. Williams typically associates the past with spirituality and Southern gentility, and this is in evidence here. Her spirituality is indicated by his giving her a “beatific smile,” and her gentility is made

manifest when she seats herself between the two other contestants, possessing a “dignity which they lack.” This is also emphasized in the way she handles the news of her son’s defeat; when the winner is announced, her “disappointment is hardly less palpable” than Mrs. Diesselhorst’s, but is “borne with better grace. The fifty dollars would have been very convenient. She looks down shyly and rearranges the lace of her sleeves”—another article of clothing underscoring her ties to the past.

Predictably, there is a great deal of animosity between death and vernal life. When Mrs. Diesselhorst and Mrs. Meredith first ascend the stage, “[t]hey grimace at the audience and still more brilliantly, and menacingly, at each other,” shortly before it is announced that Mrs. Meredith has won first prize. It is significant that death triumphs over both vernal life and the charm of the past, which is the plot of GM (and a figurative indication of Williams’ general bent towards tragedy). The magic of Amanda’s otherworld and the new life which rises in Laura with the budding spring are not enough to triumph over mortality, which in the end inevitably destroys everything.

The second scene contains another theme which is prominent in GM; in his poem, Tom weighs his ties to home—which is characterized by spirituality, gentility, and the charm of the past—over and against the enticements of flux, represented by the classic Williams symbols of wind and the open road. This is a truly lyrical moment, a mood Williams does not satirize as strongly.

On a minor note, there are subtle bits of Williams’ humor throughout the play. When he introduces us to Mrs. Kammerer, whose “massive body supports clothes and jewels of a value that would provide comfort as well as the necessities of life to such a family as the Wingfields for possibly ten years,” and when he has her say that the first-, second- and third-place prize

winner are being given fifty, twenty-five and ten dollars respectively, and adds, “It is unnecessary to say how much these notable awards have done to advance the whole poetic movement in America!”—this is an allusion to a sentiment Williams’ friend Paul Bigelow expressed, which Williams cherished and included in his *Memoirs*: “The very rich have such a touching faith in the efficacy of small sums” (3). When she announces that Tom has “a responsible position in the commercial world which prevents him from attending the meeting this afternoon,” this is a comically grandiose reference to Tom’s (and Williams’) humble post at International Shoes.

Editing the Play

Williams wrote the following in pencil across a blank page preceding the play:

The Poetry Prize & Night After

In the original version, Mrs. Kammerer says of the muse: “Like a gem exposed to light and shadow, sometimes She is somber—Again she is gay—and dancing!” I have capitalized the second “she” to match the first.

3. "A Monday Breakfast"

Unlike the other two one-acts, this play was probably not based on a true story. It was, however, inspired by the adulation Williams truly felt for his pioneer ancestors, who were among the first settlers of Tennessee. At times, this adulation is his explanation for choosing "Tennessee" as his professional name. The one-act can be compared to two poems Williams wrote circa 1937, entitled "Odyssey" and "Inheritors." The latter begins,

We were the pioneers
the long-haired men in coon caps
the clear-eyed
who saw dusk coming slowly
like bitter smoke out of the hills
 We were the cavaliers
 the Virginians
 who came down through Cumberland Gap
 into East Tennessee
 [We then] took the trail westward again
For we were the ones that known lands
were not large enough to contain
the adventurers
the ones that must have something new (*Collected Poems* 189)

The speaker of the poem then asks,

 What has become
 of our deer-skinned, moccasined race?
Were all of them lost
in crossing the Isthmus
in rounding the Strait of Magellan?
[.]
Where are the Indian-fighters [. . .] ?

The answer:

 The towns have taken them
The cities have done their best to make whores
of our sweet-limbed daughters
our sons have grown round
with unwholesome accretions of fat
with muscles well-covered, disused
and the softness of wealth

The western acres have turned our flesh into bread
our bone into wood to build houses
our blood is caught up
in the churning motion of wheels (190)

The speaker concludes the poem by predicting that our pioneer blood will rise once again, inspiring us to break the oppression of our urbanized existence and move us toward frontiers (literal or figurative) once again. In the one-act "A Monday Breakfast," Williams uses this pride in our national heritage as fuel for the fire of a new revolution based on the socialist mood of the 1930s.

A Monday Breakfast

Mrs. Wingfield, in her dingy wrapper, enters the living-room-dining-room where Tom is sleeping on the folding bed.

MRS. W [*with brilliant energy, impervious to the bleak grey morning*]: Six o'clock, Son. Rise and shine!

[*Tom twists slowly on the bed, resisting the encroachment of another morning.*]

MRS. W: Rise and shine! Rise and shine!

TOM [*dismally propping himself on one elbow*]: Oh, for God's sake, Mother.

MRS. W: What?

TOM: Wake me up, but don't say "rise and shine."

MRS. W: What's wrong with "rise and shine"?

TOM: It's too sarcastic, Mother.

MRS. W: What's sarcastic about it?

TOM [*getting out of bed in his shorts and fumbling gloomily with his socks and shoes*]: Every day the sun tries again to create a little excitement in the human race.

MRS. W: What?

TOM: He comes up full of energy and fire, making all kinds of exclamatory remarks through the open windows of St. Louis, Missouri. [*crossing to window*]

He shouts and raises his arms and brandishes his weapons and waves his banners.

What's the reaction? We get out of bed and brush our teeth and eat some kind of mush and catch a street-car. Going where? To work in a goddam warehouse!

That's not what the rising sun had in mind.—He goes down feeling discouraged. I had a beautiful dream.

MRS. W [*setting breakfast on table*]: A dream you had? About what?

TOM: California.

MRS. W: California? Don't mention that state to me.

The last I heard from your father, a post-card he sent from Hawthorne, California.

He said he was working on a—a squab-ranch there. He said he would send me a little money as soon as he got paid.

[*pause*]

I guess he never got paid.
Don't put on your shirt before you've washed!

TOM: Why not? It changes the program.

[*He disappears into bathroom.*]

[*Mrs. W's attention is suddenly caught by something on the fire escape out the side door. With an outraged gasp she crosses to pull the door open.*]

MRS. W: Young man!—That isn't your bottle of milk!
You set that bottle right down or I'll call the police!

[*pause*]

Young man—Are you *hungry*, young man?

You are?—Well—Come on in and I'll give you something to eat.

[*After a moment a seedy young transient enters, grinning apologetically.*]

MRS. W: Don't you think it's much nicer to ask for things than snatch them off a door-step?

VAGRANT: Yes, Ma'am. But asking isn't always getting these days.

MRS. W: Just the same, you know it pays to be honest. No one who's honest goes hungry in America.

VAGRANT: Since when, lady?

MRS. W: Where there's a will there's a way. Sit down at the table and look at the Globe-Democrat till I get things ready. My son's having breakfast, too.

He's just about your age and has a job to get to.

[*The vagrant sits and watches hungrily as she serves the oatmeal.*]

MRS. W: You don't look like the type of young fellow who'd be dishonest by choice.

VAGRANT: Thanks, lady.

MRS. W: Tom!

[*Tom enters yawning. Stares at the visitor.*]

MRS. W: Tom, this young man's hungry, I'm giving him some breakfast.
This is my son, Mr.—

VAGRANT: Lee. Tom Lee.

[*They shake hands.*]

MRS. W [*pleased*]: Well, well. Two Toms! Where are you from, Mr. Lee?

LEE: California.

MRS. W: Isn't that funny? We were talking about California.
I don't suppose you ever ran into a man named Wingfield out there? Worked on a squab ranch?

LEE [*grinning*]: No, Ma'am.

MRS. W: Don't you have folks out there?

LEE: Yep.

MRS. W: Then why don't you go back there? Instead of traipsing around strange cities—catch as catch can.

LEE: I guess I was born to travel.

MRS. W: You've got the wander-bug, huh?

TRANSIENT: Yep.

MRS. W: Well, that's a mighty bad thing to have, I think.
I'm glad my boy is satisfied to stay put. It's the only way to get ahead in this world.

LEE: This world has changed.

MRS. W: How do you mean?

LEE: It used to be that a fellow made progress by going and going, not by just staying put.

TOM [*with interest*]: That's the truth!

LEE: Those were the frontier days, when it paid to move.
But now—
You're right—
To get ahead in this world, you've got to stay put.
No more long-legged people, hitting the trails!

MRS. W: There's more than one kind of moving.

LEE: You want my opinion?

TOM: Yes. What is your opinion?

LEE [*drinking his coffee*]: There's just a lot of—dead cities!

MRS. W [*sharply*]: What?

LEE: Babylons and Ninevehs!
Cities that's swollen an' bloated up from the blood they've sucked out of people that
broke the ground which they've been built on!
Now they don't grow anymore, those towns. Just squat on their over-stuffed haunches
and wait to bust.
What are they squatting down on? The drained out, bloodless ghosts of the people that
put the fat on them.

MRS. W [*sharply*]: That sounds to me like pretty radical talk.

LEE: Sure.

MRS. W: What nationality are you? Foreigner, I suppose!

LEE: No, Ma'am. I come smack out of the people that made this country.

MRS. W: Well, so do we. I'm a daughter of the American Revolution. We don't
approve of such talk.

LEE: You should. The revolution that you're a daughter of was fought for human
liberties, wasn't it? Well, for nearly two hundred years since then there has been going on a
counter-revolution to take those liberties away. The Tories are back in control again, Ma'am. If
you're a daughter of revolution you ought to resist 'em.

MRS. W: Now I've got you spotted. You're a Red!
You criticize society, but what do you do for it?

LEE [*smiling*]: What did Paul Revere do for the people you come from?

MRS. W: Don't mention his name in connection with yours, young man!

LEE: Why not? I come from pioneers, too. Indian fighters!

They made this country, tore it out of the wilderness with their bare hands, fought and bled and died for it.

And what do *we* have for it? Stolen milk bottles for breakfast.

Don't tell me I'm unAmerican, lady. I've got the "Gem of the Ocean" in my blood.

But this great stockyard of penned-up, sweating cattle that wait for the butcher to pull them onto the block—is no more the "Gem of the Ocean" than I, Tom Lee, am the King of Paradise!

MRS. W [*snatching his plate from the table*]:

Take your breakfast outside—Eat it out on the fire-escape.

I won't have a Bolshevik eating at my table!

[*The youth grins wryly, shakes his head and goes out.*]

[*Tom rises and goes after him.*]

MRS. W: Tom! Where are you going?

TOM: Out on the fire-escape, Mother.

[*Curtain*]

Discussion of "A Monday Breakfast"

In this one-act, one can detect the same system of stasis and flux we have examined in GM, but here it is coupled to Williams' pride in his ancestry, so it is an overland system with California serving as the figurative extreme, rather than a primarily water-based system with the Pacific as the extreme. Because of this change, the last place we hear from Mr. Wingfield is California rather than Mazatlan, on the "Pacific coast of Mexico" (145), and Tom dreams of the state rather than Fiji's South Sea Island. As usual, Mrs. Wingfield is a force for stasis and temporal success: "I'm glad my boy is satisfied to stay put. It's the only way to get ahead in this world." Stasis signifies spirituality, which is typically associated with the religious, political and social mores of conservatives, in conflict with those exponents of carnality who would violate these mores. This system works well here, as the two Toms break with Mrs. Wingfield's sense of political propriety.

It is noteworthy that this symbolic system makes Tom's otherworld a past-oriented otherworld. In GM, Laura and Amanda dream of the Elysium of the past to an extent, but Tom's dreams of paradise are primarily oriented toward the future, which is typical for representatives of carnality in Williams. "A Monday Breakfast" and the GM drafts reveal, however, that originally Tom's dreams were as oriented around reviving the glories of the past as Laura's and Amanda's are. In indulging his drive for liberty, he is walking in the steps of his ancestors who once enjoyed limitless frontiers. There is just a hint of this remaining in GM, when Tom emulates his father, and when he reminds his mother earlier that "[m]an is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter" (174).

Tom Lee's status as a "Bolshevik," a "Red," actually confirms his ties to the carnal pole of the prime dichotomy. Red is a typical symbol for those indulging in carnality, as in Williams'

short story “The Red Part of a Flag,” composed, like the poems “Inheritors” and “Odyssey,” circa 1937 (and later retitled “Oriflamme”). Anna, the protagonist, rebels against the spiritual bondage she feels by buying a brilliant red dress, the icon of her resistance. She then moves “in a glorious banner wrapped, the red part of a flag!” (*Collected Stories* 131). This imagery is reflected in “A Morning Breakfast” by Tom Wingfield’s description of how the sun “shouts and raises his arms and brandishes his weapons and waves his banners” in an attempt to “create a little excitement in the human race.” Naturally, Tom Lee is the incarnation of this sun.

Tom Lee is actually an instance of a technique Williams used throughout his career during the process of characterization. Williams often created characters which merely amplify all or part of other characters’ natures; for instance, in *Battle of Angels*, he introduces toward the end the “Woman from Waco,” a “personification of the animal sexuality side of [Val, one of the protagonists] which has always dogged him and interfered with his idealistic pilgrimage through life” (*Selected Letters* 1: 320). In “A Morning Breakfast,” Tom Lee functions similarly, an amplification of Tom Wingfield; they even have the same given names. He is the incarnation of Tom Wingfield’s fantasy of all he hopes to become, roughly parallel to his father, Mr. Wingfield.

Portions of the play can be found in folders HRC 17.1 – 17.3, which contain draft fragments of “The Gentleman Caller.” However, I do not recall that these portions of the one-act were incorporated into the larger narrative. Drafts of the play may have been inadvertently included among those of “The Gentleman Caller” because both plays feature the Wingfields.

“A Morning Breakfast” is related to other plays Williams wrote in the 1930s, plays like *Candles to the Sun*, which have an explicitly political theme. Though there is a political dimension to virtually all his narratives, there is a sense that his heart was not altogether in the creation of these particular plays, which are almost political tracts. His enthusiasm in the

“Inheritors” is surely heartfelt, but his modifying the motif to be more socialist in nature is probably not sincere. He was, however, living in a decade when it was expedient for playwrights to have strongly political themes, and he obliged, though the status of his family, which was considered bourgeois, often hampered his efforts to pass for a young radical.

Because he seems to be drawing on the socialist mood of the 1930s, and because the play is so similar to poems he wrote in 1936 and 1937 and to the symbolism of “Oriflamme,” which was begun in 1937, it seems fairly certain that Williams composed “A Monday Breakfast” sometime in the late 1930s. Moreover, if it were written later, it would almost certainly make some reference to WWII.

There are allusions to war, but it is to the Revolutionary War, with Tom Lee serving as a modern-day Paul Revere. With his surname, there is also a reference to the Civil War, which is accentuated by his vilifying cities and glorifying the country; the Civil War has traditionally been seen as a conflict between the industrial North and rural South. On the play’s handwritten title page, Williams even writes “Tom Lee of Va.” rather than “A Monday Breakfast”; apparently, he was considering making Lee a Virginian rather than a Californian, to emphasize his ties to the South (and its former general) more strongly. This North/South contrast is even clearer in GM, as we have seen. Essentially, part of the past Tom Lee is fighting to revive is a specifically Southern past.

It is strange for Tom Lee to be on the side of a specifically Southern past. In Williams, characters on the carnal side of the prime dichotomy are usually in the flow of time, oriented toward the present and future, and toward the North, whereas only characters like Laura and Amanda are concerned with clinging to the past, and to the superannuated charm of the South. However, much of the South considered the Civil War to be a defiant struggle for freedom

(ironically), which is a particularly classic concern of representatives of carnality. This makes Tom Lee's championing the past (and subtly, the South) appropriate. This Southern defiance can also be sensed in Williams' essay "Tennessee Williams Presents His POV," where he recounts a time when someone asked his mother,

"Mrs. Williams, why does your son waste his talents on such morbid subjects?"

Mother spoke as quickly as if she'd always known the answer. "My son," she said, "writes about life"—and she said it with the conviction of a rebel yell.

(*Where I Live* 115)

Editing the play

Williams wrote the following in pencil across the title page preceding the play: "Tom Lee of Va."

A space between "oatmeal" has been omitted: originally "oat meal."

In one sentence, the word "they" has been changed to "the." The sentence originally read: "Cities that's swollen an' bloated up from they blood they've sucked out of people that broke the ground which they've been built on!"

A comma between "Tom Lee" has been omitted. A sentence originally read: "But this great stockyard of penned-up, sweating cattle that wait for the butcher to pull them onto the block—is no more the 'Gem of the Ocean' than I, Tom, Lee, am the King of Paradise!"

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VITA

D. Brent Barnard was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1971. After completing secondary school, he spent several years working as a missionary, traveling throughout the United States and abroad. In 1994, he graduated from Central Bible College with an Associate of Arts degree in missiology. After working for a year in an administrative capacity for an actuarial firm, he enrolled at Evangel University, where he came to the realization that the delight he experienced in literature was God given, and that a life given over to the enjoyment of literature would actually please God. He therefore graduated from Evangel in 1997 with a double major in English and Biblical studies, and promptly enrolled in New York University where he graduated with a Master of Arts in English in the spring of 2000. He began pursuing his doctorate in the fall of 2000, enrolling in the graduate program at Louisiana State University while simultaneously teaching courses and—during the summers and the final years of his degree—working as an academic advisor at Brookhaven College’s multicultural center. He currently lives in Dallas, Texas.