

Chapter VI

CHAPTER - VI**“ONE WORD MORE” : A QUEST FOR A NEW SELF**

“And so I presume to insist there must be somewhere truth to be pursued

each day with words that are misunderstood and feared because

they are the words of an Artist, which must always

remain a word most compatible with the word

Revolutionary and so be more than a word.

Therefore, from youth into age I have continued

and will still continue the belief and the seeking, until

that time when time can no longer concern me.”

“The Misunderstandings and Fears of an Artist’s Revolt”

from Where I Live : Selected Essays by Tennessee Williams.

The term “self” “teases” not only the philosophers and psychologists “out of thought”¹, the literateurs too are seen groping in dark while defining “self”. Tennessee Williams had promised to produce “Non-Black” plays immediately after 1960. The cynosure of this Chapter is to see whether transformation of the “Self” (i.e. from “Black” to “Non-Black”), had been possible at all or not. Keeping this in view, an indepth study of the characters reacting to “similar situation” in “Black” and “Non-Black” plays has been pursued. Lastly, the acceptance of Williams’s plays by the audience and the

critics' attitude towards the playwright as construed from the reviews and write-ups published in various theatre - journals are to be taken into account. The above-mentioned tenets are highlighted in the following three sections.

I

Why is there a gradual switchover from the "Black" to the "Non-Black" self? The reasons to some extent, have been investigated into the previous Chapters (especially in Chapter III). But some philosophical supports to the issue are sought for.

"Williams is not in the tradition of Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller. They are concerned with social problems, with how man gets along with the world around him. Williams is worried as O'Neill with how man gets on with the world inside him".²

"The world inside a man" not only falls in the purview of psychology but, it brings the philosophical questions to the fore. Automatically, the question of "evolution of self" or remodelling of the old self gains ground. The dichotomy of Williams's presentation of a "Black" and a "Non-Black" view gives rise to the question of ambiguity in Williams's plays. Actually, John Golden (The Death of Tinkerbelle, 1967) labels the framework of Williams's outlook as a "double dilemma" :

"On the one hand, the puritan instinct in conflict with human corruption, on the other, a fragmented and chaotic universe in conflict with the intuition and skill of an orderly dramatist. Williams not only has found the means to reconcile the moral and aesthetic division in both art and life, but has been able to convert the psychic tensions

these divisions produce into a source of uncommonly high dramatic energy.”³ Williams actually stressed the basic conflicts in human beings : “the primitive struggle between light and dark, between God and the Devil, between love and death, between innocence and corruption and between illusion and reality. (The Death of a Tinkerbell) This internal conflict, this ambivalence is a yearning for a paradise lost, one that promises the kind of fulfilment, total engagement with the full range of sensual experiences that life promises but never seems to deliver.”⁴ Thus, there is always a hiatus between the “inspired object” and the “achieved goal”. Thus, transmogrifying of an old self is utterly impossible, rather a pipedream that hardly can come true.

Different branches of philosophy, such as Western, Eastern et al analyse the “self” from myriads of angles. Søren Kierkegaard took the cudgels to define “self”:

“Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, it is a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two facts, so regarded, man is not yet a self”.⁵

It might be possible that along with the emergence of New South, Williams’s settings changed, and receiving harsh treatment in the hands of life, he might have changed into a battered person, seeking for a catharsis in his creation. Again, a dilemma is noted in the playwright’s mind.

The “calm mind” could produce plays, that appeared dull and inane to the theatre-goers, while, the “disturbed mind” had been the fountain of portrayal of the brilliant characters of the early plays. So, the “old self” i.e. the “disturbed self” might be Dionysian but productive and the quiet “satisfied self” was a crack-up of the old frame, though claiming to be Apollonian. Murray Krieger cogently commented : “The Dionysian must be there for the Apollonian to transform, so that, Apollonian radiance can retain its brilliance only by continually illuminating the Dionysian abyss ... the Apollonian cannot sustain itself in isolation, it can exist only with the Dionysian.”⁶ Thus a linear revelation

through "Black - Non-Black - Black" cannot be done away with, in case of Williams.

The negative traits of the "Black" plays cannot be fully negated by the positive features of "Non-Black" ones. But, a close study and analysis of the "Black" and "Non-Black" plays reveal the making of a "new self", a "self" that gets transformed and gets shorn of all ruinous traits that mar life and blur the clear vision of an individual. "Knowing the content of individual experience does not explain the unique meaning or totality any more than knowing that a tree has a trunk and branches tells how it will be perceived by the different people who see it ⁵Experiments at the Hanover Insitute have shown that we do not get our perceptions from the things around us, but that our perceptions come from us.' ("Education for what is real": Earl. C. Kelley, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1947). The sole reality is ⁶individual reality and which is based on a background of unique experience'.⁷"

The evolution of the "self" has hardly anything to do with the term "self acceptance", so it has wisely been omitted and "acceptance of reality" has been used instead. The "self" is not something to accept or reject - or to trade in for a new improved model ... it is a "given", though never stable, never permanently fixed".⁸ The term "never stable" or "never permanently fixed" makes way for the scope of "emergence of self". This is the nub the chapter centres round.

In case of Williams, in the early plays the "self" might have experienced a sad deterioration and he tries to recoup the same in the late plays. But could he succeed in retrieving the same? The late plays do not contain well - conceived themes, attractive and compact dialogue, but, they have a message of optimism, hidden behind the world-weariness of the characters. Williams preaches optimism, thinks of "quieter elements of existence", needs to rethink of his life "anew". But the ⁹plays which won plaudits belonged to the span of persistence of the "Black Self". Then, it might be "Geworfenheit" in case of Williams. The "Black" self he possessed made him feel at home than the "Non-

Black” self - the assumed identity. Perhaps, after the sixties, the period which he coined himself as the “disastrous decade”⁹ of his life, he fell in a dungeon where the “self” underwent an unwelcome change. Wylie Sypher puts forth veritable reasons : “The heroic figure of free man - a dream of the enlightenment, the Promethean self pinnacled in the steady bright light of the eternal beyond time and history - is plunged into the institutional lower world where the law of large numbers closes in and the average is a prison where the self loses identity. Prometheus is bound again, cast into a utilitarian order where his freedom is gone and his existence is only a form of contingency upon numerical constants. Thus appears the existential theme of ‘Geworfenheit’ - the state of being thrown into a world where we do not ‘belong’. It is a second exile of man, doubly melodramatic, because the romantic vision of the free self is so intense.”¹⁰

But, if we are at one with this view we have to admit that Williams had to compromise with a world where he did not feel at home. Then the connotation of the world “Non-Black” itself remains apocryphal.

Since it has already been considered that neither all his “Non-Black” plays could claim to be shorn of “Black” streaks, nor the “Non-Black” plays contained no hue other than “Non-Black”, we can equate Williams’s quest for self with Alma Winemiller’s inference:

“Alma (to John) ... I’ve thought many times of something you told me last summer, that I have a *doppelganger*. I looked that up and I found that it means another person inside me, another *self* (italics mine) and I don’t know whether to thank you or not for making me conscious of it !”

(Summer and Smoke, Scene XI, Part II)

Williams too harboured a “doppelganger” i.e. two “selves” in him, one (Black) manifested in his plays till 1960 and the other from 1960 to his last days. (Non-


Black). But both of the “selves” had been complementary to each other rather than contending with one another.

II

In Chapter III, a long discussion on the reasons behind the change in attitude of Williams has been seriously carried out. Hence, the repetition of the same seems extraneous. “Non-Black” and “Black” Williams, are quintessentially different so far as reacting to tricky situations is concerned. A close scrutiny of a “Black” play beside a “Non-Black” play in respect of the characters’s response to a particular situation, further strengthens the observation.

Being a “Black” play, A Street Car Named Desire speaks of “violence”, “sense of insecurity”. In A Street Car Named Desire, Blanche du Bois, the sister-in-law of Stanley Kowalski had been heinously treated by Stanley. Even she had been robbed of her virginity when her sister Stella had been out for her child birth. Stanley however took the cudgels up to break her ties with his friend Mitch and succeeded in lining up evidence of lechery, squandering of property against Blanche du Bois. Thereafter she was sent to a lunatic asylum marked with the stamp “insane”, which fell short of adequate proof. “Violence” gained in strength when Stanley sordidly approached Blanche in Scene X :

“ Blanche : I warn you, don’t. I’m in danger !



[He takes another step. She smashes a bottle on the table and faces him, clutching the broken top]

Stanley : What did you do that for ?

Blanche : So, I could twist the broken end in your face.

[He springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle-top but he catches her wrist]

Tiger - tiger, Drop the bottle-top ! Drop it!

We've had this date with each other from the beginning.

[*She moans. The bottle-top falls, she sinks to her knees. He picks up her inert figure and carries her to the bed*] (italics mine)

(A Street Car Named Desire, Scene X)

But, a similar situation might have taken a demure turn if it had been an excerpt from a "Non-Black" play. As in Kingdom of Earth, a "Non-Black" play, we easily let our imagination run wild and paint it "Black", where Chicken was about to drown Myrtle but ended up with light humour. But, Myrtle like an ingenue built her trust on Chicken - Lot's half-brother, a real rogue. Lot had announced her marriage with Myrtle, but Chicken smelt rat in it. He thought of having a look at their marriage-certificate and he tried an abominable legerdemain on Myrtle. Had he been Stanley Kowalski, he might have flung to fury and could have raped Myrtle, who at that time had no way open to her, or he could easily drive her away by intimidating her. In that way, he could incur the property without any effort, as soon as Lot died, who was already on the verge of dying. Chicken was intelligent enough to suppress the "black" impetuosity and controlled himself remembering of the "quieter elements of existence", though his actions were never genuinely "Non-Black" both in approach, means and end. He tried to make

Myrtle reach her wits's end by playing a false trick that a bolus of flood was rushing in to devour the locality up. He gave her an inkling of Lot's incurable malady (tuberculosis). Naturally, Myrtle began to lose her courage and stepped in the snare, carefully laid for her. The conversation below certifies Chicken's malicious wit and spitefulness :

“ Chicken : And one month after she died (Miss Lottie, i.e. Lot's mother), Lot started dying. One lung gone and one going, but trying to run this place. Didn't take long for him to find out he couldn't so I begun to hear from him. He sent for me to come back and operate this place for him, sent for me twice by letter and a third time by wire. “Chicken come back” was the message, “ I will make a deal with you” - well, I'm no fool.

Myrtle : No no, you're no fool.

Chicken: I said, “All right, but I'm going to name the deal”. I said, “If you want me to run this place for you, well here's the deal.

When you are through with TB : -

It goes to me

Myrtle : *TB?*(italics mine) (Kingdom of Earth, Act III, Scene I) ”

Thus, through vigorous persuasion Chicken tried to cause Myrtle's liaison with Lot to snap. After Lot's demise, he wanted to face no impediments from any corner and could accrue the property from Ravenstock lineage without any melee'. He strained his brains to garner the information that Myrtle had not, at all been married to Lot. It carried Chicken off his feet as it could beef up his conspiracy against Lot:

“ Chicken : That's what he figured, son of a bitch thought he'd screw me by leaving a widow. But one thing he didn't count on was the house being flooded and him and his widow both - unless I haul his widow up on the

roof .

Myrtle : Oh now, look here, Chicken !

Chicken : Him and his widow both ! Drowned in it ! Unless I haul his widow up on the roof.

Myrtle : Chicken, I can't catch my breath ! I, I, we we (Myrtle stands gasping like a fish out of water, leaning for support against the table :

.... Lot an me, we... *ain't... married!*

Chicken : *You an' Lot ain't married ? (italics mine)*”

(Kingdom of Earth, Act II, Scene I)

Chicken could easily lose his quietude and pick up a chance to treat Myrtle shabbily as like Blanche she too had no Shep Huntleigh to protect her. Perhaps, as it is a “Non-Black” play, the “search for togetherness” too played a vital role in making Myrtle emotionally get detached from Lot, and cling to Chicken. Blanche du Bois of A Street Car Named Desire might have never been such frank and open to Stanley. But Chicken’s sharp wit, and prudery saw him through the situation. He could brilliantly manoeuvre and win over Lot, without having recourse to violence, in the least.

If we juxtapose two situations - one from The Rose Tattoo (“Black” play) and another from The Red Devil Battery Sign (a “Non-Black” play), and observe the nuances in response of the characters to the situation, we see “Old” Williams silhouetting the late plays.

In The Rose Tattoo, Serafina had been deeply in love with her husband, who died in a street accident. Till Serafina came to know of her husband’s secret

alliance with a woman, she used to worship the urn containing the ashes of her husband's mortal remains, who died in a mishap. But, after being confirmed of his illicit relationship with Estelle Hohengarten, she threw off the urn, broke with her past rituals "she strictly adhered to, and, came out to be a new Serafina, who could unhesitatingly yield to the caring arms of Alvaro Mangiacavallo.

“ When Serafina discovered that the mutual trust she and her husband Rosario shared was nothing but a sheer hypocrisy, she could not maintain her cool :

Serafina (wildly) : This is the wife that's speaking! What do you know of my husband, what is the *lie* ? (*italics mine*)

[A strident voice sounds over the wire]

The voice (loud and clear) : Don't you remember? I brought you the rose-coloured silk to make him a shirt. You said, "For a man"? and I said, "Yes, for a man that's wild like a Gipsy!" But if you think I'm a liar, come here and let me show you his rose tattooed on my chest !

[Serafina holds the phone away from her as though it had burst into flame. Then, with a terrible cry, she hurls it to the floor. She staggers dizzily toward the Madonna. Alvaro seizes her arm and pushes her gently onto the sofa].”

[The Rose Tattoo, Act III, Scene I]

King Del Rey, supremo of the Mariachi band, in The Red Devil Battery Sign was caught in an emotional bond with Woman Downtown, a woman who took refuge in a hotel to ensconce herself from the ire of her husband, Commander of a secret rebel group, The Red Devil Battery. King got deeply involved with her. He was the only man in whom Woman could find a confidant, to whom she could be free to give rein to her natural instincts. But King Del Rey like Rosario of The Rose Tattoo had a wife and a loving daughter. Her wife, Perla, knew about his clandestine alliance with women, but

could not be violent enough to break with her husband. Perhaps, the courage of King to tell the truth, placated the anger of Perla. The miasma of “mendacity” does not cause the women of the “Non-Black” plays to suffer from fake disillusionment as it does in early plays. If the situation described below demanded Serafina to encounter, she might have let Hell loose in her family or could have fallen out with her husband and decided to leave him for ever. But Perla restrained from doing so.

Perla could smell rat in her husband’s growing solicitude for the other woman, but, she stayed tolerant. Of course, she protested against it. But at the same time, mutual distrust between them did not give birth to intense animosity, that could have marred their relationship, ruining the family altogether. Like Serafina, she had a daughter, Nina. Unlike Serafina, she could pluck up courage to extract the Truth from her husband, if need was felt. But, she stressed on strengthening “love” that could refreshen their bondage, so even after being aware of the unwanted presence of Woman Downtown in her consort’s life, she maintained her calm. The conversation below certifies her mettle:

“ Perla : I smell perfume on you, a woman’s perfume.

King : Oh, ho that. A drunk woman at the bar took out a spray bottle and sprayed me. (He is deceptively quite).

Perla : You don’t want to go to bed with me because you got a Woman Downtown, I think.

King : Mierda.

Perla: I sit up for you nights, but when you come home you don’t come in the house if the light is still on but you sit in the yard, why? To look at the dump-heap, at crest view-by-the-Dump-Heap in which we sunk our

life savings? Till half an hour after I turn the light out? I say nothing but I think, I feel, I'm a woman and I ... I love you[?] (italics mine).

(The Red Devil Battery Sign, Act I, Scene IV)

The female voice of protest, no doubt, is praiseworthy. But her tolerance and patient striving for cementing connubial tie firmer evokes a sense of admiration. If Perla had been Serafina, she might have risen up in arms and, reaching the end of her fortitude, might have denied her husband. So, "man's effort for attaining perfection at all levels of human relationship" (a "Non-Black" element) is prominent.

Two situations can be brought side by side from one "Black" and another "Non-Black" play again, to ascertain different responses of the characters to almost the same situation, the "destructive impulses" being over shadowed by the "quieter elements of existence."

Summer and Smoke is a "Black play" according to the period it belongs to (i.e. written before 1960). So, it is amenable to the influence of "Black" elements. The Night of The Iguana is a play presented at the Royal Theatre in New York in 1961. So this play is expected to display "Non-Black" tinge.

Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke had tried to find her life-partner in John Buchanan, a heartless young doctor whom she could not understand at all, even from her childhood. John had vociferous demand for Alma's body. But, Alma being a puritan never yielded to his voluptuous approaches. At the close of the play, Alma approached John with all her heart, the truest feelings she had in reserve, but, John Buchanan's deceiving nature stood exposed when Nellie(Alma's music-pupil) came gambolling to announce her engagement with John Buchanan. Being it a shock of her life, Alma stood standstill for some moments. Then, she learnt to put up with it. The pang of jilt found sad sublimation in Alma's offering her body to an unknown travelling

salesman, which she kept untouched till John Buchanan spurned her love, round whom the colourful dream of her future spun.

Here, both John Buchanan and Alma Winemiller hung their sentiment upon extreme ends. John Buchanan proved himself “a deceiver” by seeking Nellie’s hand in marriage, ignoring the long courtship they had, negating Alma’s heart-felt devotion to him. Alma too could have avoided the uncouth decision of sleeping with an unknown salesman. What could it amount to? “Sense of insecurity” (Black element) goaded both of them to turn reckless and follow a devilish course blindly.

In The Night of the Iguana Hannah Jelkes, a young spinster who used to paint, came close to the clergyman Reverend Shannon, while staying in the Costa Verde Hotel. Shannon had been emotionally involved with Mrs. Maxine Faulk, a widow in her mid-forties. In the meanwhile, Shannon got opportunity to exchange views and thoughts with Hannah, who accompanied her poet-grandfather Nonno. Hannah by her intelligence and exquisite demeanour won Shannon’s heart.

But, while the play approached its end, Shannon rooted off all his tenuous infatuation he might have had at some corners of his heart, for Hannah Jelkes. From the Olympian heights of fatuity, he descended to the hard reality and accepted Maxine Faulk, whose humble entreaties had been enough to cause him to be faithful to her. Of course, he muttered stealing a glance at Hannah Jelkes, “I want to remember that face. I won’t see it again.”¹¹ Even Hannah Jelkes bore it with repressed taciturnity. She might have felt drawn towards Reverend Shannon, but she maintained her puritanic attitude till the end, till grandfather Nonno breathed his last.

Oppressed by “loneliness” and “frustration”, she too, might have had recourse to dissipated life like Alma Winemiller. But she only withdrew with a helpless whimper :

(The united parties of the... here now.
 The united parties of the... drops to...
 ... there's no...
 ... and the curtain starts to descend...
 ... of The ~~...~~)

Thus, the "search for togetherness" helped Shannon to remain faithful to his old affair and lead it to the consummation of a nuptial knot and "longing for perfection" kept Hannah aloof from any further involvement with Shannon. If Shannon had been John Buchanan he might have built an affair with Hannah Jelkes and denied Maxine Faulk. If Hannah Jelkes had been Alma Winemiller, she could compensate her "loneliness" and "frustration" for a profligate existence.

III

The search for self had not been in vain. "NonBlack" Williams developed certain positive inclinations which the "Black" Williams lacked in. The study of responses of characters of "Black" and "Non-Black" plays to almost similar

situations, in the previous section, has successfully represented them.

But the fact that remains yet to be seen is whether “Non-Black” Williams was preferred more to “Black” Williams, so far as production is concerned. If yes, why? If not, why not?

As analyses have shown, “Non-Black” plays are more optimistic in outlook than the “Black” plays. But the “Non-Black” plays have lost ground, they have failed to impress the audience, they have not won applause as “Black” plays did.... “in a small segment of Williams’s recently published novel, Moise and the World of Reason, the young and unsuccessful writer-narrator of the book meets an aging, once distinguished playwright, who is trying to stage a comeback at a less than grand off - Broadway, ‘Off-Broway’. There is a duality of illusion and reality, for both characters represent Tennessee Williams : one early in his career and the other past his zenith. The latter is Williams in the 1960s and 1970s, a time of great despair for him as one new play after another folded, often in less than a fortnight. Most of these plays reflect the symbolist aesthetic.”¹² But why did the late plays failed on stage while the early plays succeeded to hold the audience spellbound?

Was it because his work lacked in “Social content”? Williams was more interested to talk about the “repressed individual” rather than for the “oppressed class”. But then it could have moved the audience more deeply. Was it because of the weakness of plot? But, Nancy M. Tischler accused Williams of this flaw right from the beginning of his career, of course, barring a few. According to Tischler people had condescended to his weak plots as a concession to his brilliant characterization and, composition of dialogue. “He could sit down at a typewriter and compose a characterization and dialogue for that character that in no way related to any play. This astonishing ability he was to carry into his later work.

On the other hand, he was always been plagued with the inability to construct

good plots. But when the characters are good enough, the audience forgets weak plotting.”¹³

Willard Holland, a newspaperman in California who had the memories of looking at Williams from close quarters recalled: “His people were really fantastic. You could take a page or pages of dialogue he wrote, give them to an actor, and just put the spotlight on him, and anyone who just happened to walk into the theatre couldn’t turn away from the strength of it.”¹⁴

But, if an indepth scrutiny of the late plays is undertaken neither brilliant characterization nor arresting dialogue comes within our ken. But, as Williams talks of the “repressed individual”, the presentation of the individuals cannot escape our attention. Of course, dialogue may not be as trenchant as before but they have an appeal of their own. If we remember the delineation of Hannah Jalkes in The Night of the Iguana, portrayal of Chicken in Kingdom of Earth, Zelda Fitzgerald in Clothes for a Summer Hotel, then can we chime in with the accusations Williams had been exposed to? Moreover, the two women mentioned here, are the exponents of Modern Women.

Williams, especially, after 1969, had been accused more of self-parody. As during most of the sixties, he had been battling drugs and alcohol and intermittent snatches of depression, his pen went on scribbling and producing the plays like The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore (1963). In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel (1969). Small Craft Warnings. (1973) and Out Cry (1973). But, plays of this period failed to impress the critics. Even critics like Foster Hirsch observed : “Williams is writing more to explore his own problems than to entertain audience. Private, intensely egocentric, there are chamber plays that chart the playwright’s own insecurities. Trying for new ways of relating to his work and to his audiences, Williams no longer thought of himself as a popular writer but as a tortured spirit in search of self understanding”.¹⁵

A play, In The Bar of a Tokyo Hotel included in Dragon country, disappointed critics and audience. Moreover, he had again been disparaged for using

drama as a “private therapy”. The bitter comments are shortlisted here :

“I don’t think anyone should be allowed to see it a terribly naked work, that reveals more about its author than he could have possibly intended.”¹⁶

.... “a play by a man at the end of, not his talent (that was long ago), but his tether ... that someone who was a major American and world dramatist should come to this, is a tragedy almost unparalleled in the annals of literature, never mind, drama.”¹⁷

“Played out? Tennessee Williams has suffered an infantile regression from which there seems no exit.... nothing about In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel deserves its production. That’s the kind of play it is, and that’s the kind of play it gets in this week’s Life. From a theatre review that predicts the demise of one or America’s major playwrights to a newsbreaking story that unseats a Supreme Court Judge, we call a bad play when we see it.”¹⁸

But Williams’s bumptious rejoinder was, “It was not as bad as the critics said it was”.¹⁹ The language might be cryptic, or not as poetic or poignant as before.

The critics did not lose sight of the dramatist who, under the veneer of portraying his own tormenting soul, was resolutely optimistic, a “Non-Black” playwright. If a survey of theatrical write-ups of different late plays of Williams is done, we may find cold response but not utter negation of Williams’s artistry. Mel Gussow, in a review of Out Cry commented : “Knowing what we do about Tennessee Williams, about his other plays and the anguished period of his life, the late 1960s, that inspired his new play, Out Cry we are prepared to be moved, if not shattered. The best thing about Out Cry, is the quality of the playwright, here working in an adventurous, Pirandellian vein. Much of the writing has an indisputable lyric beauty (just as some of the lines seem too carefully and poetically arranged as in “maze of amazement”). In the later part, Gussow is exposed

to cynicism. The core of the play is the play within the play, and once its homicidal secrets are revealed (of past Williams), could that play stand on its own? The framework, the play outside the play...the stranded confused actors ... is certainly the most fascinating and most original aspect of Out Cry, but it seems superimposed. In moving from fantasy to reality to memory, the characters never really lose their places.”²⁰ Even he accuses Out Cry falling short of “*humor*”. (*italics mine*)

But, Gordon M. Wickstrom was all praise for Out Cry. He revealed: “All of us interested in theatre must be fascinated by Out Cry. ‘A garden enclosed is my sister’ says Felice, reminding us surely of Williams’s tender relationship with his sister Rose, as well as its conventional symbolism. But, ‘a garden enclosed’ is this theatre too, a garden of enduring innocence in spite of every corruption. One senses that the theatre, the play is replicating itself inside itself in search of a way ‘out’ - or perhaps deeper ‘in’ - and towards salvation ... Perhaps Williams’s secret in this play ... perhaps in others of his as well ... is that madness, so dramatically ineffable, makes opening to direct experience of the sacred. In any case, the play takes us to the moment of acceptance and reconciliation in a way that our tormented late or postmodern consciousness can credit ... and that is no small thing.... Williams’s ‘dreamers’, audience as well as actors, are Conrad Bishop says, ‘wide awake’ and therein may be one of the secrets of drama: super wakefulness inside the deepest dream”.²¹

Even after the failure of The Two Character Play, Clive Barnes wrote: “The play happens, in my opinion, to be one of Williams’s masterpieces and will long outlive its adverse first-night criticisms.”²² Who says the critics had only a barrage of abuses to pin down Williams? Even Lyle Taylor observed as a confident optimist: “The line that holds The Two Character Play together is not narrative, as in earlier plays, but, an unrelieved tension, fear which the actors cannot let go for an instant without sacrificing the whole performance, at least not until the very last moments when hate surrenders to love, when the brother and sister, alone together in their confinement, at

least reach out to each other 'with gallantry in the face of defeat'. This same gallantry we have seen ever and again in the characters of his greatest plays : Amanda Wingfield, Blanche du Bois, Alma Winemiller, Maggie the Cat, Catharine Holly, Alexandra del Lago, Hannah Jelkes. His hopes stretched afar .. In the different era of theatre a reinvigorated temper of the times will enable audiences to sustain the transmitted pain of such 'a human outcry' the playwright's personal anguish, released at last."²³

Critics like Albert E. Kalson (reviewed A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur) Williams R. Ellwood (reviewed The Red Devil Battery Sign) had not been eloquent about Williams's talent. But A.E.Kalson did not remain tight-lipped to eulogize Williams's growing optimism : "One aspect of Creve Coeur which may cheer Williams's followers is that the dramatist has abandoned his bleak vision of life without hope, which culminated in The Red Devil Battery Sign, Dorothea finally comes to understand what Bodey has always known : 'We must go on. That is all that life seems to offer and demand'."²⁴

Vieux Carre' is a most controversial play regarding the attitude of critics towards it. Perhaps it might be a vengeance wreaked deliberately upon Williams because of a newspaper-interview where he "individually attacked all the major theatre-critics in New York, charging them with everything from incompetence to hypocrisy..."²⁵

However, Vieux Carre' had been a crashing failure. The eminent critic Walter Kerr commented in his New York Times Review of the New York Premiere of Vieux Carre' : "Tennessee Williams's voice is the most distinctively poetic : the most idiosyncratically moving, and at the same time, the most firmly dramatic to have come the American theatre's way - ever. No point in calling the man our best living playwright. He is our *best playwright* and let qualifications go hang."²⁶ (italics mine) But, later he found fault with the play's lack of dramatic tension : "Someone will try the play again. They won't have anything inherently dramatic to work with, but they'll have more than

meets the ear at the moment. I'm game for a second go."²⁷

But, Joan F. Dean in a review of Vieux Carre⁴ points out a series of "Black" elements - loneliness, displacement coeval with some of "Non-Black" traits - "kindness" and "struggle between brutality and humanity", and blames Vieux Carre⁴ to be a derivative of the early plays : A Street Car named Desire, The Glass Menagerie, The Night of the Iguana and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Of course, his volleys of poignant remarks are lessened by a word of honour, "the play's strength is Williams's message ... whatever hope exists, lies in the individual kindness one human being can show for another. Those kindnesses appear often, even in this microcosm of horror - in Mrs. Wire's attachment to and generosity towards the Writer, in Jane's concern for the elderly spinsters and advice to the Writer, in the Writer's visits to Jane and Nightingale. That spirit of human kindness is epitomized by the apparition of the Writer's deceased grandmother who lifts her arms to him in what he interpretes as a gesture of 'forgiveness' through understanding'."²⁸

After having various contradicting reviews, Williams decided to turn a deaf ear to all the critical responses. Of course, admiration, applause, appreciation are the most sought-for things by a dramatist. When fortune baulks at it, no way is left but to disregard the critics, as Tennessee Williams was heard to blab out a confident rejoinder, "I have forgotten about them ... I wish they'd forget about me."²⁹

One point is crystal clear. No critic could disown Williams's plays, no critic could overlook the altruistic message that his plays inform. In an interview, he said, "I have a positive view of the future. I think we are going to go through almost total destruction , but not quite. I think we will stop just short of it."³⁰ The quest for a new self, of course, never went unrequited, phoenix of a resolute optimist emerged out of the ashes of a dissipated pessimist. To quote Donald Spoto in verbatim : "As an artist of the first rank, Tennessee Williams felt the tragedy of the modern world - of its alienation, of

its loneliness, of its loss of a sense of the transcendent. He heard its echoes of pain and despair earlier and louder within himself, and in his great plays he told us what was wrong. But at the same time, he lived - by his own ready admission - on an alarmingly grim course of self-destruction.”³¹ Here the dramatist’s quest finds consummation. Of course, the rest is to be judged and opined by the posterity.

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