

**"IN QUEST OF A NEW SELF" :
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
"BLACK" AND "NON-BLACK" PLAYS
OF
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**

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By
KETAKI DATTA

SUPERVISOR :
DR. B. K. BANERJEE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL
RAJA RAMMOHUNPUR
DARJEELING
WEST BENGAL

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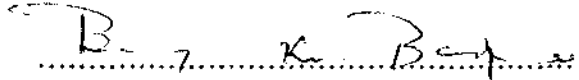
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*To my parents,
whose concern, co-operation, blessings
made the completion of the dissertation possible.*

D E C L A R A T I O N

This is to certify that the subject matter of the thesis is a record of work done by the candidate herself under my guidance and that the contents of this thesis did not form a basis of the award of any previous degree to her or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else and that the thesis has not been submitted by the candidate for any research degree to any Other University.

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PREFACE

Tennessee Williams, an extremely prolific playwright of his time, presented the American Theatre with a new play almost each year since his first Broadway success. Detailed studies of Tennessee Williams's early plays, his successes and failures have already been related to us. Even, the late plays (of course, a few) right from Period of Adjustment (1960), The Night of the Iguana (1961) to The Red Devil Battery Sign (1975) and Clothes for a Summer Hotel (1980) have been brilliantly dealt with by Foster Hirsch and a few scholars of eminence. But, none of any early work delves deep into the comparative aspects of the early and the late plays, from any specific angle (e.g. Black/Non-Black).

Based on an interview of Tennessee Williams,¹ I feel tempted to appellate his early plays as "Black" plays and the late plays as "Non-Black" plays. But mere labelling amounts to nothing unless clear definition of the same is marked out. Williams in the same interview does injustice to the terms stating the characteristics of "Black" and "Non-Black" plays merely as "destructive impulses" and "quieter elements of existence" respectively. Again the plays fall in a maze of confused nomenclature. In this dissertation, I have divided the plays into two halves, the plays written before 1960 (Black plays) and the plays written after 1960 (Non-Black plays). Of course, such a division derives its relevance from the above-mentioned interview. It might have been a pedestrian task if I had to take up one play at a time and comment on either "Black" or "Non-Black" elements contained in them. Instead I have taken the "elements" to be the yardstick of judgement and the plays automatically have been analysed, one after another.

Williams had been more interested in the "inner world" of a man than the society he had been placed in. "Most of his work, however, is free of so-called 'social content'. Tennessee Williams was to become the spokesman for the repressed individual rather than for the oppressed class".² Naturally, I have been interested in the "inner world" of the

playwright, the causes behind the change in attitude in 1960, and, I have accounted some causes — personal and professional, cultural and societal.

However, what are the “Black” and the “Non-Black” plays, according to the playwright ? “Sex”, “violence”, (rape, Cannibalism, Castration), “oppressor - oppressed motif”, “somasochism”, “lunacy”, “frustration”, “neurotic proclivity”, “awareness of the corrupt world”, “fear of loneliness”, “sense of insecurity”, “faithlessness”, “escapist penchant”, above all, a “negative view of life” are headed under “Black elements”, i.e. “destructive impulses”. The “quieter elements of existence” as “mirth”, “search for hope”, “acceptance of life” or “comeback attitude to life”, “optimism”, “practicality”, “realistic view of life”, “togetherness”, “sincere expression of man’s reaching towards perfection” are labelled as “Non-Black” elements.

While comparing the “Black” with the “Non-Black” plays, apart from the “Black” elements and the “Non-Black” elements, the point of theatricalism, too, figure prominently. The remarkable shift of emphasis in theatricalism (including use of “light” and “sound”) and language has been given a dekko into. As for example, in The Glass Menagerie, the “signifier” is the glow of light that centres upon the depressed countenance of Laura, while in The Two Character Play, the light gets focussed upon Felice’s and Clare’s faces, leaving their bodies in stygian darkness. Here the “signified” are the “Black” elements - “confusion of existence”, and “loneliness”. In the conclusion of the dissertation, the search for “a New Self” by the playwright finds consummation. Does he succeed to elevate the “old self” into a better, improved “New Self” or does the quest end up in a rehash of the old one? For that, a dabbling into philosophical definition of “self” as well as loss of self in modern literature and art has been resorted to.

The dissertation comprises the following six chapters :

Chapter I (The World of Tennessee Williams : A Journey) explores Tennessee

Williams, the man. Autobiographical snatches in some of his plays are not lost sight of. For example, which living character Laura has been modelled upon, or who has served as an original for Amanda Wingfield's husband has also been mentioned. An effort has been made to judge the influences of D.H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg and a few others on Tennessee Williams.

Chapter II (Angel in Armour : A Study of the Black Plays), has spelt out the "Black" elements in different early plays written before 1960. The plays included in this study are : The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Street Car Named Desire (1947), Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1950), Camino Real (1953), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Orpheus Descending (1957), Suddenly Last Summer (1958) and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959). The "Black" elements are written large on these plays.

Chapter III (The Sea Change : An Indepth Probe) dives deep into the soul of the playwright. The reasons behind the change in the dramatist's attitude towards life have been traced here. Why on earth does the playwright think of altering his notions about the plays themselves? The ground itself is refurnished, the selected views he cherished, undergo a reshuffle. We find plays of a different man (after 1960), though the shadows of the past are still lambent. Chapter IV (Quem Quæritis: An evaluation of Non-Black Plays) considers some selected "late" plays of Tennessee Williams. The points like definition of the "Non-Black" the impact of the Manichæan principle and judgement of the plays in the light of "Non-Black" elements have surfaced in this chapter. The chosen late plays are : - Period of Adjustment (1960), The Night of the Iguana ((1961), The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (1963), Kingdom of Earth (1968), The Two-Character Play (1975), A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1979), and some plays from Dragon Country (1970). Perhaps all the late plays have not received elaborate analyses. But they have been discussed in keeping with the criteria of the "Non-Black" plays. The style of analysis remains the same as that in Chapter II.

In Chapter V (A Janus-Faced Personality unmasked : A comparison of the Black with the Non-Black plays) a comparative study of the early and the late plays serves as the staple. In Section I, the points that serve to be the criteria of comparison and contrast have been sequenced. In section II, comparison and contrast entail rigorous consideration of "Black" and "Non-Black" elements. The similarities and dissimilarities too, are based upon the concept of "Black" and "Non-Black" stigmata. The parallels drawn between The Glass Menagerie (Black Play) and The Two Character Play (Non-Black Play) and between Camino Real (Black Play) and The Red Devil Battery Sign (Non-Black play) have been compared and contrasted according to selected measures of judgement. The nuances in language, mood and expressions have also been taken note of.

Chapter VI (One Word More : A Quest for a New self) is an attempt to define "self" philosophically (Section I), and mull over a new self if ever evolved, in the process of journey from the "Black" to the "Non-Black". An interesting study of different responses of the characters of "Black" and "Non-Black" plays to similar situations makes Section II interesting. The acceptance or failure of the artist by the audience and theatre-reviewers, and emergence of a new self, if any, serve as staple of another prudent subsection (Section III), quite germane to the issue. MLA HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS OF RESEARCH PAPERS by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert (3rd edition) has been followed while preparing this dissertation.

Thus the dissertation winds up. All that I have tried to do in this dissertation, is to preserve some sort of balance between biography, exploration of the back-ground, the definition of the appellations "Black" and "Non-Black", judgement of the playwright's soul-searching effort to define "New Self" and reasoning for any transformation of old self whatsoever and an overall comparative study of the "Black" and the "Non-Black" plays. There is, of course, neither "sensational discovery", nor any "definitive solution". But I rarely do hesitate to express what my own heart and intellect speak, even if it deviates slightly from

the received authoritative point of view. Highlighting a new and interesting vista of information regarding Tennessee Williams is my sole aim in this work.

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Chapter I

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS : A JOURNEY

"I feel this chapter ought to begin with a serious comment on the meaning of life, because sooner or later, a person's obliged to face it " - Flora Goforth in The Milk Train doesn't Stop Here Anymore

Since the life of Tennessee Williams is a much - explored area, in this chapter my aim is to highlight three important areas of the playwright's development -

- (a) his life in connection with its influence on the plays.
- (b) the literary influences on the dramatist and
- (c) the South and its role in shaping his plays.

(a) LIFE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE PLAYS

Williams's life of course, was much akin to great artists who could draw inspiration from the life they lived, the life which was not^a run-of-the-mill one. From the very beginning of his life, Williams saw a strained relation between his parents. His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams was a puritan, while his father Cornelius Coffin Williams was a cavalier to the core. But Tennessee Williams preferred to pose as a "rebellious puritan" to the contemporaries, as well as to the posterity. The traits of his character which were later reflected in various protagonists of his plays, found roots in the days which might have passed into oblivion, if they were not recovered from the sepia - coloured Memoirs.

His father, Cornelius Coffin Williams had worked for the Telephone Company in Memphis. There he met his mother, Edwina Dakin, a minister's daughter, who won reputation by singing for an amateur production of light opera. Though Williams

bore hatred towards his father, the latter served as an original for Tom's father, in The Glass Menagerie as well as modelled for Big Daddy of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and an incarnation of corruption and obstinacy in Boss Finley of Sweet Bird of Youth.

Williams had his aptitude for horror manifested quite early in his life. When his father abandoned his mother she had to move back to her own family, in Columbus rectory. Since then, the town of Columbus, Mississippi, played a significant role in Williams's life. He and his favourite sister, Rose, grew up there and in his later life, he recalled the memory of the township as a dark wide spacious land that one can breathe in. He himself was born there on 26th March, 1911.

Tennessee Williams in an interview confessed that he owed his "aggressive and violent" nature to paternal ancestry. According to the note recorded by Robert Rice, Williams's creative urge had its maiden appearance at a mountain resort, near Knoxville, Tennessee, where the family used to spend some time during each summer, "to escape the malaria country, during its hottest season."¹ The resort - dwellers used to assemble round the fire and enjoy a story-telling mood. Those were especially ghost - stories. Tom was then a boy of three years, and he wore an innocent look while the golden curl adorned his small, sweet face. One day, while he was abruptly asked to tell a story, Williams courageously took the gauntlet thrown down upon him and told a story - one of the most horrendous, the company had ever been familiar with.

As from the childhood, the mother played a very important part in Williams's life, Williams developed an unconscious rapport with the mother-image. While going down memory-lane he would reminisce the day he had been admitted to a Kindergarten, in the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, "I was enchanted, I loved, all the ABC blocks, and the modelling clay. Then all of a sudden, I looked up and my mother wasn't there. I lay on the floor and kicked and screamed."² Fortunately, Mrs. Williams had not gone too far, she hurriedly came upstairs and he felt relieved. Of course, that was the first and the last day to the Kindergarten. His attachment to the mother had its influence

on his works as seen in Laura (The Glass Menagerie) being tended by her mother Amanda. In A Street Car named Desire, the mother-image had a vicarious representation in Stella, and when Hadrian in You Touched Me “grope for a mother’s breast”, Williams’s own relation to his mother became far more pronounced. Actually, his sympathy for his heroines was an indirect outcome of his sweet and indissoluble bonds of love with his mother. He could not put up with the⁴⁶ masculine crudities and his world became increasingly feminine”³

But Williams had to start to attend school anyway. By that time, his family shifted to Clarksdale, the “Blue Mountains” of The Glass Menagerie. There was confluence of two rivers - the Mississippi and the Sunflower, and, here itself Williams had brilliant memories when he was about to step into the palmy days of his youth.

Keeping the beauty of Clarksdale in mind, he prepared the setting of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Summer and Smoke. For Williams, the Mississippi delta itself had a great influence on his plays, in Nancy M. Tischler’s words, it was “perhaps a symbol of the artist’s longing for the ‘sweet bird’ of his youth in a country touched with the merciful blur of remembrance.”⁴ Along with the growing years, Williams began to develop an analytical psyche. The filthy milieu fraught with industrial and urban squalor, stirred in him an acrimony towards the urban civilization itself. Rather, he fell in love with the areas like Mississippi delta on Clarksdale.

From the dazzling days of tender childhood, man generally draws sustenance in his later days. Though, “Years bring the philosophic mind”⁵, the mature mind of the mature age cannot deny its roots in the pranks of childhood. But in Williams’s case, childhood was a sorrowful part of the memory, that had gone a long way in causing his ill-health. Hence, in poems, as well as in his plays, this obsession with health was reflected.

Once he was down with incurable and frequent bouts of diphtheria. During the illness, he grew a habit of reading books which his grandfather amassed. He could

even see the events happening in front of his eyes, if he just shut his eyelids tight. Often in his plays, he represented “heart-beat” by ticking-clocks and watches. Owing to this illness, he could neither go out nor play with other children. In his own words, he became “delicate and sissified.”⁶

In his Memoirs too, he said that his whole nature had undergone a miraculous change after the disease. Just after the spell of illness, his imagination had a firm grip on his mind and he strove to keep himself engaged with “quiet,lonely games”⁷ Being bored with the common games of solitaire, he improvised one of his own. Ever since his early days, he started reading Iliad and “began fighting the Trojan War with cards, one side black and the other red.”⁸

As ill-health stood in his way of enjoying the life outside, he came more and more under the influence of his mother. Thus, his fragility had been successfully mirrored in the characters like Laura, Mark and a few others. As Tom was always confined in the four walls of the room, he became more and more fond of his sister Rose. In Clarkesdale, they used to frolic their time away, Rose was his first “centre of affection”. Rose of course was also a part of tragedy in his life, because she failed to cross from childhood to adolescence.

Tom, while convalescing used to visit one of the young parishioners named Laura Young, with his grandfather. Williams recalled, “She was something cool and green in a sulphurous landscape. But there was a shadow upon her ... she loved me. I adored her. She lived in a white house, near an orchard and in an arch between two rooms were hung some pendants of glass, that were a thousand colours, ‘This is a prism’ she said. She lifted me and told me to shake them. When I did they made a delicate music.”⁹ Perhaps Williams’s penchant for creating music along with verbal magic traced back to these childhood days.

However, during the First World War Williams had to shift to St.Louis,

Missouri, where his father was transferred, on promotion. As their new dwelling was in a tenement where only lower middle-class people used to inhabit and as his peace was incessantly being interrupted by the school-children, he developed a hostile attitude towards life.

It was a perfectly ill-lighted apartment, in a wilderness of identical brick and concrete structure, with no grass and no trees nearer, than the park. All these impressions had sufficient bearing on his famous plays like The Glass Menagerie and A Street Car named Desire. An abrupt change in the life of little Tom and Rose, i.e. shift from Clarkesdale to the hellish St. Louis left Williams "fairly lonely and miserable." (Tischler). Perhaps a rebellious self was being conceived under the veneer of an apparently serene one. St. Louis, was the place, where he could see his father from very close quarters. He was stunned to see Cornelius Williams's keen business acumen, his addiction to liquor, his fondness for Poker-playing. Though these won Cornelius immense popularity outside, he remained unpopular at home, rather unloved by all. No doubt, Cornelius Williams at this phase, imprinted a picture on young Williams's mind, which later on served to be a model for Stanley Kowalski (of A Street Car Named Desire) or Val Xavier (of Orpheus Descending).

Laura of The Glass Menagerie had been modelled on Rose Williams. Just like Laura, Rose too possessed a fine collection of glass animals. Williams remembered : "These little glass animals came to represent in my memory all the softest emotions that belong to recollections 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."¹⁰ It was Laura Young; the parishioner, who imbued his tender soul with "love, music and glass" while Rose completed it with her "glass possessions".

In 1919, just after the birth of Walter Dakin Williams, Mrs. Williams was bedridden with postwar influenza epidemic, and Tom was sent to Clarkesdale to stay with his grandfather, for about a year. Instead of growing any friendship with other boys

of his age, he became absorbed in reading Shakespeare and other authors of his choice. Once he recalled : "I loved Shakespeare, I did not appreciate the beauty of the language but I loved *Violence*. (italics mine) I was mad about Titus Andronicus"¹¹ Perhaps this affinity had sown seeds of violence in the mind of Williams.

Who knew what unexpected jolt awaited him at St. Louis ?! Just after one year, when he came back to the hideous St. Louis, Rose bade adieu to the world of sanity and had recourse to a world where only "Schizophrenic" miasma held her taut. It was such a severe blow to Williams that, he also began to withdraw from the illusory sphere and began to take refuge in writing. At the tender age of twelve when "reality" seemed to sink its talons on him, he sought comfort in reading books after books. "Lady of Shalott" of Alfred Tennyson had a lasting influence on him. Later on, he admitted - "she was floating down a river in a state of trance, and did something to me"¹². As the lady's World of romance was shattered so was Williams's and, perhaps this little incident had its great bearing on the major as well as the minor plays of Williams. As Williams's life in all aspects ended in a fiasco, he was afraid of expanding the horizon of known faces. He found solace in the lap of literary exercise. He himself declared :

"I discovered *writing* as an escape from the *world of reality* in which I felt *acutely uncomfortable*. It immediately became my place of *retreat, my cave, my refuge*."¹³ (italics mine).

The man, who became a writer, had actually the reasons like loneliness, anxiety and fear that goaded him on to writing. Thus, the man shed off the strait-jacket of loneliness, and garbed himself in the much-comfortable apparel of a writer, who, from the very childhood, won advertising contests and kept on sustaining himself on meagre pittance. Smart set prize for answering to a contest question, "Can a wife be a good sport?" or a ten dollar prize for the best review of the silent film Stella Dallas went to his credit.

While he clattered articles on the typewriter overnight, he seemed to take a sojourn in another world, where loneliness, anxiety or violence, could reach a higher plane of "sublimation". At this stage, he developed an insular attitude towards his surroundings. However, after his graduation he was admitted to the University of Missouri at Columbia and thus, his drab life was refreshed with a gush of air.

The change proved salubrious for the young man. Here, the College-associates were amused by the Southern accent that Williams had. Naturally, they nicknamed him as "Tennessee". Williams fell in love with the name attributed to him. Here, apart from the love he felt for gooch and smoke, he also had a romantic affinity towards a girl named Hazel Kramer.

This was not actually a newly-fangled relationship. They were acquainted with each other from the age of twelve. But owing to the cruel interference by Tom's father, the relationship was nipped in the bud. Williams's father had manipulated and compelled the girl to get admitted to University of Wisconsin and Tom's College career lost much of its charms. Later, Williams gave vent to his pent-up feelings in the two short stories "The Important Thing" and "A field of Blue Children".

Though Williams was disappointed in love, he liked the University where he enjoyed tranquillity of mind. But Williams was sad to find that the choice of journalism as the major subject was a blunder for him. Of course, he had literary endowments, but had only a restricted liking for news. The bitter choice made his belief confirmed, that he was not apt for journalism, rather fiction was the field where he could thrive.

However, Williams's later creations and his abnormal sexual tendencies were responsible for his relationship with Hazel Kramer. When Williams had himself enrolled in University of Missouri, Edwina accompanied him to Columbia to help him find a place to stay. That very night, in the hotel, he wrote a letter to Hazel at the University of Wisconsin, proposing marriage. A week later, she replied that they were too young to

think about anything like that.

Williams met Hazel again, but romance by then had died down. Miss Florence, i.e. Williams's landlady related the news of Hazel's marriage after some years. Tom could not believe his ears. Hazel was married to Terrence Mc Cabe, a funny, extrovert man. However, Hazel's marriage ended in a tragedy.

Tom never asked any other woman to marry him. Hazel broke up with Terrence Mc Cabe years later, and Miss Florence, out of terrible shock, committed suicide. Hazel, too, died mysteriously, on a trip to Mexico, of suspected botulism.

In the meanwhile, he was happy at the Fraternity, even served for a short while as a member of the wrestling team. While he was having a tie with an opponent, he found himself on the mat. He recollected, "I attacked my adversary with great fury. I used activity to conceal my skill. I lost the match."¹⁴ However, after that, the Fraternity named him as "Tiger" Williams.

When Williams lost his grades and faced failures in R.O.T.C. during his third year at Missouri, Cornelius Williams took umbrage. Cornelius Williams had inherited an indomitable pride from his ancestors. He himself had quit the University of Tennessee Law School after one year to accept a Commission as Second Lieutenant in the Spanish-American War. Cornelius Williams was taken aback to see the spinelessness in his son.

As Cornelius Williams had a great fascination for money, he took his prodigal son from the University and acquainted him with the practical world of business. St. Louis appeared solitary to him, but now he was in hell. Cornelius Williams financed for a concise course in stenography for Tom and got him a sixty-five dollar-a-month job at the shoe-factory as a clerk-typist. The three years he remained confined in the brick-walls of the shoe-factory was an irksome experience for him. Typing out the numericals in the order-forms was almost marring the thin remnant of literary talents he had. Being exhausted and fed up with this drab chores, Williams ejaculated: "The lives of most

people are insulated against monotony in their own soul - Alas for the poet, the dreamer who has been cast into the world without this indispensable solution.”¹⁵

However, his determination to be a successful dramatist led him to the University of Iowa, where he came in contact with veteran professors of playwriting like E.C.Mabie and E.P.Conkle. The latter in 1938 remarked, “I have only one really good student this year - he’s poor, and shy and very talented.”¹⁶ Williams thought he was a first-rate teacher.

Though the three years had been a kind of oppression for young Williams, it was in his words “an indescribable torment”(Tischler) to him as an individual but of immense value as a writer. It gave him first-hand knowledge of what it meant to be a “small wage-earner in a hopelessly routine job”(Tischler). This “contact with reality” provided the basis for The Glass Menagerie and the ideas for several completely unWilliamsian, simple characters who were to appear as the Gentleman caller(in The Glass Menagerie) Mitch(in A Street Car Named Desire) and some others. It also created the vision of the little man at the mercy of the machine, appearing as the tubercular protagonist in the stories “The Malediction” and “The Strangest kind of Romance”. This little man, symbolizing all little men similarly ensnared everywhere, spent his days at the factory and his night with his cat, which used to offer him love and security. As his hands and the machine could never achieve the same rhythm, he was constantly jamming the machine. The Glass Menagerie itself highlighted this hatred for routine work. Tom despised his job at the shoe-factory and Laura could not learn to operate a typewriter.

The Poker Night after repeated cancellations and alterations came to be captioned as A Street Car named Desire . At International Shoe Company, there was a dark, burly, amiable worker assigned to a job,close to Tom. He was attributed with numerous qualities which Tom was lacking. He was at ease in the concourse, with unknown persons and was overconfident of his abilities to impress the ladies. Tom made friendship with him. Soon after, he married and just after ten years, he passed away. His name was

Stanley Kowalski and his family survived in St. Louis for many years.

It is yet to be judged, how much of Stanley Kowalski is represented by the character with that name in A Street Car Named Desire, but Blanche Du Bois is a creation of his fecund imagination. There is no evidence of any homosexual attachment between Williams and Kowalski. But, Tom had a “powerful erotic and romantic attachment” (Tischler) to Kowalski. Whenever they were seen together they were to pose as a “overstruck hero-worshipper and the idol of his dreams”(Memoirs).

Spectators and readers of A Street Car Named Desire (a film directed by Elia Kazan in 1951) think that A Street Car Named Desire is a rendering of the eternal clash within everyone . Williams knew it most deeply in himself; his sister had been broken by conflict, he was on the point of being broken by it. In the play which many still consider as his masterpiece, he revealed not what all life is like but what some of life is likely and what all life is in constant danger of becoming - a willing ritual-sacrifice of humanity at its gentlest to the fierce demands of carnality. As an empty immolation, it leads only to death or insanity.

Eventually, Williams had several experiences of homosexuality. Pancho, Kip Kiernen, Bill Glavin, Frank Merlo-were his erotic mates who kept him in good humour from time to time. In 1948, his Chart of Melancholy publicized itself as Summer and Smoke. Acclamation followed acclamation. The Rose Tattoo (1951) brought him accolades. But Camino Real could not win any applause, he was so eager to receive. The production of Camino Real was so inauspicious that, on the one hand, it won no applause, on the other, it took his friendship with Elia Kazan to a delicate edge. Kazan respected Tennessee Williams but once he commented upon their inner differences : “I realized there was a difference between the way he and I approached life. I think he is closer to the feeling of death moving in on him. Somebody once said that you could not do good work in dramatic form until you had included the possibility of your own death. He lived with this, he lived with death all the time, he was brought upto it.”¹⁷ At the premiere,

Kazan brought along with him ^{?)} her wife Molly and John Steinbeck's family. The play was a failure, and, Tennessee took offence to Kazan's misdemeanour.

By New Year's day(1955), Audrey Wood of Liebling-Wood Agency, had signed the terms with the Playwright's Company to produce Williams's next Broadway play, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. The play was structured as a series of confrontations between members of the Pollitt family : Brick, a former athletic star and recent alcoholic; his wife, Maggie, the "Cat", who was sexually frustrated because of Brick's peculiar distance from her just after the suicide of his friend Skipper; Big Daddy, Brick's father whose imminent demise meant the transfer of a vast estate; his loyal, long-suffering wife, Big Mama, and ; Brick's venal brother and sister-in-law.

Specifically, Kazan believed that the character of Big Daddy was too important to vanish after Act II, he also thought that as a result of confrontation between him and Brick some change should be evident in the son, and finally he felt that Maggie should be a more sympathetic person at the end. Williams in some way acceded to all these counsels.

On March 21, 1957, Orpheus Descending (developed on Battle of Angels) - with an epitaph from Hart Crane - opened at the Martin Beck Theatre, where once Maureen Stapleton had won laurels for a Williams play. But not even her energy and talent were enough to please critics and audiences. The play closed, after 68 performances, on May 18, 1957.

Practically, at this time, Williams began to speak openly about his fear of failure. "In an interview with New York Herald Tribune, he confessed - 'With Orpheus Descending, I felt I was no longer acceptable to the theatre-public. May be I thought, they'd had too much of a certain dish, and may be they don't want to eat any more.' The 'dish', of course, was violence, derailed sexuality, and the submission of mythology - in this case, Orphic mythology - to his own dramatic purpose."¹⁸

Suddenly Last Summer, again an autobiographical play of Williams was written just when he was undergoing a series of intense psychotherapy under the supervision of Dr. Lawrence Kubie. Just at the same time, he was visiting Rose so often, that, it astonished everybody around him. Perhaps, Catharine's lobotomy and Mrs. Venable's restlessness were the immediate cathartic outcome.

Williams's mother could not be satisfied with Mrs. Venable's suggestion of "cutting the horrible story out of her (Catharine's) brain", which reminded her of Rose's lobotomy - operation in 1937. She said to Williams - "Why don't you write a lovely, long play again Tom ? ... Like you did before, a lovely, lovely long play?"¹⁹ (Perhaps, she unconsciously referred to The Glass Menagerie).

Sweet Bird of Youth (1959), Period of Adjustment (1960), The Night of the Iguana (1961) - all these followed one after another. But Williams seemed to lose faith upon his creative power. Perhaps, that's why, he thought of retiring from a playwright's favourite haunts of sex and violence and thought of having recourse to a world where "serenity" might serve as a staple to feed on.

After 1960, we find a different Williams, who knows, it might be the result of his snapping of relationship with Kazan or any other reason that gnawed deep into his entrails or simply his desire to bid adieu to a world ridden with sex, violence, exuberance of unsought-for passion and take refuge to a world where soft emotions wield, where laughter and comic quips are the sole companions ?!

The late plays of Williams like Small Craft Warnings (1973), Kingdom of Earth (1968), A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1979) The Red Devil Battery Sign (1979) no doubt, displayed remnants of the talent of a great genius. But even then, they have also some messages to convey to the theatrical audience, to the reading public, in general.

Clothes for a Summer Hotel (1980) was perhaps his last attempt in the

tradition of I rise in flame, Cried the Phoenix (1951). In the latter, Lawrence-Frieda had been remembered, while in Clothes for a Summer Hotel, Zelda and Fitzgerald had figured . Spoto had nicely described the night Williams was destined to meet his demise : “On the evening of February 24, 1983, he withdrew quietly to his bedroom with a bottle of wine. On his bedside table was the traditional array of prescriptions, capsules, tablets, eyedrops and nosedrops and all the paraphernalia associated with decades of hypochondria and chemical dependence. In the morning, friends entered the room. One of Tennessee Williams’s hands was resting gently, palm upward. At last, there was stillness.”²⁰

b) Literary Influences on the Dramatist

A man cannot deny the influences that shape his view towards life. The bitter altercations that broke Williams’s heart, and, the sweet connubial bliss that his grandparents used to enjoy, soothed his mind. All these contributed to the shaping of his life-view. Again, the influences of great poets and dramatists of the time could not be ignored altogether. A triumvirate of Hart Crane, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg - had cast major influences on Williams’s works.

Williams, in the “Frivolous Version” of his “Preface to my poems” (1944) had declared candidly : “It was Clark (Clark Mills Mc Burney a poet-friend in St. Louis in 1933) who warned me of the existence of people like Hart Crane, and Rimbaud and Rilke, and my deep and sustained admiration for Clark’s writing, gently but firmly removed my attention from the more obvious to the purer voices in poetry. About this time, I acquired my copy of Hart Crane’s collected poems, which I began to read with gradual comprehension.”²¹

In fact, Williams had stolen the copy of Hart Crane’s poems from the library of Washington University in St. Louis, because it did not get the proper connoisseurs it deserved. Regarding Hart Crane he was more reverent, “I have it with me today, my

only library and all of it I am inclined to value Crane a little above Eliot or anyone else because of his organic purity and sheer breath-taking power. I feel that he stands with Keats and Shakespeare and Whitman.”²²

Crane was a living presence for Tennessee Williams. The bohemian dramatist could not even dream of missing the portrait of his favourite poet, which he procured from a book in the Jacksonville Public Library. Even while writing letters to Donald Windham, he made three allusions to the valuable portrait. In You Touched Me, the dramatization of D.H.Lawrence’s story, he wrote in collaboration with Donald Windham, he had made a passing reference to Hart Crane. When Hadrian was browsing through Matilda’s book of Verse, he mused a line that became his cynosure for a moment - “How like a caravan my heart - Across the desert moved towards yours”, and he screwed up his eyebrows^{asking} - “Towards whose? Who’s this H.C. its dedicated to?” Matilda coyly rejoindered, “Hart Crane, an American poet who died ten years ago”. Again, the lines that startled Hadrian had owed its origin to the fifth stanza of “To Brooklyn Bridge”,^(of Hart Crane) the piece which led all the poems of the collection.

In the Preface to A Street Car Named Desire (1947), Williams again turned to Hart Crane for the lines which the latter had penned down barely a month before his suicide in the Caribbean, near Florida, which later on was included in “The Broken Tower” (fifth Stanza) :

“And so it was I entered the broken world,
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind, (I know not whither hurled),
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.”²³

Of course, these four lines describe Blanche du Bois’s dramatic retreat into oblivion which started the very moment she stepped in VieuxCarre’. The resplendant past of Blanche Du Bois that had disillusioned her, formed one arc of the broken world while the world of “disheartening reality”, constituted the other arc - the one gone with the

wind, the other barely having .

Again, in 1946, the very title of the play Summer and Smoke bore the impression of Crane's "Emblems of Conduct". There, Crane had inserted between fragments, the following lines -

"By that time, summer and smoke were past
Dolphins still played, arching the horizon,
But only to build memories of spiritual gates."

Williams was not contented enough to borrow the title from Crane, a nice passage in the play too echoes the phrases of Hart Crane. Alma, somewhere late in the play, in Summer and Smoke told her "former puritan self" as "having died last 'summer', suffocated in 'smoke' from something on fire inside her."²⁴

In 1959, again, Williams was indebted to Crane for his motto of the play Sweet Bird of Youth. The lines had been extracted from "Legend" included in Hart

Crane's White Buildings collection :

"Relentless caper for all those who step,
The legend of their youth into the room".

Debusscher had beautifully examined the purport of this adaptation. "Like Crane's poem, his play relates an experience which instructs us about the nature of good and evil, and, from which rules can be deduced to govern the conduct of life. The dramatic itinerary of the characters, their "relentless caper" is presented as a warning; their 'legend', in both meanings, of 'Key' and 'exemplary life' is meant to convey a message of moral import. Chance's final speech about recognising 'the enemy, Time in us all', however clumsily tacked on, confirms the seemingly paradoxical ambition of Sweet Bird of Youth to be a modern morality play, as implicitly announced in the motto from Crane."²⁵

After three years, i.e. in 1962, Williams again alludes to Crane in The Night of the Iguana. In a conversation between Hannah Jelkes and Reverend Shannon Williams

turns to Hart Crane and that too a very sensitive aspect of Crane's physical attributes- his "closed eyes."

"Hannah : You're a very difficult subject. When the Mexican Painter Sequeiros did his portrait of the American poet Hart Crane he had to paint him with closed eyes because he couldn't paint his eyes open - there was too much suffering in them, and he couldn't paint it.

Shannon : Sorry, but I'm not going to close my eyes for you. I'm hypnotizing myself at least trying to - by looking at the light on the orange tree leaves.

Hannah : That's all right. I can paint your eyes open."

(Act II, The Night of the Iguana)

Here, an attempt seems to have been made to equate Shannon with Crane, but Hannah's quick rejoinder makes the difference much acute - the difference in between her subject and that of Sequeiros. The Glass Menagerie (1945) the piece-de'-resistance of Williams too echoes of Hart Crane. Tom in Scene VI, while conversing with Jim, portrays a future where he will be free from all his ties with his mother, sister, shoe-factory. Immediately afterwards, the image of "the sailing vessel with the Jolly Roger again", gets projected on a screen in the background. Tom thinks the rail of the fire-escape to be the rail of an imaginary ocean-liner and he leans on it. The stage-direction flashes: "He looks like a voyager". Obviously, Williams had been influenced by Crane's poems captioned "Voyages". Can't we see a vague shadow of "oppressed" Crane in Tom Wingfield ?

The title The Glass Menagerie itself owed its origin to the poem The Wine Menagerie from Crane's collection White Buildings. Perhaps, the first couple of lines of the poem might have served for making of scene six, where we get Tom heavily drunk:

“Invariably when the wine redeems the sight
Narrowing the mustard scansions
Of the eyes”²⁶

The poem The Wine Menagerie harps upon the primary emotion “Loss”. Loss is the main concept of Williams’s vision, a feeling that no human being can ever transcend. “The monosyllable of the clock is ‘Loss’, ‘Loss’, ‘Loss’, unless you devote your heart to its opposition”, he has said. No doubt, the mood of melancholy and nostalgia that pervades The Glass Menagerie owes much to Hart Crane. Finally, in order to achieve sublimity, Crane establishes a number of “mythic parallels” for its central incident, such as, a confrontation between a man and a woman in a bar, the violent meetings of Judith and Holofernes, Salome and John the Baptist, the Petrushka and his “valentine”. All the figurines are heading towards the central figure i.e. the accident, the breaking of the Unicorn. Perhaps, we may relate this incident of accident to the pre-frontal lobotomy-surgery of Rose, (i.e Williams’s sister) which supplies a subdued tone to the play, as a whole.

In Suddenly Last Summer (1958), Hart Crane’s influence is felt again, rather vividly. Here, Violet Venable is Grace Hart Crane, and Sebastian Venable is only a protracted shadow of Hart Crane himself. In Steps must be gentle, Grace Hart Crane is determined to preserve her son’s posthumous reputation. Violet Venable in Suddenly Last Summer, too, is keen enough on preserving her son’s fame. Grace’s words, in every case, might fit in Violet’s lips too — “I have made it my dedication, my vocation to protect your name , your legend, against the filthy scandals that you’d seemed determined to demolish them with. Despite my age, my illness”²⁷—

Debusscher quite appropriately brings parallels between Crane’s life and Suddenly last summer, “the real life traits of Hart Crane appear splintered, divided up among three characters, first, the dead Sebastian, the homosexual author of a limited, practically unknown body of work reserved for a coterie, who travels restlessly in pursuit

of 'Vision', second, the 'glacially brilliant' Dr. Cuckrowitz with his 'icy charm' in whom both Mrs. Venable and Catharine recognize a number of Sebastian's features, and who represents an aspect of Crane seen in Steps must be gentle, where Grace reproaches her son for his 'icy language' and frigid attitude; finally, Catharine, whose uncompromising insistence on the truth threatens the Sebastian myth and who embodies the self-destructive tendencies that led to Crane's suicide"²⁷.

Hart Crane and Williams even shared a similar life full of turmoils, squabbles between parents, feverish existence and a sad end. In an interview with Cecil Brown, Williams had admitted that he had a lot of parallels between his life and that of Hart Crane. Williams then blabbed out, "Yes, I have a codicil in my will that when I die, I am to be pushed off a ship, where Crane went down."²⁸

Another major influence on Williams was Anton Chekhov. In several interviews, Williams had admitted that, Chekhov's influence on him surpassed even that of D.H. Lawrence. The Glass Menagerie, which won international rewards owed its oeuvre much to Chekhov's The Sea Gull. Even Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard had provided Williams with clues to develop A Street Car Named Desire.

Konstantin Trepnev of The Sea Gull can be taken as an exact prototype of Tom Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie. Both struggle to establish themselves though their hopes are being ruthlessly belied. A remark, the doctor makes about Konstantin may as well be applied to Tom: "There is something in him: He thinks in images; his stories are vivid, full of colour and they affect (one) strongly. The only pity is that he hasn't got definite aims. He produces an impression and that's all, but you can't get far with nothing but an impression."²⁹ Both the aspirants feel pinned down, by their background and their ambience and both are meekly rebellious. Neither of them has finished his formal education, Konstantin left the University in his third year, while Tom graduated from high school to take up a job at a shoe warehouse. They have to struggle with intractable problems to get relieved of their adversities. Konstantin manages to publish

short stories, though ultimately he is ruined. Without trying to overcome his circumstances, he commits suicide after a single unsuccessful attempt. In joining the merchant marine, Tom escapes the family responsibilities giving up all but the memory of his mother and sister. Yet he is comparatively successful at least in finding out the meaning of his life.

There are even striking similarities between the literary forms with which Tom and Konstantin experiment. Tom of The Glass Menagerie says: "I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion" and elsewhere he admits that he has himself made up a historic realm we have stepped into. Konstantin wants to introduce a new kind of drama to the theatrical arena. In order to do away with the ramshackle limits of realism, of "tradition and conventionality", he emphasises, "we need new forms of expression" (The Sea Gull). "Moon" serves as a dominant symbol in both Chekhov's and Williams's plays. Regarding the music effect too, Williams is indebted to Chekhov's Cherry Orchard and The Sea Gull. "Ominous cracking sound in the sky" (The Glass Menagerie) is a witty adoption from The Cherry Orchard. Thus, Williams is grateful to Chekhov, especially in bringing out the inner experience and reaction of his characters, in developing a mood, or an atmosphere characterized by the ebb and flow of feeling and developing a feeling of tolerance and understanding for the sensitive misfits of this world.

A great influence on Tennessee Williams is August Strindberg, the Swedish dramatist. The play You Touched Me! which is fed on a story by D.H. Lawrence and which Williams has composed in collaboration with Donald Windham, echoes of Strindberg's famous play, The Father. It narrates the story of Matilda, fragile, poetic and repressed by her Aunt Emmie, who at last sets domination at nought and elopes with the soldier Hadrian, her brother in adoption. Captain Cornelius Buckley, Matilda's father is an interesting character. Emmie mocks him by calling Hadrian "your sniveling little charity boy", who has been adopted in the family by Captain himself, in compassion. The Captain recalls Captain Shotover of Shaw's Heart break House on the one hand, and receives an old Strindbergian treatment in the hands of Williams, on the other. When the Reverend

Guildford Melton calls for a likely suitor for Matilda's hand, Emmie explains that the Captain is a scholar and at the moment intensely absorbed in preparing an article for the Royal Geographical Society. Later, Emmie warns the Captain that if he still keeps on drinking like a fish, she will "call and get the male nurse to bring the strait jacket", and it is clearly in her plan to see that the Captain is sequestered in what Reverend Melton euphemistically calls "Some Christian retreat". Emmie is almost a Strindbergian character. Emmie represents "aggressive sterility" instead of "predatory maternity". She aims, as the Captain remarks, at "reducing the net amount of masculinity on the place." But, unlike Strindberg's Emmie, Laura loses. Williams takes a more sure and certain view of male-survival.

Miss Julie is supposed to cast a shadow on Williams's A Street Car Named Desire. If we probe deeper to explore the truth, we at a first glance, find in both the plays - a hysterical girl, the product of degenerate aristocracy, descends to a devastating sexual encounter that results in her complete undoing. In one case, we get, consignment to an insane asylum (A Street Car), in the other, suicide (Miss Julie).

Miss Julie is more of a woman than of a weak insect. She is neurotic, but not alcoholic. Unlike Blanche, she has not taken refuge to a world of absurd hypocrisy and deceit. In her earlier love affair, she displays sadism by deliberately training her fiancé with a horsewhip. Blanche's ruthlessness consists of unveiling her young husband's true sexual nature, forcing his suicide; Miss Julie, quite obviously, is more vibrant and positive. But the two are alike in that both are by heritage weak and that is the one and only reason, why they can create sympathy in an audience. The men, on the contrary, are remarkably different. Strindberg's Jean is a climber and an aspirant. He is discontented with his position and cultivates the ways of his superiors, their taste in wines, and so on. In his instability, he fluctuates between obsequious servility and highly assertive brashness. Stanley Kowalski, on the other hand, is complacent and entirely in accord with himself. His pleasures suit him, bowling and drinking and fringing; he is enraged that anybody

could reflect on his origin and position by calling him a “Polack”, he is happy to be one, or rather, to be a good American of Polish extraction. He aspires professionally, and his wife Stella assures us, if we needed the assurance, that he is going to get somewhere. He is hard and ruthless but never shy or fawning or mean.

The inevitable difference between the plays is one of mood. Decadence in Williams is steeped by the steam from Blanche’s eternal baths, the fumes of alcohol, the shimmer of heat from the pavement, the Latin rhythms of the street, the ritual of Poker, until the hot-house atmosphere prevails. In Strindberg, the crisis is more rhythmic and seasonal, the festivity of midsummer, Julie’s monthly indisposition, the magic of dusk and flowers. In Strindberg, the sexual meeting takes place to the tune of warm fiddles and summer folly, in Williams, to shattering glass and tawdry make-believes. But the plays predict an almost similar future.³ Vitality belongs to the materialists and opportunists.

Camino Real again seems very much Strindbergian. Williams, here, makes use of the dream-method. Of course, it appears that the action is dreamed by Don Quixote, for Gutman says as the play begins, “And now I must go downstairs to announce the beginning of that old Wanderer’s dream... Certainly the play observes the logic of dream, where in Strindberg’s words, ‘anything can happen, everything is possible and probable’ time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality imagination spins and weaves a new pattern made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations. While Williams’s characters do not ‘split, double and multiply’ as do Strindberg’s, they are rather static resuscitations - the atmosphere of dream prevails, the shock, the illogical, the illusion.”³⁰

Yet, the real affinity of Camino Real lies with Strindberg’s pilgrimage plays. In it both search and flight are present, and its very title suggests comparison with Strindberg’s last play, The Great Highway. The action of Camino Real proceeds through sixteen so-called “blocks”; The Great Highway is subtitled “a drama of wandering, with seven stations”. Strindberg’s Hunter, once a soldier and now a traveller in a foreign land,

begins his pilgrimage in the Alps, and advances through a landscape of windmills, a satiric episode in Donkeyville, an arcade in Tophet, a crematorium, a Dantesque dark forest to seek once again the Alpine heights where he will "await the liberation". Kilroy (Camino Real) has some such vision: "I don't see nothing but nothing - and then more nothing. And then I see some mountains. But the mountains are covered with snow." However, in Williams's play there is neither physical progress nor spiritual elevation. There is no real "camino" but a dead end, from which a few escape by an unscheduled flight on the plane "Fugitivo" to an unspecified destination. Still there is a similarity of tone. One could remark of Camino Real as Martin Lamm has of The Great Highway: "This ulcered, ragged play is one of (his) most repellent but also one of his most gripping"(Richard B. Vowles).

Somewhat more striking are the similarities to two earlier pilgrimage plays, Lucky Peter's Journey and Keys of Heaven. Kilroy is a brasher, more posturing version of Lucky Peter- Strindberg's peripatetic hero, a character in turn modelled after Ibsen's Peer Gynt. In Keys of Heaven Strindberg introduces Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who assume substantial and amusing roles, a gallery of literary lovers, Hamlet and Ophelia, Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Desdemona. The plot has little in common with Camino Real, but the tone is as dark and satiric, if not quite so febrile.

However, Williams in a 1955 interview, has defied the Strindbergian influence upon him. Again, when the lawyer of Strindberg's A Dream Play observes, "It is misery to be human", it is this sense of pessimism which suggest that Strindberg and Williams are fellow spirits. In portraying the sexual conflict, Strindberg is a felt presence. The clashes of The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof recall the words of Strindberg in his preface to Miss Julie, "I myself find the joy of life, in its strong and cruel struggle".

Lastly, Williams's theatricality is very much of Strindberg's tradition. Williams, in the Afterword to Camino Real, perhaps echoes Strindberg: "The colour, the grace and levitation, the structural pattern in motion, the quick interplay of live beings,

suspended like fitful lightning in a cloud, these things are the play..."

Ibsen, too, influenced Williams in shaping his view of life. Actually Williams was "particularly enchanted by all the very violent plays." Ibsen's Ghosts in particular excited him. He said "it was so fabulous, so terrifyingly exciting that I couldn't stay in my seat! I suddenly jumped up and began pacing the corridor of the peanut gallery, trying to hear what was being said on the stage, but at the same time I wouldn't stand to watch it anymore. It was the scene in which Mrs Alving realises that her son, Oswald, you know, is afflicted with syphilis, and that it has gone to his brain."³¹

D.H. Lawrence had a deep influence upon Williams. The resemblance of Orpheus Descending to Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's lover, is undeniable. Of course, Williams had the novel of Lawrence (Lady Chatterley's Lover) in mind, when he first harped upon the idea of the play ("that hideous book" referred to in The Glass Menagerie). In both the novel and the drama, a woman (Lady Chatterley, Lady Myra), a victim of an unfortunate marriage to an invalid husband [Clifford, Jabe] is awakened to the joy of life by a dark lower class lover [Mellors, Val] who has been connected in the past with a neurotically possessive woman (Bertha, The Woman from Waco).

Lady Myra is shot to death by her husband with the zygote in her womb. A blowtorch lighted by a man of the hysterical mob discovers Val, who is thought to have committed the murder. Lawrence's novel, on the contrary, concludes on a more positive note; the lovers are to be wedded, the child is to be born, and there is some hope in the face of the "bad time coming ... for these industrial masses" (Lady Chatterley's Lover) which Mellors envisions for a future life continuous with their present happiness.

The Glass Menagerie of Williams again, reminds us of Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. Both the works pivot round a domineering mother, a weak father, an artistically inclined son, and an abortive relationship between a virginal girl and the virile young man she loves.

Amanda Wingfield corresponds with Gertrude Morel as in the words of Lawrence “ a woman of character and refinement who goes into the lower class and (who) has no satisfaction in her own life”. Both women after being wooed by quite a good number of men socially and intellectually their equals had suddenly fallen in love with a social inferior whom they both liked at a glance. However, the results in each case were incessant misery of mutual incomprehension.

Both Tom Wingfield and Paul Morel are deeply engrossed in neurotic relationships(of course, of different nature) involving their mothers and a delicate young girl. Both have artistic ambitions which are benumbed by compulsion of their contributing to the family welfare through the enervating tedium of factory work. An alternative counterpart to Paul Morel in the play is Jim, the Gentleman Caller, who resembles the former as the delicate Young girl’s suitor. Finally, the fragile delicacy of Laura Wingfield and Miriam Leivers corresponds rather closely : “A fragile, unearthly prettiness - Laura - is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, gives a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting”. (The Glass Menagerie). “Miriam’s beauty - that of a shy, wild, quivering sensitive thing”..... “Miriam was exceedingly sensitive ... The slightest grossness made her recoil almost in anguish” (Sons and Lovers).

Both find it difficult to adjust to normal social relationships - each more at home in a less threatening, non-human world : Laura’s favourite collection of little glass animals; Miriam’s fixation with the flowers surrounding her woodland home. Both sense the incompleteness of their fragmented natures and would gladly be aroused to sensual consciousness, if they were only emotionally capable of it. Demands of the flesh are too much for them. When the male suitors share the joy of these girls’s private world - a possibility of spiritual communion has been felt. But Jim and Paul -who attempt to awaken them to sensual consciousness meet with sad rebuff only. When Tom is scolded by his mother Amanda for reading “ the hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence”, Lawrence’s influence on Williams is more and more exposed.

Williams has coined A Street Car Named Desire, “a play of incomprehension”. Williams has tried to interweave the brutality and the compassionate elements in his male protagonist. The dark Pole Stanley is, of course, the Lawrentian fox, limited in intellect and sophistication, but equally, alive in the flesh.

The play can be compared with Lawrence’s short story “The Princess”. In both works, a fragile heroine runs away to a strange world of naked elemental force to meet her destruction, in a violent sexual encounter, with a flesh-loving brute. Blanche had the experience of a dissipated life before she entered the Kowalski household, but, the Princess can boast of pure virginity unless she has to yield forcibly to Romero in the aloof forest-cabin. Blanche’s sexuality has somewhat masochistic overtone. She, out of sheer qualms of conscience, (as she accused her of being responsible for her husband’s death) embraced a lifestyle, she hated from the core of her heart.

Similarly, Summer and Smoke took after Lawrence’s The Virgin and the Gypsy. Suddenly Last Summer had its embryo in Lawrence’s The Woman who rode away and in various aspects, William’s various works (both early and late) echoed D.H. Lawrence’s. However, “Williams’s works represent an abnormal psychology rather than a comprehensive philosophy of life. Like the novelist, the playwright depicts vividly the fragmentation of flesh and spirit within neurotic human beings ; but he always fails in his works to envision that state of organic wholeness - individual, natural, cosmic - which Lawrence approaches in his major fiction.”³²

Again, Eugene O’Neill could not also be ignored as influencing Williams. Williams came into the limelight at a time when O’Neill was in his roaring heyday. O’Neill too, was keenly interested in the tragedy of lost souls and gave sensitive expression to their tragic plight. Williams’s treatment of the theme of desire in A Street Car invited a fruitful comparison with O’Neill’s treatment of the same theme in his tragic masterpiece Desire under the Elms. Of course, the path foreshadowed by O’Neill served as a viaduct to Williams.

(c) Shadows of the South

The Southern Culture had a powerful influence upon the playwright. The Old South had a decadent phase and at last it had to pass into oblivion as New South emerged out of its ashes. Since the days of Clarkesdale, the Old South had an appeal to the deepest soul of Williams. So, his characters were the disturbed people of the South, the anxious individuals of the Old South, the men and women who might be taken as the remembrances of the old Southern Culture.

While facing an interview, Williams candidly remarked : “I write out of love for the South. But I can’t expect Southerners to realize that my writing about them is an expression of love. It is out of a regret for a South that no longer exists that I write of the forces that have destroyed it.”³³

He himself, in the same interview, had admitted that, “I don’t write about the North, because I feel nothing for it but eagerness to get out of it : I don’t write about the North because so far as I know - they never had anything to lose *culturally*.”³⁴(italics mine) Tennessee Williams’s mind could share the sorrow of the destitutes, the pain of the have-nots, the penury of the culturally-ruined masses. So, the Southern infertility which, of course, was a result of deliberate manipulations, could shake him to the heart of his hearts. He went on : “But the South once 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.”³⁵

Perhaps, the South which had lagged far behind the rat-race of fulfilling the American Dream, made him cry in pain. So, his pen gave words to the sufferings of the Southerners only. Though an accusation of biasness could be flung at Williams, he had every right to defend himself against it, by drawing the sweet experiences he gathered during his childhood in the lap of the decaying Old South.

Williams, again, was very much aware of the clash between the materialistic and the idealistic aspects of the society. He opposed to this clash, and, so in an interview with Louis Davis which was later published in "The Tennessean Magazine" (3rd March, 1957), he expressed, "what I am writing about is human nature. I write about the South because I think the war between romanticism and the hostility to it is very sharp there."³⁶

We are avid to know what "romanticism" is according to Tennessee Williams. He had clarified this point too. Romanticism for him, stands in direct contrast to materialism. "It is a reverence for all that is idealistic, and beautiful, I wish that the people of the South could realize that I am about its romanticism ... I love the accent, the beautiful speech. Southerners express things in a way that is humorous, colourful, graphic."³⁷

Tennessee Williams is the more prominent among the Southern playwrights who in every way - literary, dramatic, commercial or national - has etched an identification with the South in his writings. Barring Camino Real (1953) almost all of the major plays of Tennessee Williams (of course, the plays before sixties) had their settings in the South. They are The Glass Menagerie (1945), A Street Car Named Desire (Pulitzer Prize, 1947), Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1950), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Pulitzer Prize, 1954), Orpheus Descending (1957), Garden District (1958), and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959). Surprisingly enough, all these plays could win him applause though the over-exuberance of violence in these plays drove him to face calumnies and hence, detractors.

Williams's allegory is applicable not only to the Southern world but to all mankind, so it transcends the limits of time, and is elevated to the sublime heights of timelessness. Let us first consider his autobiographical play The Glass Menagerie. In the South, we have come across a paradoxical co-existence of culture and power. Tom and Amanda in The Glass Menagerie have shown a strange combination of both. They have affinity to culture (Tom is a poet) and the potential for power, but these potentialities are lying in waste in them, as both of them are estranged from the cultural past and are

unable to accept the cultural present.

Amanda is very much a relic of the past and she likes to cling to the bygone days and culture only. Of course, she tries to fit herself in the present reality. But Tom is hopeless in that respect too. If Tom could cut a niche for himself in some “future”, setting both the past and the present at naught, we could find no reason to call him “misfit”. But Tom feels pricks of conscience to shake off the responsibilities he has to his family, that has already been deserted by his father, who had “fallen in love with long distance”. (“May we say, then, that Williams felt the South could not find itself by becoming something other than the South?” Jacob Adler : Tennessee’s South). “Crippled mentally and physically Laura has neither the culture nor the power. Both lie latent in her, but they can be awakened only by a Stranger (Tom and Amanda, the inheritors of the bygone days, are helpless) who recognizes the beauty and potential underneath the grotesqueness of deformity”³⁸.

Again, the Southern dilemma and the contrast between culture and power find their truest manifestation in A Street Car Named Desire. Story is of prime importance, and the people, the culture-power bifurcation comes to secondary importance and tertiary significance is gained by Blanche or a sensitive individual lost in the complex modern world of Williams’s plays.

In order to clarify the culture-power conflict in A Street Car, Blanche may be considered as the representative of the cultural and the ideal, as well as the representative of power. Being a descendant of the Old South, Blanche dissipates her power instead of recognizing her cultural past, she gets firmly bound to it, “Thus Blanche represents one way the South could take, unable to face the contrast between the romantic past and the realistic present, Blanche violently betrays her code while desperately pretending to maintain it. That way inevitably lies the Cemeteries.”³⁹

Stella belongs to the Old South too. But, unlike Blanche, she is not

particularly Southern in outward manifestations at all. She is married to a man who is the embodiment of brutal violence (i.e. rape), not to speak of power. So, the match can give birth to an eclectic culture.

Overlooking all his flaws, Adler goes to a certain extent to say, "Stanley is by no means all bad, his strength is not all directionless, his love for Stella is pathetically real."⁴⁰ Again, an affinity towards the past displays weakness in Southern male. Williams has thrust maximum stress upon the naivete of Harold Mitchell and Blanche's husband. Perhaps, a less complete man can be drawn to the "past" that Blanche embodies. Yet Blanche, despite her promiscuities, possesses streaks of "genuine culture and beauty" that Stella lacks in and Stanley pretends to overlook.

Again, in Summer and Smoke (1948), the Southern dilemma comes to the fore. If we consider Summer and Smoke as an allegory of body and soul, we need not strive to trace the right track any more. Of course, the South, according to Williams, is trying to settle the question of disharmony, between the body and the soul.

In Summer and Smoke, Williams had to present the South which was neither the postwar South, nor the Civil-war South, not even the Reconstruction South, but, the South of the "turn of the century"(Adler). Williams was keen enough to make use of ample of devices to universalize the past. The sets were adequate enough to conform to the reality - Gothic (the houses), classical (the statue), and scientific (the anatomy chart), thus including the Western cultural history, in gamut.

"The Gothic, and the classical are, it is true, not suitable to the South's historical and architectural past, but they also suggest further reaches of time."⁴¹

So, the "use of the past helps Williams in various ways : it assists beliefs, it helps strip away the details useful to realism but detrimental to allegory, both Southern and Universal."⁴²

Thus, in its use of the past and its characteristics, Summer and Smoke reduces

realism to the minimum, for the sake of allegory. But universal allegory is present only in general terms : souls are crippled without bodies and, bodies are violent without souls. The details of the play will not fit into the universal allegory, but, fit very well into an allegory of the South. That allegory therefore requires further scrutiny.

Alma has been represented as the Soul of the South. Alma Winemiller, in relation to her mother, in relation to Nellie, the daughter of the town-prostitute is more a soul stunted with streaks of so-called culture that has its roots in the romantic past. Alma is a daughter of a neurotic mother. Alma runs every choice of being an exact replica of her mother who is hopeless and futureless. Thus, while exploring the feminine soul, Williams is prone to unravel the "Southern" soul, which is slightly grotesque, pleasant on the surface (Alma), but very ugly underneath (Mrs. Winemiller).

In the male protagonist, John Buchanan, Williams has tried to impinge the germs of violence, though the excess of his power has not yet found a channel. For the central violence of the play, i.e., the slaughter of John's father everything should be considered responsible. The violence is committed by an outsider, but it ensues only because the South is still ignorant of itself. Alma is unaware of physical violence and of the evil that "cuddle in the depths of the soul." The responsibility for violence in the South lies everywhere - not only in the "outsider", but also in the divided South itself. Cultural past and the present reality are poles apart, no connection being there to hold them in proximity.

Like Summer and Smoke, almost all of Williams's plays to some extent, juxtapose the physical and violent with the cultural and the ideal. The Rose Tattoo presents a cluster of individuals not firmly tied to the Old South, but, a group of Sicilian immigrants on the Gulf Coast. If The Rose Tattoo has any connections with the South it must be the inevitable reason that perchance the characters are in the South. Yet, here is another Southern race susceptible to both culture and violence. Serafina, shares Southern characteristics, a list of demands - religious, superstitious, honour, courage, resplendence

of rank, sky-scraping standards - all for her child, and even moves towards an extreme tendency of being violent on switching over to a psychotic withdrawal. She has tremendous weakness for "rose" symbol and has potentials for fecundity, no doubt a pointer towards "real future" which many of Williams's plays having Southern background seem to lack in.

Serafina cannot be a proper idol of the South as like Rosa she cannot be overwhelmingly sexual and sensual. Rosa, here, is neither Southerner nor Sicilian but an American to the core. She, like Stella of A Street Car is at heart an American. The over-emphasis and repeated utterance of "Rose" has made the symbol quite fitting to the underlying purport of the play.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof differs from the earlier plays in that its major characters belong to no labelled category - "neither aristocratic, nor middle-class nor foreign. Big Daddy, Big Mama and their two children lack in the sophistication of culture as well as power. Fertility, in this play, is not an emblem of "power" otherwise, Gooper could top the list of "revered" individuals with a long troop of offsprings he might have boasted of. Brick of course, can ascend the ladder of "culture" through the acquisition of money. But, fear and disillusionment have debilitated him to aspire for either culture or power. Maggie, a purely Southern girl, of cultured background wants to contest for power. As compared to the previous Southern plays, the action occurs in a highly stylized presentation bordering on the expressionistic.

Big Daddy can be taken as the central embodiment of power. But his power demands to be channelled through a worthless son and a badly confused son, i.e., ultimate waste of power is indicated. He himself yields slowly to the deadly clutch of cancer. Maggie, too, is left with a chance of gaining power by force only, if she gains at all. All the characters feel famished owing to dearth of love in the world they reside. Love could easily wash away all the flaws, waste of power or inadequate culture display. In Act II, the conversation of the father with the son, certifies lack of love and lack of communication.

Maggie seems to crave more for sex than for love, more for power than for culture. In Williams's next three plays, all laid in the South, the pattern as well as the quality go awry.

Suddenly Last Summer has an over-bearing Gothic structure, which cannot appeal to audience's sympathy. It only preaches the gospel of science, of money and denounces love, and upholds "neurotic courage of desperation" as a laudable quality. Not only in the South, but everywhere people are either tyrants or oppressed, either butchers or the slaughtered. No inkling of grand future is there. Culture verges upon nonsensical babbling, and, power is either an indicator of insanity or that kind of scientific aim which turns human beings into mere specimens for a study under the microscope.

In one respect, Sweet Bird of Youth does indeed concern the South. Williams tries to point out that Southern culture and power alike have fallen victim to the Boss Finleys, "the corrupt, pseudo-saviour, rabble-rousing politicians." If so, the future is submerged in stygian backwaters.

In Summer and Smoke, Williams explored the Southern dilemma to the hilt, in A Street Car most poignantly, and in both with a degree of hope. That hope dwindles into the coldness of Suddenly Last Summer, the emptiness of Sweet Bird of Youth. Faith, as dead as the ministers variously portrayed, bursts forth again in The Night of the Iguana, and a minister is apparently saved. But after The Night of the Iguana, darkness comes to rule the roost.

Thus, we have made an excursion into the soul of a renowned dramatist. The making of an artist, of course, counts much upon the artist's understanding of man, the ambience, the connection of man's miseries and misfortune with the vast world in general. No doubt, Williams's imbibing the staple of his plays from the South and from the much-precious nooks of other literateur's works and ideals has enriched the plays's qualities. But it has also made men aware of their febrile existence. Not only

the men and women of the South are groping for a meaning of existence, but men who have lost themselves in the alleys of “confusion of living”, strive to find a meaning of this enigmatic existence.

The novelist writes and tries to give life to the characters, for a dramatist the characters either whisper or shout in his ears imploring their lives to be brought to the theatrical arena. Tennessee Williams, the dramatist, with his message and through exquisite creations establishes himself as one of the key figures in the history of American drama.

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Chapter II

CHAPTER - II

ANGEL IN ARMOUR : A STUDY OF THE "BLACK PLAYS"

"Nobody ever gets to know nobody ↓
 We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside
 our skins, for life ↓ ... We're under a life-long
 sentence to solitary confinement inside
 our own lonely skins for as long as
 we live on this earth.

- Val Xavier

in

Orpheus Descending

"Black Plays" of Tennessee Williams are the early plays, i.e. the plays written before 1960. As he himself has confessed that these plays are embodiments of "destructive impulses", this chapter is intended to pinpoint the elements as "black" ones or "destructive impulses".

The "destructive impulses" are the stints which goad the characters to thwart the harmony of existence, to drive themselves into the clasp of peril and surrender to negative facets of existence. As harmony gets resumed at the end of the play, the dramatist tries to convey a message to the spectators and interested readers - some good hides beneath the veneer of evil. So, the sole presence of "destructive impulses" is an absurd notion. It is clear enough that "black" plays are not all black and the dramatist himself declares that the "non-black" plays won't be all white.

To be precise, the “black” elements are to be sorted out as - “fear of loneliness”, “absurd soaring imagination that hardly finds fulfilment”, “lunacy”, “alienation”, “endless waiting”, “frustration”, “love and escape penchant”, “death-syndrome”, “confined solitary existence”, “oppressor-oppressed complex”, “sodomasochistic tendency”, “sense of insecurity”, “sense of defeatism”, “painfulness”, “neurosis”, “violence”, “corruption”, “mendacity”. Along with these “black” elements some “white” too get intertwined. They are - “come-back attitude to life”, “search for hope”, “sincere expressions of man’s reaching for perfection”, “the disclosure of moral truth by unmasking a quality secret”, “emphasis on the world of inner consciousness”.

From the choreographic point of view, the dramatic language, use of symbols, music and lighting, the later plays claim a clear-cut deviation from the early ones.

Silhouetting the early plays against the backdrop of “black” stints, we can easily identify the darker elements lurking in the bosom of these plays. Harry Levin in The Power of Blackness upholds the “black” gaining the ascendancy over the “white”. Of course it is an offshoot of Manichaeic dichotomy. To quote him in verbatim “The resulting triptych to shift to a closer metaphor - may resemble a set of photographic negatives. But we stand in slight danger of forgetting that ‘black’ is merely one side - the less popular side of a famous polarity”.¹ However, the power of Blackness is a power which derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations in some shape or other, no deep-thinking mind is always and wholly free. From the point of view of Williams’s plays his declaration is quite apt “The union of opposites, after all, is the very basis of the American outlook, the old and new worlds, the past and present, the self and society, the supernatural and nature.”² So, the “black” elements which are to be sought out from the bosom of the early plays of Tennessee Williams bear full sanction of the scholarly cogitations.

To trace the “fear of loneliness”, i.e. a significant “black” stigma in the early

plays, one doesn't have to grope in dark. The "search for togetherness" is a strategy which ensures solace and comfort to life. All of Williams's people who are possessed of the artistic temperament are reaching out to others, who are often as incomplete as those who initiate the contact. Simply, if the world is an unfriendly and cold place to live in, there is warmth and comfort in deep, trusting companionship, the idea of togetherness, and even love. His fragile people seek each other out, whatever anguish they feel, they know that the pain of life can be alleviated in the presence of others who are similarly pained, as we hear in the concluding lines of the poem "The Interior of the Pocket":

"The way small animals nudge one another at night

As though to whisper

We're close! There is still no danger!"³

The scenes where lonely and hurt creatures reach out to each other are the most touching in Williams's work. Pitted against the strength, the cupidity and the vulgarity of the organized world they often have only their numbers with which to face the onslaught. They are the moths, the roses, the stars, the leaves, the earth which gather in order to ward off the enemy, the predators, the winds, the night which seek their destruction. They are usually fugitives against their will and the aged fighting to glimpse their youth for the last time.

W.L. Dusenbury in The Theme of Loneliness in American Drama affirms "loneliness" as a "black" element - "Laura's horn is the slight limp which she has magnified to make her seem to herself 'a freak' until she has become in a sense just that, knowing how alone she is and always will be, Tom, although he must run away to save himself is forever haunted by a feeling of guilt towards her and pleads that her candles may be extinguished in his memory. As the final curtain falls, Laura blows out the candles, and having then apparently been forgotten by Tom, is left in 'black' loneliness forever."⁴

Almost most of the early plays are ridden with this quality : In The Glass

Menagerie (1945) Tom Wingfield; his father “ who has fallen in love with the long distance” and has gone away thrusting all the responsibilities on his wife Amanda Wingfield’s shoulders; Amanda Wingfield herself, and, her only crippled daughter Laura Wingfield - are all cocooned in their own realms of solitude. That “solitude” is no “bliss”, but an imprecation that lacerates the already-wounded hearts of the characters. The Glass Menagerie is a piece-de-resistance of Williams where, he probes into the deepest recesses of the characters, and comes up with ladles replete with mire that blacken their souls, the malady, perhaps, is “loneliness”. Amanda Wingfield, in the solitary confinement of four brick walls in their tenement at the end of the lane where the “fire escapes commingle”, very often flies on the wings of imagination and to fight off the clutch of “loneliness”, refers to the “seventeen gentleman callers”, she had to treat in her heydays at Blue Mountain. Tom finds relief from the clasp of solitariness in composing poems and frequenting the movies. Laura’s loneliness can find consummation when W.L.Dusenbury in his The Theme of Loneliness in American Drama states - “It is no wonder that Laura suffers from a painful sense of loneliness, for from the first scene to the last, her mother makes her feel her lack of popularity with men and her inability to cope with any kind of social life. Laura’s closing line of the first scene, ‘Mother’s afraid that I’m going to be an old maid’ is complemented by the closing scene in which the gentleman-caller departs, never to return. In the intervening action Laura’s pitiful inner apartness from the life around her is made overt by other incidents. Amanda’s lack of sympathy of the girl’s nervous sickness at business school elicits only Laura’s reply of ‘I couldn’t face it, I couldn’t’. Any contact with people is almost more than Laura can face. Seemingly her only sense of attachment is to her little glass figures, but this feeling of closeness to them is so intense that when Tom throws his coat and accidentally knocks some off the shelf she cries out ‘as if wounded’ and covers her face with her hands. Her devotion to so fragile a material object as the glass menagerie represents the enervation of her spiritual connection to anything.”⁵ Tennessee Williams again says that the light that should encircle Laura in most scenes must not appear realistic, where she is only an onlooker, with a

peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas. Laura's "separation" is thus symbolically, presented by both lighting and staging. Nathan calls her "a creature crippled deeply in inner spirit" and no doubt, her "physical disability" is little in parallel with her "psychological isolation". Tom Wingfield points to Jim O'Connor, the stranger who visits their family on his invitation, as "an emissary from the world that we were somehow set apart from" (The Glass Menagerie). Tom tries to fly off the unbearable clutch of isolation which he experiences at home by hurtling into the great world of reality. Although his concluding lines signify that he could not find a "sense of belonging in motion", he attempted to break the bond that tied him to his mother and made an advance towards it.

In A Street Car Named Desire (1947) (first performed at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, won Pulitzer prize for drama in 1948), Blanche du Bois is the most lonely woman, who has lost her job as school-mistress, whose social reputation is at stake, the meagre property which she possessed has also been sold out. Now she takes a street-car named Desire, and reaches her sister Stella's residence. Her husband Stanley Kowalski welcomes her but later on changes for the worse. However, the solitariness which grips Blanche come ringing through the following extract from Scene V:

"Stella : Blanche, do you want him ?

Blanche : I want to rest ! I want to breathe

quietly again ! Yes - I want Mitch very badly !

Just think ! If it happens ! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem ."

(A Street Car Named Desire)

Blanche wants a person, who can pierce the gossamer of solitariness that nestles round her. Even she implores the paper boy, quite unknown to her, to give

her company. The way she approaches the paper-boy may aver her coquettishness but actually, Blanche is desperate to get rid of her inordinate isolation, that eats her from within. At last, in the last scene (Scene XI), when she is robbed of her virginity by Stanley, and succumbs to the heinous politicking of Stanley and his friends who want to malign her as mentally disbalanced, she wails in despair (perhaps, “a search for hope”): (Holding tight to the Doctor’s arm): “Whoever you’re I’ve always depended upon the kindness of strangers”(A Streetcar Named Desire). She expected, even at the last moment, the arrival of Shep Huntleigh, her faithful friend, but she had to yield to the doctor.

The play Summer and Smoke (1948) begins with a couple of memorable lines quoted from Rilke : “Who if I were to cry out/Would hear me among the angelic orders”? Of course, this is the nub round which the principal characters - Alma Winemiller and John Buchanan revolve. Alma has an inherent holiness and John Buchanan is a man who craves for carnal love. For Alma, “love” is a holy emotion that can attain “perfection” only in the elevated sphere of spirituality. However, in the closing part of the play, she has to shower all her love, latent in her bosom, on a travelling salesman. In Alma, perhaps, we get a faint reflection of Miriam of D.H.Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers. Here, the solitariness of Miriam is less of any account than the “sense of insecurity”, she is engulfed in. Feeling sick, she meets John Buchanan, John blurts out,

“John : Breathe ! ... Out? Breathe ... out!

Alma : Ah

John : Um

Alma : What do you hear ?

John : Just a little voice saying -

“Miss Alma is lonesome”] (She rises and turns her back to him).”

(Summer and Smoke, Scene IV).

The Rose Tattoo (1950) has a different kind of interest. Serafina loses faith in her dead husband Rosario, whom she adored, loved, and hoped to cling to. A "sense of insecurity" caused her to be drawn to Alvaro Mangiacavallo, who could assure her of protection throughout life. The concluding part of the play asserts that Alvaro is the angel of a realm where Serafina might find a ray of hope to take refuge to. The dialogue in Act III Scene III suffices to explain Serafina's quest for security :

"Serafina :Just now, I felt on my breast the burning again of the rose. I know what it means. It means that I have conceived!(she lifts the glass to her lips for a moment and then returns it to Assunta). Two lives again in the body! Two, lives again, two!

Alvaro's voice (nearer now, and sweetly urgent) : Rondinella Felice!

[Alvaro is not visible on the embankment but Serafina begins to move slowly toward his voice]" (The Rose Tattoo)

In both Camino Real (1953), and Cat on a HOt Tin Roof (1955). the terror of loneliness, the fear of insecurity are felt deeply. In Camino Real, the dramatist ~~are~~ relieves the realm of Terra Incognita where the characters are like the pageants on a colourful screen. They come and go, and open their hearts to us. In "Block Ten", perhaps, Jacques and Marguerite add meaning^{to} "loneliness" :

" Marguerite: We are together, breathing quietly together, leaning together, not frightened,now not alone, but completely quietly together."

(Camino Real)

Their interdependence, their proclivity to cling to each other, remind us of Lucky and Pozzo, and Hamm and Clov of Beckett's Waiting for Godot and Endgame simultaneously. In "Block Fourteen", again, "loneliness" becomes a watchword:

" (The Bum leans out his window, draws a deep breath and says) -

Bum : Lonely.

Marguerite (to herself) : Lonely.

Kilroy (on the steps) Lonely." (Camino Real)

A faint sibling of “despair” is heard too. As if, the hopes of life are all evaporated to nullity and life has only to pander the chill of solitariness and hopelessness to men. Cat on Hot Tin Roof (1955), Orpheus Descending (1957), Suddenly Last Summer (1958) and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959) all contain the stigmata - “fear of loneliness” and “insecurity” and a “quiescent reiteration of hopelessness” and “frustration”. In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Big Daddy exhorts “Brick on boozing”:

“Life is important. There’s nothing else to hold on to. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don’t do it, *hold on to your life. There’s nothing else to hold on to.*” (italics mine)

It seems as if the audience lend their ears to a saga of “life”. Big Daddy clings to the last straw - “hope” against hope. Maggie sets the “fear of loneliness” and “insecurity” at naught, when she says in the concluding part of the play,

“Maggie : Oh you weak, beautiful people who give
up with such grace. What you need is
someone to take hold of you gently, with
love, and hand your life back to you, like
something gold you[^]let go of - and I can !”

(Cat on a Hot Tin Roof)

Again, the dramatist tells in the preface - “It is a lonely idea, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that”, as if the reiteration makes the meaning crystal-clear. Orpheus Descending (1957), of course, opens with the “black” chill. In the very

stage direction the playwright describes -

“A great dusty window upstage offers a view of disturbing emptiness that fades into late dusk”. When Val Xavier exudes painfulness, we really feel for him -

“We are all of us sentenced to imprisonment in our own skins for life.”

(Orpheus Descending)

In Suddenly Last Summer and Sweet Bird of Youth, the battered forces of existence are unveiled. Everyman alone, having estranged existence as an island, is again the cynosure of the two above-mentioned plays. Catharine, as well as Mrs. Venable after the death of Sebastian Venable retire in loneliness. The ambience smells of abnormal existence.

In Sweet Bird of Youth, “hopelessness” and “sense of insecurity” remain intermingled. Princess cannot stay without Chance Wayne as she fears to be alone. Again, the “Castration episode” is the darkest part of the play where the sordidness of existence is exposed.

“Lunacy” is another “non-white” streak that makes frequent appearance in Williams’s plays, especially the early ones. As “lunacy” itself cannot stand alone, it is closely associated with two other “black” elements - “neurosis” and “sense of insecurity”. These are the common characteristics of modern individuals who easily come under the vicious cycle of all these pigments, that remain perhaps rooted in their inherent nature. From “sense of insecurity,” “neurosis” may result, again “neurosis” may give rise to “lunacy.” Among Williams’s early plays the cycle comes full circle especially in A Street Car Named Desire, Suddenly Last Summer and in those plays where the streaks are present but not in such prevalent manner are The Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, Orpheus Descending.

Why is “insanity” taken to be a derivative of “sense of insecurity”? “Sense of insecurity” is a destructive propensity which shoves an oppressed person to the verge

of precarious mental balance that very often bumps into “psychological disbalance”. “Security is mortal’s chiefest enemy”, says Hamlet, the Shakespearean protagonist. Even then, “Security” is much sought-after protective shield of each and every life. But Williams’s characters are so sensitive that they often draw an invisible deadline to salubrious thinking and yields place to imaginary, “undefined feelings”. To the reader’s utter dismay they observe that their troubles originate more often in faulty neurological mechanisms. Herein lies the cause for the “madness” that eats into the entrails of the characters Williams etches quite sincerely.

On inception, the characters have an inclination towards mental illness where a quirk often shakes their inner selves violently thrusting them into mental maladies. They either fear to encounter the world or beat a retreat from the world populated with individuals like their own or different from themselves. To be true, the early plays mostly deal with such kind of “hypersensitive characters”. The unaccountable intention to close their door upon the world outside, often gives rise to a “fugitive tendency”. They feel an urge to escape from the meaningless world they inhabit.

John Von Szeliski, directly deals with this matter in his Tragedy and Fear (pp. 44-45): “The Glass Menagerie and A Street Car named Desire are respectively lyric and violent dramatizations of sensitive women who lead lives of repressed desperation or neurotic dreaming because their senses are too thinly armored for dealing with the coarse world around them. In the former play, their sensual delicacy ensures their continual failure in a social atmosphere which has traded gentility for brutality and the idea also carries over to Tom, the central figure”.⁶ Laura like most of the characters of Williams is a sensitive, misunderstood exile, a recurrent character in Williams’s works, one of the “fugitive kind”, who are too fragile to live in the malignant world.

“As to the latter, Williams said that A Streetcar’s theme is that the ‘apes will inherit the earth’. This variation of Anderson’s expression of human destiny emphasizes a vision of man’s anthropological regression, with animalism and loveless sensuality

seem as throttling reason, compassion and morality. Williams's sensitive protagonists cannot make successful adjustment to this kind of life-problem without becoming animals themselves and, failing this, they are destroyed." Thus, this unusual freak in the individual's character gives rise to "insanity" that ruins them, at last. Hypersensitivity leads to mental disbalance as detected in *Blanche du Bois* or *Amanda Wingfield*.

Again, in *Summer and Smoke* as in Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* the seed of destruction lies embedded in sexual maladjustment. Frigidity is not only a tragic weakness but it gives rise to psychic imbalance as we see in Alma's strange behaviour towards the last of the play, *Summer and Smoke*, where she buries her past "puritan" self, and has recourse to a new "abnormal" self where sexual repression is a vice, sexual promiscuity is a welcome relief. Towards the conclusion of the play, *Summer and Smoke*, Alma who bore pugnacity to any kind of sexual approach lastly yields to a mean offer of a travelling salesman. If reasons can be traced back, then perhaps, John Buchanan's infidelity towards her shoved her to such a tragic extremity. The conversation that drags the play on to its conclusion really astounds us:

"Alma : There's not much to do in this town after dark, but there are resorts on the lake that offer all kinds of after-dark entertainment. There's one called Moon Lake Casino. Its under new management now, but I don't suppose its character has changed.

The young Man : What was its characters....

Alma : Gay, very gay, Mr. Kramer

Young Man : Then what in hell are we sitting here for? Vamonos!

Alma : Como no, Senior !

Young Man : Ha-ha-ha! (She jumps up)

I'll call a taxi,(He goes off shouting 'Taxi')

(*Summer and Smoke*).

Should we point it out to be an effect of hypersensitivity yielding to profligacy that is, of course, a symptom of psychic failure !

So far as the “black” pigments in Williams’s plays are concerned, none can deny that one “black” element is interwoven with other disagreeable elements as broken arcs destined to form a full circle, “Human incapability to endure” often serves the cause of lunacy that ruins most of Williams’s characters. In both Suddenly Last Summer and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof we find the disaster of the protagonists rooted in this flaw. The misfits who cannot adjust with the ways of the world, the lost souls who expect a lot from this universe at last drift into mental imbalance or verge onto severe lunacy. In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Brick like most of the Ibsenian characters, is at the tether’s end . Big Daddy loses all faith even upon the love of Big Mama that sustained him throughout his life. In Act II, he nonchalantly gives a clear expression to his misgivings :

“ Big Mama : Oh, Big Daddy, Oh, oh, oh, Big Daddy !

Big Daddy - What’s the matter with you?

Big Mama : In all these years you never believed that I loved you!

Big Daddy : Huh ?

Big Mama : And I did, I did so much I did love you! I even loved your hate and your hardness Big Daddy.

(she sobs and rushes awkwardly out on to the gallery).

Big Daddy : (to himself) Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true...”

(Cat on a Hot Tin Roof).

Thus, “lunacy” is partially analogous to the “expectation” and its “betrayal”, as Maggie in the last scene wants to overcome her sense of futility by embracing the last stubble of expectation - begetting a child. She thus asserts a “comeback attitude” to the

otherwise hollow universe.

In Suddenly Last Summer, the memory of a dead lover haunts Catharine like a nightmare. The memoirs of the dead poet Sebastian Venable are demanded to be lobotomized off her brain by Mrs. Venable. But, the shock of the brutal hacking of Sebastian by the aboriginal, famished young band, can hardly be overcome. Both of them take a sad turn towards lunacy when the world casts a pall of dolour in front of their “will to live”, their interest to survive. Catharine cannot bear the onus of relating the sad memory to Mrs. Venable and at last she sobs off her sorrow on the arms of Dr. Cukrowitz who went on interrogating him. She gasps : “When we got back to where my Cousin Sebastian had disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows he - he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won’t believe, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don’t blame them ! -*They had devoured parts of him* (Mrs. Venable cries out softly). (*italics mine*) (Suddenly Last Summer, Scene IV)

Princess Kosmonopolis of Sweet Bird of Youth, Serafina Delle Rose of The Rose Tattoo, Lady Torrance of Orpheus Descending - all incline towards mental disbalance due to numerous reasons like “sense of insecurity”, “mutual distrust”, and “hurt feelings”.

Williams admits that from the time he was fourteen, he was a “dedicated writer” and that from the beginning his own fear and terror of losing what he most loved gave his writing “an atmosphere of hysteria and violence”(Signi Falk). His first story, “The Vengeance of Nitocris”, a violent piece written when he was sixteen, “Set the keynote for the most of his work that followed.”⁸

The next cluster of “black” elements, that abound in Williams’s early plays are mainly - “the high-soaring imagination of the characters that hardly finds fulfilment”, “endless waiting”, “frustration”, “despair”, “painfulness” and consequent “alienation”. Dissecting all the major early plays we come across each of these elements

that in one way or other contributes to the shaping of the play and justifying the epithet - "black" plays. These four elements mentioned above are correlated to each other and in a group leads on to the protagonist's or the central character's disaster and ultimate doom.

"It is that despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death. The despairing man is mortally ill. In an entirely different sense than can appropriately be said of any disease, we may say that the sickness has attacked the noblest part; and yet the man cannot die This is the situation in despair. And however, thoroughly it eludes the attention of the despairer, and however thoroughly the despairer may succeed (as in the case of that kind of despair which is characterized by unawareness of being in despair) in losing himself entirely, and losing himself in such a way that it is not noticed in the least."⁹

In The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams's major theatrical success, a me'lange of all of the "black" elements seem to be present in adequate proportions. R.B. Stein in his article "The Glass Menagerie Revisited : Catastrophe without violence" states that: "The Glass Menagerie" projects not a series of violent confrontations leading to catastrophe but a vision of lonely human beings who fail to make contact, who are isolated from each other and from society, and who seem ultimately abandoned in the universe."¹⁰

Even in that deplorable plight, Tom aspires to "go to the moon", Amanda Wingfield remembers the halcyon days of blue mountain and vicariously revives the charm while she dresses up Laura to entertain the gentleman caller Jim O'Connor. Amanda has high hopes about her daughter getting forever attached to the gentleman caller. Laura is quite happy to remain in her self-made universe, where she feels comfortable, cosy.

But, all their high ambitions, fall on the thorns of despair and get pricked to a sorry state. Tom, who has deep fascination for poetry, feels entrapped in his routine job at the factory, a job which hinders the smooth way of his towering imagination, ^{crushes} his

sensitive spirit, a job which acts as a blockade in the way of fulfilment of his ^{soaring hopes} and dreams, though it is retained, owing to a sense of responsibility to his mother and sister. "I'm leading double life", he tells his mother, "a simple honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic Czar of the underworld", (The Glass Menagerie). "Either Tom stays inside, working for the Continental Shoemakers to pay the rent of the apartment, or he runs away to the merchant marines, gets free to write his play"¹¹ .

In case of Laura, who has her dreams hovering over Jim of her childhood days, also, has to alight abruptly from the empyrean heights. Her favourite collection of glass animals received the first jolt when Tom rushed for the door threatening to explode all their illusions. The gentleman caller Jim O'Connor is also seemingly the embodiment of all the desires of Amanda and Laura. The gentleman caller is the long-delayed but always-expected something that we live for ! While joining Jim in dance on his entreaties, a horn of the unicorn (an extinct animal) falls on the floor and breaks. But, Laura this time does not shriek in pain but says "It is no tragedy, Freckles". Her hopes and wishes are yet to get a jolt, in the maximum, when Jim departs never to return. In the words of Scheye again, "In the final scene, Laura stops her pursuit and takes her place in the past. A conjuring trick, the gentleman caller, has shown Laura, what Tom could never tell her; that her life is on the other side of the scrim which divides illusion and reality, in the dark."¹² Thus, the bubble of "soaring imagination" gets pricked and at last evaporates in the air itself.

In The Glass Menagerie, the unfulfilment of the high hopes did not give birth to lunacy, rather the whole family had been doomed to frustration. Rather a violent clash of illusion and reality leads on to a resultant despair. Jim O'Connor is a most sought-for man whom Laura requires in her life as her consort to come out of the cocoon of insecurity and "lonesome" plight. The angel of hope preaches gospels of confidence and places Laura amidst a group of "disappointed persons". He says- "But just look around and you will see lots of people as disappointed as you are. For instance, I hoped when I

“I was going to high school that I would be further along at this time six years later, than I am now”.

(The Glass Menagerie)

Surprisingly enough, while trying to convince Laura that she must not suffer from a negative feeling of inferiority, he soon betrays his own fear and insecurity. Six years have passed and he still is “planning to get in on the ground floor”. Tom, himself is at last in the clasp of endless hopelessness. He says in the closing scene, “I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for the last time and followed, from then on, in my father’s footsteps”.(The Glass Menagerie) But his heart still pines for Laura, his only sister. “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.” (The Glass Menagerie)

Francis Donahue in The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams makes it vivid. The hopelessness of Amanda’s existence is framed by the humble tenement-environment to which she and her family are now reduced. They are far from the highly cultivated soil of the South, having been transplanted to a Northern Urban area.”¹³

Amanda whose aim is to find a suitable groom for Laura, helps her daughter secure a business education. As it later develops, Laura gets enrolled in a business school but being unable to face the realities of life, becomes violent. When she takes her first examination, she leaves school and never comes to join again. But she never reveals the truth to her mother. Every day, while her mother thinks she is at school, Laura walks in the park, visits the botanical gardens, and sometimes even goes without lunch in order to use her allowance to go to the movies. ‘But even like Azzaro, the spoilt child of Ben Okri’s Booker Prize - winning Novel (1991), The Famished Road, Laura and Amanda Wingfield have to face the reality. They decide to go on living on earth.

In A Street Car Named Desire the central character Blanche du Bois, had

high hopes regarding her property at Belle Reve, and also of her conjugal life with Allan Grey. But all her skyrocketing ambitions are frustrated and she accepts a lascivious life, to which she can neither conform nor can come out easily. Allan, in spite of his over-refinement, had a blemish on his character which was enough to shatter Blanche's dreams. Arthur Ganz, in his well-written article, "The Desperate Morality of the plays of Tennessee Williams", has pointed out, "For Blanche, who has lost the plantation of Belle Reve, the beautiful dream of a life of gracious gentility, is an exile like the homosexual (her husband)".¹⁴

This belying of hopes attains the climax when her brother-in-law sexually torments her. Thereafter, deep frustration sets in. She loses faith in both people and life itself. Later on, while Stanley Kowalski, to veil his own guilt maligns her as "lunatic" and compels her to go to a lunatic asylum, her nerves are almost at the point of snapping. In Scene XI, she comes to know about the "plotting" against her, and it comes to her as a blow. In Ibsen's Ghosts when Mrs. Alving came to know that the search for "Sun" is Oswald's ultimate earthly quest, she screamed and cried bitterly. Oswald urged: "And let us live together as long as we can. Thank you, mother." But here Blanche does not get the warmth of feeling even from her sister.

It is clear from the following dialogues:

" [The sound of this new voice shocks Blanche, she makes a shocked gesture
Stella nods and looks quickly away]

Blanche : What's going on here ?

[She turns from Stella to Eunice and back to Stella...]

Blanche (continuing) What's happened here?

Stella (agonizingly): Hush ! Hush !

Eunice : Hush ! Hush !

Blanche : Why are you looking at me like that ?

Is something wrong with me ?

Eunice : You look wonderful, Blanche.

Don't she look wonderful ?

Stella : Yes?⁷

(A Street car Named Desire)

Blanche smells collusion in the air. She declares at last : "I'm anxious to get out of here - the place is a trap!"

Even her own sister unwittingly joins the hostile camp. At last, when instead of Shep Huntleigh, whom she had been expecting within a few days, she is handed over to a Doctor and Matron of lunatic asylum, she cannot believe her senses. She, on flimsy excuses goes inside. But, she cannot escape the sinister snares she had been in. In Scene XI :

“ Stanley : She says that she forgot something.

[The echo sounds in threatening whispers]

Matron : That's all right.

Stanley : What did you forget, Blanche ?

Blanche : I - I

Matron : It don't matter, we can pick it up later.

Stanley : Sure, we can send it along with the trunk.

Blanche (retreating in panic) : *I don't know you - don't know you. I want to be left alone , please !(italics mine)*

Matron : Now, Blanche !^{??}

(A Street Car Named Desire)

At last, Blanche is driven away having none to feel for her, only her sister Stella lamenting ! “Oh my God, Eunice help me ! Don’t let them do that to her, don’t let them hurt her ! Oh God, Oh, please God, don’t hurt her ! What are they doing to her ? What are they doing? (She tries to break from Eunice’s arms). But the tragedy of Blanche leads her from utter frustration to complete alienation - within a few moments, she gets adjusted to her plight and implores the Doctor for a little compassion.

In Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo, Cat on a Tin Roof, the “Black” elements like “soaring imagination receiving an abrupt jolt”, “frustration” and consequent “alienation” are not altogether absent.

In Summer and Smoke, John Buchanan the young doctor and Alma Winemiller are individuals having different attitudes towards love and sex. Alma was too puritan while John was driven by natural instinct. He was flirtatious, lusty and had a deep sexual longing too. However, in the long last, Alma is driven to promiscuity like Blanche in A Street Car, after losing faith in love-bondage, she shared with John Buchanan. Williams is deeply interested in Alma. He has said repeatedly that Alma is his most favourite character : “I think, the character I like most is Miss Alma. She really had the greatest struggle. You see, Alma went through the same thing I went through - from *puritanical shackles* to, well, *complete profligacy*- Freedom, Liberation from taboos.”¹⁵ (italics mine)

In Scene VII, a conversation in between Alma and John makes it clear why Alma turns to a different life. She adds a new meaning to alienation, rather she escapes her insanity through a nonsensical relationship.

Alma : So that is your high conception of human desires. What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I-I reject your opinion of where love is

and the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking ! There is something not shown on the Chart.

“ John : You mean the part that Alma is Spanish ^{for,} do you ?

Alma : Yes, that’s not shown on the anatomy chart! But it’s there, just the same, yes there! Somewhere not seen but there. But its ‘that’ that I loved you, with that! Not what you mention ! - Yes, did love you with - John, did nearly die of when you hurt me!

(John turns slowly to her and speaks gently)

John : *I wouldn’t have made love to you. (italics mine)*

Alma (Uncomprehendingly) What ?” (Summer and Smoke)

Thus, her frustration sets in, and she responds to the call of the young salesman. However, Williams has maintained that Alma’s passion is healthy, “What is frustrated about loving with such white-hot intensity that it alters the whole direction of your life, and removes you from the parlor of an Episcopal rectory to a secret room above Moon Lake Casino!”¹⁶ Thus both in A Street Car and Summer and Smoke a conflict between “puritan” and “cavalier” has been hinted at.

The Rose Tattoo is a play regarding infidelity in husband-wife relationship. Here “high-soaring imagination” of the wife Serafina Delle Rose centres round deep respect and devotion to her husband. But lastly after her husband’s death *duêto anâccident*, she comes to know that her husband was not faithful to her. Williams depicts Serafina as a woman with a “woman’s heart passionately in love” idealizing her marriage with Rosario. After his death, too, she goes on idealizing their relationship. For that reason only, she sequesters herself from the real world. She has his “heart in the marble urn with the ashes”, she lives in the past, reveres the memory and talks to the ashes.

Later on, when she comes to know that Rosario has “defiled their marriage

bed", she gives up adoring past memories. When reality dawns upon her, Serafina speaks out - "A man, when he burns, leaves only a handful of ashes, no woman can hold him. The wind must blow him away". (The Rose Tattoo). But here alienation finds a deviation, Serafina gets mentally aligned with Alvaro, while past memories are lost to her for ever.

In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof "high hopes receiving sad rebuffs", "frustration" "alienation" are not the major "black" elements to be found. Rather, "mendacity", and "perversity of longing" (i.e. homosexuality) are brought to the fore. Foster Hirsch remarks: "It is ironic that Williams is obsessed here with the theme of mendacity. He rates his characters according to their ability to speak the truth. Big Daddy, especially hates lies and liars, and unlike Brick, he can accept the truth about himself, he demands the truth about his illness just as Brick avoids the truth about his sexual feelings."¹⁷ "Homosexuality" is also a "black" streak for which Maggie accuses Brick, having homosexual relationship with Skipper.

In the last four remaining plays, Camino Real, Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth too the manifestation of the above mentioned group of "black elements" is quite prominent. Kilroy of Camino Real, Val Xavier of Orpheus Descending Sebastian Venable of Suddenly Last Summer, Princess Kosmonopolis and Chance Wayne of Sweet Bird of Youth all had their hopes smashed to pieces and the upshots are "deep frustration" and "alienation". A "sense of loss" pervades Sweet Bird of Youth. Chance Wayne, after loving Heavenly from the core of his heart receives a great blow. He opens his heart to Princess Kosmonopolis, in Act I Sc. II - "I gave people more than I took. Middle aged people I gave back a feeling of youth. Lovely girls ? Understanding, appreciation! An absolutely convincing show of affection. Sad people, lost people ? Something light and uplifting. Eccentrics ? Tolerance, even odd things they long for".

But always just at the point when I might get something back that would solve my own need, which was great, to rise to their level, the memory of my girl would

pull me back home to her”.

(Sweet Bird of Youth)

But Chance's hopes are all marred when Heavenly went on saying “Chance go away! Chance you're a liar”, “My father's right about you”, so on and so forth. Her father had been a political nob who bore hatred against Chance Wayne and held his daughter back from forming any deep meaningful relationship with the swindler. A “sense of loss” gnaws Princess Kosmonopolis's heart too. In Act II, Scene II, she says - “All day I've kept hearing a sort of lament that drifts through the air of this place. It says, “*Lost, lost, never to be found again.*” (italics mine)(Sweet Bird of Youth) This sigh swishes on through the play, dragging it to the bottom of despair.

According to Arthur Ganz : “In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams has produced a work in which the homosexual - so often for him the symbol of the lonely, rejected, exile - becomes the rejector the sinner who must be punished.¹⁸ Thus, the central character “the exile homosexual”, has met a violent death before the play opens.

Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, Camino Real, all these three plays contain the vision of “universal corruption”, a “black element” again. In a world where “cruelty” is the main key, the innocents are not only pulled down to destruction, but they too are corrupted along with “Time”. Kilroy (Camino Real), Val Xavier (Orpheus Descending), Sebastian Venable (Suddenly Last Summer) are all wandering innocents yielding to the sinister motive of the world. Williams has said flatly that the sinister fantasy world of Camino Real is nothing more nor less than his conception of the time and the world that he lives in.

“By now it should be clear that Tennessee Williams's real subject is the Painfulness (not the tragedy) of existence, and the fate of human dignity (not of the soul) in the face of suffering. It should also be clear that however neurotic Williams himself may be and however widely neurosis enters into and affects his work, there is little point in looking for the roots of his art and less in searching out, the meaning of any particular play, on one or another categorical. Freudian plot of ground, because to Williams ‘everything’ is painful-sexuality, touch, communication, time, the bruteness of fact, the necessity of lie, the loss of innocence. And finally, it should be clear that Williams has alternatively been elegist, soothsayer, mythmaker, exorcist or consoler-none of the

incarnations final and no one incarnation carried through to finality".¹⁹

Now , "confined solitary existence", "love and escape penchant", are to be pointed out as "Black" elements in the "early" or "black" plays of Tennessee Williams, "It is a dilemma that Williams never resolved, in play after play restaging this conflict between love and escape".²⁰

"Love and escape" is a theme, which is nothing new to either The Glass Menagerie or A Street Car named Desire, Jim O'Connor comes and toys with Laura's emotions and bids adieu to her. "Love" for Laura is a "bliss in solitude", while Jim makes an escape for ever.

In A Street Car, Blanche losing all hopes of life tries to find meaning of life in a bondage with Mitch, but lastly Mitch too eludes all her hopes. Love creeps in both Blanche's and Mitch's souls, when their conversation in Scene VI takes a remarkable turn -

" Blanche : You talked to your mother about me ?

Mitch : Yes.

Blanche : Why ?

Mitch : I told my mother, how nice you were and I liked you.

Blanche: Were you sincere about this ?

Mitch : You know I was.

And lastly,

Mitch (drawing her slowly into his arms) : *You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be you and me, Blanche ?*

(She stares at him *vacantly* for a moment).

Then with a soft cry huddles in his embrace.

Blanche : Sometimes - There's God - so - quickly." (italics mine)
(A Street Car Named Desire)

But, the love that soothes Blanche's heart, loses its pristine azureness and becomes dusky in appearance. Mitch, who sought for her hands later on gets vitiated by Stanley Kowalski's mean plans against Blanche. He sprinkles blemishes on her character and tells Mitch about it. In Scene IX, the illusion of love is evaporated -

" Blanche : What do you want ?

Mitch : (fumbling to embrace her) : What I been missing all summer.

Blanche: *Then marry me, Mitch !*

Mitch : *I don't think I want to marry you any more.*

Blanche : No ?" (italics mine) (A Street Car Named Desire)

She like Alma, is bruised mentally, all her tender feelings, emotions, sensibilities get numbed.

In Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth love is depicted as an illusion - far from reality itself. In The Rose Tattoo, Rosario plays with the devotion and love of his wife, Serafina delle Rose, who at last comes out of the illusion. In Suddenly Last Summer and Sweet Bird of Youth, too, love is sure to bring the dazed persons to a disillusioned clarity.

"Ironically, the 'escape' of these characters becomes a prison, confining and degrading the prisoner and sometimes others with him. It is this basic inability to cope with reality, this deliberate and destructive evasion of the truth, that Williams seems to emphasize as a dominant trait of his problem characters. Much of the substance of

his plays follows the thematic process of uncovering such evaded and veiled reality - a revelation which inevitably resolves into crumbled illusions.”²¹

W.L.Dusenbury believes that, “the theme of escape is one of the most common in modern drama, because of the deterministic cynicism of the twentieth century, which has left no other solution.”²²

The last group of “black” elements to be taken into consideration is “oppressor-oppressed complex”, “mendacity”, “sado-masochistic tendency”, and finally “death” syndrome.

Elmer Rice in his play Street Scene wittily comments on “oppression” itself:-

“That’s all there is in life - nothing but pain. From before we’re born, until we die | Everywhere you look, oppression and cruelty! If it doesn’t come from Nature, it comes from humanity-Humanity trampling on itself and tearing at its own throat. The whole world is nothing but a blood stained arena, filled with misery and suffering. It’s too high a price to pay for life - life isn’t worth it!”

This is true to the core. The memorable utterance of Val Xavier (in Orpheus Descending) clearly forks menfolk and womenfolk into two sharp halves. “There’s just two kinds of people, the ones that are ‘bought’ and the ‘buyers’ - perhaps an early version of the ‘eaten’ and ‘eaters’, more appropriately of the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressor’”. Again, most of Williams’s male characters like Stanley Kowalski (A Street Car), John Buchanan (Summer and Smoke), Tom’s father (The Glass Menagerie), Jim O’Connor (The Glass Menagerie), Rosario (The Rose Tattoo) are “sadists”, while Laura (The Glass Menagerie), Amanda (The Glass Menagerie), Blanche (A Street Car), Alma Winemiller (Summer and Smoke), Serafina (The Rose Tattoo) are “masochists”, feeble enough to oppose their male counterparts. Regarding “oppressed-oppressor” complex, Foster Hirsch (in The Portrait of the Artist) is definitely eloquent, “Stripped, Blanche goes mad and Stanley finally gets the dame who called him common. He wins; the brute stalks the

earth unchecked. Williams appreciates Blanche's culture and he certainly sympathizes with her as a born victim, but he chooses Stanley ; the materialist triumphs over the romantic. The outcome of the clash is presented however, as grim necessity rather than joyous victory, Williams makes it clear that he considers 'realism' a limited approach to life, but whether we like it or not, we must, finally accept it.²³

Jim proves himself to be a "sadist" oppressor by taking opportunity of Laura's weakness. Laura, on the other hand, tolerates everything with mute submission even when Jim says that he has some other girl Bettie waiting for him, Laura does not protest, but swallows the pain down, proving herself to be a "masochist".

In Summer and Smoke, Alma's "masochism" is pronounced when being snubbed by John Buchanan, again and again, she goes on loving him still lastly he blurts out that he'll be unable to marry her.

In Orpheus Descending too, we get a clear picture of "oppressed-oppressor" relationship. In Act II, as Lady accuses David Cutrere -

"Lady ... But I had your child in my body the summer you quit me, the summer they burned my father in his wine garden, and you you washed your hands clear of any connection with a Dago Bootlegger's daughter and
David : I didn't know

Lady : I wanted death after that, but death don't come when you want it, it comes when you don't want it. I wanted death, then, but I took the next best thing. You sold yourself. I sold myself. You was bought, I was bought. You made whores of us both."

(Orpheus Descending)

"Death-syndrome" is pronounced in almost all the early plays, especially Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, Orpheus Descending.

In Act II, in Orpheus Descending;

6 Lady says, "And I remember asking her one time, Zia Teresa, how does it feel to die ? Only a little girl would ask such a question, ha ha ! Oh, and I remember the answer she said - 'it's a lonely feeling'".?

"Black" plays are not wholly "black". Some "non black" elements are present in these plays as mentioned earlier.

"Search for hope amidst hopelessness" is a "non-black" element. Even if Jim O'Connor leaves never^{to} turn up, Laura and Amanda do not give up all hopes of living, they still live for something "long-delayed but always expected". In A Street Car, Blanche keeps hoping till end that her "messiah" Shep Huntleigh, must emerge from nowhere and save her from the stifling situation in Stanley's world. The airplane 'Fugitive' is the embodiment of all hopes in Camino Real. It is either death at the hands of the street-cleaners or escape via airplane for the traveller of the road of reality, Marguerite, in Black Nine says 'Fugitive' is the only "way to escape from this abominable place". In Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, The Rose Tattoo, Summer and Smoke - in all these plays, a reverting from all hopelessness to "life" is detected.

"The disclosure of moral truth by unveiling a guilty secret" is also a "non-black" streak. In The Rose Tattoo, Serafina's husband's infidelity to her, in Suddenly Last Summer, the truth regarding Sebastian Venable's death, being disclosed by Catherine are the examples of this element. This element has a panacea of "purgation" and "cure" in its bosom. "Mendacity" of course, is an abominable "black" streak.

Moving completely into her world of illusion, Blanche writes a letter to Shep Huntleigh - a letter full of lies. She pretends to be deeply involved in this company of rich friends. At this juncture one can sense a note of hysteria in her world of illusion. Later, on hearing the neighbours quarrel, she comes up with a strange fact that she is compiling a notebook full of quaint words and phrases that she has picked up while living

with them - a sarcasm uncalled-for, and quite spiteful. It is here that Stanley stuns her. He broaches that he has already formed a suspicion that she is not exactly the lady she pretends to be. He has garnered a lot of information about her.

Blanche tells Stella that she herself will leave before Stanley throws her out. This too is a "lie" - she has no intention of leaving for she has become interested in Mitch who seems to her to be the best among Stanley's friends. But Blanche cannot relate to Mitch either, on a realistic plane. Acting her role of Southern belle, she plays coy with him - yet she invites him in the absence of her hosts. She tells him not to switch on the lights and to pretend they were Bohemians in a Paris cafe'. She starts talking in French to him. Her behaviour puzzles Mitch. As Benjamin Nelson puts it:

"She is trapped in a terrifying contradiction. Her need to be special, to adhere to codes, and a tradition no longer valid creates an intense isolation. While simultaneously, her desire not to be alone, to be loved threatens to break through the isolation."²⁴

A Street Car is quite similar to Strindberg's play Miss Julie. Both heroines evade the reality about themselves. Lady Julie is irresistibly attracted to her servant Jean and Strindberg lets her "imagine that she loves him in a higher sense as a means of protecting and excusing herself" (Strindberg's Preface to Lady Julie) (August Strindberg; Preinferno play). It is upto Jean to brutally remind her with examples from her family that her rich fine world is lacking in morals. Like Stanley, he is of the earth, coarse and direct. Lady Julie, like Blanche is a dreamer - vulnerable, and self-deceptive and the end of both these women is equally tragic.

Williams admits that since he was fourteen he was a dedicated writer and that from the beginning his own fear and terror of losing what he most loved gave his writing an atmosphere of hysteria and violence. His first story "The Vengeance of Nitocris," a violent piece written when he was sixteen set the Keynote for most of his

work that followed. "I have a distinct moral attitude ... I think any of my plays examined closely will indicate what I regard as evil. I think I regard *hypocrisy* and *mendacity*, as almost the cardinal sins."²⁵ (italics mine)

By now it should be clear that Tennessee Williams's real subject is the painfulness (not the tragedy) of existence and the fate of human dignity (not of the soul) in the face of suffering. It should also be clear that however neurotic Williams himself may be and however widely neurosis enters into and affects his work, there is little point in looking for the roots of his art, and less in searching out the meaning of any particular play, on one or another categorical Freudian plot of ground.

"Sincere expressions of man's reaching for perfection" and "emphasis on the world of inner consciousness" are expressed through philosophical musings of different characters of the early plays in different contexts. For example, in Sweet Bird of Youth, Chance Wayne's understanding of transience of life and the eternity of "Time" are expressed in the following sayings :

"Chance : It goes tick tick, it's quieter than your heart-beat, but it's slow dynamite, a gradual explosion, blasting the world we lived into burnt-out pieces - Time - who could beat it who could defeat it ever ? May be some saints and heroes, but not Chance Wayne."

(Sweet Bird of Youth, Act III)

In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, "sincerest expression of Man's search for perfection" is heard from Big Mama in Act III . She says :

"Time goes by so fast. Nothin' can outrun if Death commences too early - almost before you're half-acquainted with life - you meet with the other. Oh, you know we just got to love each other, an'stay together all of us just as close we can, specially now that such a 'black' thing has come and moved into this place without invitation".

The idea of perfect freedom of man has been compared with that of a bird in Orpheus Descending by the Lady :

“If one of them (legless) birds ever dies and falls on the ground and you happen to find it, I wish you would show it to me because I think may be you just imagine there is a bird of that kind in existence. Because I don’t think nothing living has ever been that free not even nearly”.

(Orpheus Descending Act I Scene II)

Three questions that torment the Universal Man are stated by Kilroy in Camino Real in Block Three :

Kilroy : Man whenever you see those three brassballs on a street, you don’t have to look a long way for a gipsy. Now let me think. I am faced with three problems. One : I’m *hungry*. Two : I’m *lonely*. Three : I’m in a *place where I don’t know what it is* or how I got there! (italics mine) (Camino Real)

Writing on the necessity of dramatic dialogue Allardyce Nicoll says : “Action is to drama what his body is to man, in its language resides the drama’s soul. A playwright essentially is, or should be an artist in words”.²⁶ In the preface to Cat on a Hot Tin Roof Williams declared that, “a morbid shyness” prevented him from communicating to the people, at large. So while he had to reveal the “troubled conscience of his characters”, mere conversation proved futile. Hence, his dialogue was laden with oral suggestiveness.

In The Glass Menagerie, Amanda’s reverie in which she combined the past, present and future, in a meaningful unity marked, perhaps, the landmark of poetic dialogue, “Well, in the South we had so many servants, gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living, gone completely”. The dialogue of Blanche in A Street Car Named Desire approximated to this condition. After the rape-scene Blanche’s disillusionment was climactic :

“Stella : Sit down and -

Blanche : I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. You know what I shall be of ?” (A Street Car Named Desire)

Of course, it is the language of incantation cradled in the severity of poetic discipline. As Shaw's Candida is rich in poetic dialogue, Williams's too could stake a claim to that, especially for his early plays. In Camino Real, while Jacques and Marguerite talked of futility of love, the dialogue touched the zenith of poetry :

“ Jacques : Why does disappointment make people unkind to each other ?

Marguerite : Each of us is very much alone

Jacques : Only if we distrust each other

Marguerite : We have to distrust each other.

It is our only defence against betrayal.” (Camino Real, Block Ten)

Talking on the poetic dialogue of Williams's early plays, Bentley commented, “That Tennessee Williams stands head and shoulders above Haines, Miller - you would notice, I think if you dropped in on A Street Car Named Desire, at any time, during the evening for so much as five minutes. You should be struck by the far greater liveliness of the dialogue, a liveliness quite different from the machine-made slickness of the play doctors, a liveliness that the American Theatre has heard from only two or three playwrights. It is a dialogue caught from actual life and then submitted to only the gentlest treatment at the hands of the playwrights. In such a dialogue, as Odets showed us ten years ago - some approach to American life is possible. Life is no longer encased in wisecracks. Its subtle and changing contours are suggested by the melody and rhythm and passion of active speech.”²⁷

“Black” plays are not altogether “black” they have “white” streaks in them. The early plays reveal a Williams who thinks of man and is out to point out the cancerous corruption, that eats the world away, Tennessee Williams tries to give a solution to each “black” problem with a “non-black” antidote.

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Chapter III

CHAPTER III

THE SEA CHANGE : AN INDEPTH PROBE

“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.....Snatching the eternal out of the
 desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence. As far as we know,
 as far as there exists any kind of empiric evidence, there is no way to beat the game of
being against non-being, in which *non-being* is the predestined victor on realistic
 levels.” (italics mine)

- “The Timeless World of a Play” by Tennessee

Williams. (New York Times, January 14, 1951).

Williams’s view of life had undergone a radical change at the juncture of the late fifties and the early sixties. In fact, in the Newsweek interview he declared that “... from now on my plays will be different. I’ll still deal with life and reality of course - and sometimes caustically, perhaps. But, I won’t be pointing out the bestiality in life. I’m through with what have been called my ‘Black’ plays.

Bestiality still exists, but I don’t want to write about it anymore. I want to

pass the rest of my life believing in other things. For years, I was too preoccupied with the destructive impulses. From now on I want to be concerned with the kinder aspects of life. May be these 'Non-Black' plays won't be all white, but I hope to cast a kinder shadow, with more concentration on the quieter elements of existence."¹ The previous chapter (Chapter II) had shown what exactly the coinage "Black" meant to the playwright. This chapter, is a study of the sudden and the obvious change in outlook of the dramatist.

Long before Tennessee Williams, the poets like John Donne, Mallarmé; playwrights like Arthur Miller, (a contemporary playwright); Baudelaire, the 'idolator', Genet, Kafka, Sartre' and novelists like Faulkner, Norman Mailer perceived mundane existence as "black". They had emphasized it and their view had been accepted unanimously by few. To them, the manifestation of the "Black" is nothing but an *Oasis of horror* in a *desert of ennui*. Perhaps, Williams was aware of the wails resounding the confines of Baudelaire's condemned soul -

"Any where , Any where, As long as it be out of the world ,

But where to 'Set Sail'?"

("Voyage" Baudelaire).

Hence, a "come back attitude" towards the earth, an affirmative response to the gravitational pull of life on earth, an existence in the world.

So far as Mallarmé' is concerned, his early poems deviate considerably from the later and mature ones. In the early poems, his "love for life" is pronounced, while in the later ones a sharp negative view of life can be discerned. Baudelaire's quest for a new self was a harsh declaration of a tormented soul -

"To drive into the gulf, Hell or Heaven

What matter ?

Into the unknown in search of the New." ("Voyage")

Here we are sure that Baudelaire is not pining for the “Transcendental Truth”, but, the truth that might have laid embedded in the quagmire of day-to-day existence. In Mallarmé, the disinterestedness in the “here” and “now” of reality, comes much later. The poet in his early days, felt a “philia” towards the azure sky. But the poet of “Azure” is hardly traceable in the poet of “Faun’s reverie”. There the dreams are splintered and they disappear in the thin air like bubbles that might have never existed. Jacques Maritain in his “Creative intuition in Art and Poetry” coins Mallarmé’s poetry as “an elaboration of pure artefact mirroring only the void”. From plenitude to nullity, from existence to void - that was the ken of Mallarmé’.

Even Arthur Miller was not beyond the influence of the stimulus of “change in attitude”. “The shift of focus in Miller’s later plays of the Sixties from the earlier ones of the forties and the fifties, from the societal oppression and individual failure to individual[^]culpability and responsibility, is an expression of the inward orientation in human concern that characterizes much of the intellectual mood of the sixties in America.”² In Williams, the change was for the better from the “Black” to the “Non-Black”, of course, according to the observation of the dramatist himself. However, the plays could not be totally shorn of the “Black” elements. The change in attitude in the dramatist had an ample of reasons behind it. Both personal and theatrical causes demanded of him a different stance towards life and work. Just at the juncture of the sixties, an extensive change had been noticed in almost all spheres of American life. “The sixties becomes a period of self-examination in every sphere of life in America ... The youth embraces everything from sexism to mysticism that appears to oppose the established set of values. Impatient to assert the essential vitality and sense of activism, the average American, more specifically the youth, violently protests against the prolonged and unsuccessful war in Vietnam.”³ Even the sixties watched a new consciousness, on the part of women, who claimed equality with men in every walk of life. So the time, when Williams had undergone a drastic change in mental plane, had coincidental impact upon the extensive

change the society had experienced. Naturally, it had some relevance to the American social ethos which kept on changing and getting remoulded anew. It might be an indirect cause.

The direct causes which affected Williams were mainly as follows :

(a) The eminent director, Elia Kazan, who brought Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and some other plays alive on the stage, broke with him and it was a shock of his life. "The relationship between Williams and Kazan was based on a mutual affection, trust and admiration that supported their freedom to experiment artistically. It also contained destructive elements that strained the relationship as time went on and resulted in its eventual dissolution. Williams conceived of Kazan as an *Apollonian consciousness* who could bring order to the *Dionysian chaos* of his artistic genius. He relied on his director to advise him about the structure of his plays and he trusted Kazan to uphold his artistic values throughout the pragmatic with producers, theatre-owners, agents and lawyers. Over the years, Williams also developed an emotional dependence on Kazan that made him increasingly reliant on his direction for approval and support".⁴ When this seemingly indissoluble collaboration came to an abrupt close it hurt Williams deeply. A violent unrest shook him from within. A nostalgic pining for Kazan's friendship is evident from an interview "Williams on Williams" in 1962 :

"Interviewer : Do you feel any freedom being away from Kazan ?

Williams: No, No, No, I don't. One of the most regrettable things in my life is that, I don't think that Kazan and I'll ever work again together and it wasn't my choice. It was his. I think that he is the most brilliant director we have.

Interviewer : Then there is a complete break between you and Kazan ?

Williams : Well, there was certainly on my part at least - there was certainly, no change in my friendship for him, and, I think probably he still likes me but our liking is ambivalent you know".⁵

Elia Kazan's direction was always Williams's favourite. Even in a later interview he had opined that, he had full faith in Kazan's direction making all his plays throbbing with life. But, the sad rift in the relationship was a great loss to the playwright.

Kazan, in the beginning of his relationship with Williams preferred to maintain the astute restraint regarding Williams's creative pursuit. In course of time, he felt a need to reflect on the plays and "fought for control over the process of artistic collaboration in all of his directing works - both plays and films" (Brenda Murphy). However, while directing Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Sweet Bird of Youth Kazan could not hold himself back from expressing his own ideas and opinions. By 1960, the fragile dynamic of their collaborative relationship had become destructive rather than productive.

In a book extract, captioned "Purple Moonlight" by Balwant Gargi, the dissension of Williams with Elia Kazan has been clearly stated. Here, the director Elia Kazan has something to relate to the posterity regarding their questionable "walk-out" on each other. At least, the chance of getting fobbed off with facile remarks is much less here. While interviewed by Balwant Gargi, "Why have you stopped directing Tennessee Williams's plays"?, EliaKazan's pat retort was, "Well, Tennessee is a talented playwright, I love his writings full of tenderness and passion ... beautiful images we've often differed in the structure of a scene. We had a thundering argument over the end-scene of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. I insisted on my version. The play is published with two versions of the last act, offering the reader a choice. May be his third act is good literature, but mine is good theatre. Now, I'm not interested in Broadway anymore. Good-bye, commercial theatre"❦

Admittedly enough, Elia Kazan too had acrid experiences to refer to, so far as directing theatres. in Broadway was concerned. His forking of "good literature" and "good theatre" was of course, impregnated with meaning. So, the uproar regarding Williams-Kazan relationship was not to be pooh-poohed outright. It had much impact on the temperament of the playwright as well as the director. Balwant Gargi, in a relevant

portion of his book mentions -

“I contacted Miss Ross Glider, grandmother of the American theatre who I had met during her visits to India... A squat spinster in her eighties, she had a crystal - clear mind and resonant voice, ‘Tennessee used to come here and sit in that chair’, she reminisced - ‘like a school boy - a gifted writer always tortured by success and failure.’”⁷ Thus, the observations of Miss Glider reveals Tennessee Williams as reacting in maximum to the castigation and applause of the theatre frequenters, critics and comments of the stalwarts of thespian world.

(b) The death of his confidant and nearest friend Frank Merlo had a great effect on Williams’s creative career. Before the demise of Merlo, he had undergone emotional stress and strain. The last heart-rending appeal to Williams, “Are you going to leave me without shaking hands? After fourteen years together”⁸ was a proof of Merlo’s love for Williams. The demise of Frank Merlo owing to lung cancer had a great impact upon Williams’s mind.

In a “Playboy” interview Williams when asked whether his decline began with Frank Merlo’s death, retorted - “That wasn’t the beginning, no. My professional decline began after Iguana”.⁹ Again, in emoir she expressed his feelings vividly :

“As long as Frank was well, I was happy. He had a gift for creating a life and when he ceased to be alive, I couldn’t create a life for myself. So, I went into a seven-year depression”.¹⁰

Thus, Frank Merlo’s sudden death affected Williams’s personal as well as professional sphere. Williams found a trustworthy friend in Frank Merlo. Of course, they often had serious altercations between them. Before Frank’s death, Williams did not hesitate to draw a curtain upon their long-existing relationship and left off with a painter-friend deserting Merlo. Being left in the lurch, Merlo too, took revenge upon Williams by leaving the world for good and slumping Williams in a deep, depressive lull.

(c) The death of Diana Barrymore, an actress - friend of Williams had a great impact on Williams. Her death was quite mysterious. She was a great admirer of Williams's plays. She had fallen in love with the playwright. Tennessee Williams, too, had great love for her. Gilbert Maxwell analysed the relationship trenchantly : - "Any number of people have asked me about the relationship of Diana and Tennessee. They were often together, and once when the gossip columns were filled with conjectures regarding marriage, Audrey Wood took the whole thing seriously enough to remark her client, 'If you don't watch out, boy, I'm going to be flower girl at your wedding'. There is no doubt Diana had convinced herself that she cherished an unending love for Tennessee, but I always felt, as I have suggested before, that she had unconsciously confused the playwright with the man in forming this dogged attachment.'"¹¹

Of course, the dichotomy between the "Man" and the "Playwright" was the root-cause of Williams's psychological aberrations. After dismissing Diana Barrymore's selection for Sweet Bird of Youth Williams felt no qualms of conscience, though after her unnatural death, he declared :-

"I'm pretty sure, that, whether she had played in Sweet Bird or not, sooner or later Diana would have done the same thing,.... I was deeply disturbed by what happened."¹²

But, the abnormal demise left him with a sense of emotional void. Deeply saddened by her death, Williams went to Key West to concentrate upon Period of Adjustment. But, the severe mental laceration could not be healed till death.

(d) Further, the disparaging attacks of the critics had adversely affected Williams's creative progress. The critics were sceptical about the artistic decline of Williams after the sixties. The characters like Amanda Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie, Blanche du Bois of A Street car Named Desire, Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke, Val Xavier of Orpheus Descending cannot have the delineation of characters of equal

merit in the persons portrayed in The Period of Adjustment, A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur. However, the critics were more harsh about Williams's sterility and their adverse remarks and comments dampened the spirit of Williams.

In an interview Williams blantly admits : "As a matter of fact, I never got a good review after 1961. Reviews can be devastating to me. A barrage of bad reviews contributed enormously to my demoralization. The plays weren't that bad - Slapstick Tragedy and Kingdom of Earth and In the Bar of Tokyo Hotel and The Seven Descents of Myrtle and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore".¹³ S. Alan Chesler enumerates some feasible reasons behind Williams's decline in creative powers. He has divided his explanations into four major categories :

"1. Williams has been unable to separate his life from his writing during this period, making it impossible for him to achieve the necessary aesthetic distance from his work.... It also includes the mere trenchant claim that Williams is no longer able to convert his private feelings into universal forms that could be recognized and responded to by an audience.

2. Williams has been unable to create new characters and themes and has done little but rehash old work.

3. Williams has been unable, during this period, to create characters who are believable and sympathetic. He is also charged with creating characters that are simply not interesting.

4. Williams has lost his ability to control his medium, to put together workable, craftsman-like dramas...He no longer creates protagonists and antagonists worthy of combatting each other, his plots do not move effectively towards climaxes, nor do they sustain significant suspense."¹⁴

However, the negative barb had a positive facet too. Esther Merle Jackson in later decades, successfully discovered the period to be "a stage in the unceasing

progression of a poetic consciousness".¹⁵

The artist, however, enjoyed a greater emotional calm in this period. In a conversation of Don Ross with Williams in 1958, it has been understood that all the tensions of past years have relieved him of their inextricable maze, "If I am no longer disturbed myself, I will deal less with disturbed people and with violent material. I don't regret having concerned myself with such people, because I think that most of us are disturbed. But I think I have pretty well explored that aspect of life and that I may be repeating myself as a writer. It would be good if I could write with serenity".¹⁶ Eventually, the plays he wrote in this period, are generally held to be the fruits of "a period of gloom". These were actually the productions of his "calm" years.

The plays written in "serene mind" deal with people who are less disturbed, less violent. Perhaps, this is a reason why the critics fail to find in the late plays that *Tennessee Williams* they are generally familiar with. Critics cannot detach Williams from "Violence" and "Sex" and herein lies the crux of their dissatisfaction with the Williams of the late plays.

Esther Merle Jackson, while stating her views on the change in attitude of the playwright in the sixties comments : "It can be said that the plays of the late sixties and seventies represent yet another stage in the evolution of the art of Tennessee Williams. Changes in form and content which these later works display, appear to be expressive of alterations in the playwright's vision, alterations which have their origin not only in the artist's consciousness, but also in the world which he observes."¹⁷

Again, in an interview in 1960, (Newsweek June 27, 1960), Williams had declared that he would produce "Non-Black" plays which dealt with "quieter elements of existence". "But, Williams's work in the 1960s began with the highly deceptive Period of Adjustment (1960) which many critics dismissed as 'The Broadway marital comedy, it pretended to be'."¹⁸ With Period of Adjustment some theatre critics detected an

inclination of Williams towards light comedy.

The change in attitude in Williams has been differently interpreted by Ronald Gordon Perrier of University of Minnesota (1970) in his doctoral dissertation : "A study of the dramatic works of Tennessee Williams from 1963 to 1971". While commenting on the characters created by Williams in his post-'60 plays, Perrier asserts "Many of the characters in the plays written after 1963 are variations of earlier character types, but the emergence of the toughened artist figure is a new direction. The sensitive characters tend to have grown talons to withstand the brutal primitive forces of an unsympathetic world....."

Thematically, Tennessee Williams has continued to develop his familiar civilized versus primitive dichotomy. In the plays before 1960, Williams seemed to imply that there was a hope that man might really be on the road to civilization, to sensitivity, compassion. In the plays of the 1960s, however, there seems to be a growing skepticism of such an idealistic point of view."¹⁹ Sometimes it seems to us that Williams has suddenly become optimistic about the world, the relationship, the milieu - both social and theatrical. In an interview with Lothar Schmidt - Mühlich in 1975, he casts a longing look behind and accounts for the change in his attitude : "I believe that society can identify again with my current problems". He explains now more clearly what has actually changed. "The relationship of people to each other, the need to escape from loneliness, the problem in all its aspects - all that of course has its social and political dimensions. These relationships which I earlier did not see in this way, I now portray in my new plays". For him "a person must simply continue. For me, only that is realistic".²⁰

The bleak period, when he had lost Frank Merlo, when his oldest and closest friend Professor Oliver Evans yielded to recurring illness, when theatre-goers turned a nonchalant eye to the playwright he wrote in the Foreword of his Memoirs (P. XVII) :

“There is a duality in my attitude toward an audience now. Of course, I want their approval, I want their understanding and their empathy They seem to be conditioned to a kind of theatre which is quite different from the kind I wish to practice - I am doing a different thing which is altogether my own, not influenced at all by other playwrights at home or abroad or by other schools of theatre”... (Memiors, P-203)

But, a conflicting emotion caught him in its grip. The playwright wailed - „“Almost immediately after Merlo’s death, I flew down to Key West, where I had dispatched the poet Angel months before. But Angel was unable to help me now and it is hard to think of a single person who could. Probably, I should have been hospitalized for a few months, willingly or not. It is strange how alone you are at time of great personal crisis.”²¹

Again, he reverted to psychoanalyst Lawrence Kubie’s misguiding analysis. He was in a gloom of remorse- “He taught me much about my true nature but he offered me no solution except to break with Merlo, a thing that was quite obviously untenable as a consideration, my life being built around him”.²² However, he hardly had any reason behind the crumbling sensation in the sixties when his search for a new self seemed to be in vain. He yielded to the devouring clasps of emotion.

“Going to pieces in ‘the sixties’ my ‘stoned age’, suggests to me a slow-motion photo of a building being demolished by a dynamite, it occurred in protracted stages, but the protraction gave it no comfort - I’m certainly not at all eloquent upon the difficult subject of my collapse ‘in the sixties’.”²³

Despite all the causes behind the precarious slump of Williams in the sixties, it would be wise to study the mysterious personality of the playwright. The dejected and battered playwright, flogged severely in the hands of life had no hope to turn back. Again, when he actually thought of veering the style of his writing, he looked around him, and found to his dismay, that all his good and supportive companions were either dead or had left him for good. The critics too, were ready to disparage him and pin him down to

the cruel ground.

In this darkest hour, what can we expect of a playwright who enjoyed the limelight since fifteen years? His reaction was accountable, if not wholly laudable. Though it might not seem germane to the tune of the analysis, we can take the playwright's mind to be a "psychological specimen".

He, no doubt, had become a neurotic personality by the sixties with hopes being smashed to smithereens, with relations ending in bitterness, with applause of previous days thinning down to nullity. Love; attachment to favourites and basking at the helm of wide acceptance by the critics as well as the audience- are three requisites Williams might need to prop up the dwindling figure he had been transformed into!

Dr. Karen Horney in his Neurotic Personality of Our Time (1966) had accounted for the behaviour of a neurotic :

"There are in our culture, four principal ways in which a person tries to protect himself against the basic anxiety : affection, submissiveness, power, withdrawal.

First, *securing affection* in any form may serve as a powerful protection against anxiety. Second, when the attitude of compliance is not attached to any institution or person it takes the more generalized form of compliance with the potential wishes of all persons and avoidance of everything that might arouse resentment. The *submissive attitude* may also serve the purpose of securing reassurance by affection.... A third attempt at protection against the basic anxiety is through *power* - trying to achieve security by gaining factual power or success, or possession, or admiration or intellectual superiority. The fourth means of protection is *withdrawal*. The preceding groups of protective devices have in common a willingness to contend with the world to cope with it, in one way or another".²⁴ (italics mine)

Almost all the four characteristics are evident from different interviews and confessions of Williams. Naturally, he became neurotic and he was in dire need of

affection and togetherness. It might be a valid reason for the contentment of the artist through the characters whom he produced to enjoy an artistic affinity through detachment. He, perhaps, wanted to enjoy this crucial period through a new device- "artistic compromise". He portrayed characters to fulfill his unattainable dreams, wishes and desires. However, the progress in artistic revelation is the credit the playwright might claim.

The sad demise of Cornelius Coffin Williams in 1957 in the hotel-room of Knoxville had cast a pall of gloom on Williams. Though, apparently he had expressed hatred towards his father, he could not suppress the onslaught of grief he had undergone. Perhaps, the perception of grief was more than he himself could discern. Williams often went down the memory lane; only to come up with a remembrance. Of a day when his father went to the mental asylum to see his sister, Rose. "I can never forget one time when he went with me to see my sister in the state asylum. He bore up pretty well till we'd left her. Then, in the hall, he dropped his face in his hands and tried to control himself but he could not".²⁵

The tenderness of his father's heart was never felt by Williams before that day. He felt inwardly moved by his father's demeanour. It might have affected him to change his outlook towards "Man", from *negative* to *positive* aspects of life, from *destructive impulses* to the *quieter elements of existence* from *Black to Non-Black*. (italics mine) His yearning for togetherness got real articulation in the plays written after 1960. Hence, he chose the idiom "Non-Black". "It is evident that his father's passing affected Tenn far more than he could know in 1957. He has since come to feel not only sympathy and compassion for C.C. but a nostalgic regret that he and this lonely man were never able to communicate except in a kind of yearning, mutely embarrassed discomfort in each other's presence - both the Older Man and the Younger being 'condemned to solitary confinement within the prisons of their own lonely skins'."²⁶

Williams's change in attitude in the sixties corresponds to Arthur Miller's

lull in achievement in the sphere of drama. Like Williams, Arthur Miller had been perturbed by personal causes and unlike Williams, Miller had an ample of political and aesthetic reasons behind his change in attitude towards "drama" in the sixties, and his dour reticence from 1957 to 1963. Among personal reasons, the deplorable self-destruction of his wife Marilyn Monroe was the most plausible one. He received a great shock on her committing suicide. It dawned upon him that innocence was nothing but a long-cherished illusion.

The political causes centred round two major events - the refusal of international passport to Arthur Miller in 1954 and his forced appearance in front of the House Committee on Un-American activities on 26th January, 1956. Naturally, he felt himself to have lost everything. Most of his allies betrayed him and he felt utterly alone. Subsequently, his voice trailed off to silence for six years (1957-63).

The aesthetic causes could not be brushed aside. He became sceptic towards the Aristotelian standards of tragedy - the difference between social drama and tragedy. His concept of "social drama" had undergone a drastic change and he concentrated upon "psychological drama" in the sixties. "The first problem", he wrote, "is to discover our own relationship to evil, its reflection of ourselves".²⁷ Thus, the responsibility of world's evil is being shared by "Everyman" as Miller came to understand in the sixties. Thus, the sixties was the era of change and alterations, of quest for a meaning of art-form and finding it, of search for a new self which seems to be an end in itself. But, the search never ends, the perfection seems to be a far-cry to have ever been responded to.

Williams's change in the sixties must be due to a striving to establish a nexus between his "being-in-itself" and the "being-for-itself". Having all intimate relationships snapped, getting negative critical response, Williams felt dejected and desperate. The "inert-being complete and fixed" remained cocooned in its incommunicable exterior. "Being-for-itself" is characterised by lack of determinate structure by openness towards the future and by potency. As man realizes that his existence is open to "unpredictable future", the emptiness of universe makes him shudder from within. So,

he tries to fill up the “emptiness” with his chosen actions. He remains in permanent flux and is “condemned to be free”.²⁸ Thus, Williams was in permanent flux, The quest for self showing what one must be or should strive to become.

In the sixties, the change in outlook that held Williams in its sway, and that made him produce plays which received harsh criticism from detractors and cold response from the audience, had its roots in the “modern intellectual oscillation” between the two extremes of “self-absorption” and “self-abandonment”. Ibsen had experienced the pull of both and like Whitman he managed to avoid alike the fear of self and the fear of history and society that reinforces the natural egoism of the aesthete.

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Chapter IV

CHAPTER IV

QUEM QUERITIS :AN EVALUATION OF “NON-BLACK PLAYS”

“It’s strange how many people suffer from it,

I don’t only mean fear of closed spaces and fear of

heights, but fear of death and what’s worse, fear of life...

I’ve sometimes thought it was the most besetting humour of
man, and I asked myself at one time if it was due to some deep

animal instinct that man has inherited from that primeval

something that first felt the thrill of life.”

(The Razor’s Edge, William Somerset Maugham)

Tennessee Williams’s “Non-Black” plays centre round ^{the} “quieter elements of existence”. The moot-point of this chapter is to identify the “quieter elements”. All “Non-Black” plays (i.e. the plays written after 1960), may not conform to all the norms laid down for them. Even, the “Non-Black” plays display presence of the “Black” elements, i.e. the “destructive elements” (according to the playwright’s coinage) in them. Of course, Williams has clearly emphasized : “all non-black plays may not be all white”, and therein lies the crux of the coinage.

Since the plays are labelled as “Black” and “Non-Black”, a notion of dichotomy emerges ; it can be either Manichaeian or Apollonian-Dionysian or Puritan-Bohemian. The latter two are simply the dichotomies mentioned in tandem, so it is best to call it Manichaeian. What exactly Manichaeian Dichotomy is? As stated in “Encyclopaedia of Philosophy” Vol. V of Paul Edwards, “The chief characteristic of Mani’s system is a consistent dualism which rejects any possibility of tracing the Origins of good and evil to one and the same source. Evil stands as a completely independent principle against good and redemption from the power of Evil is to be achieved by recognizing this dualism and following the appropriate rules of life... The present world and man in particular, presents a mixture of Good and Evil, the result of a breach of the original limits by the powers of Evil. The whole purpose of the founding of the universe was to separate the two principles and restore the original state of affairs rendering Evil forever harmless and preventing any future repetition of intermingling”.¹

“The Non-Black plays not being all white” try to seek support from Mani again : “The Manichaeian myth begins with the two primal principles of Light and Darkness, each dwelling in its own realm, coeternal but independent. Perception of the Light excites envy greed and hate in Darkness and provokes it to attack the Light. In response the Father of Greatness calls forth the Primal Man, who arms himself with five powers and descends to battle with the Darkness. He is defeated however, and the five powers of Darkness devour a part of his light and thus bring the mixture into being.”² Hence, “Black” elements cannot altogether be done away with in the “Non-Black” plays and vice-versa.

Though Manichaeian principle is dualistic and initially it disregards “any possibility of tracing the origins of good and evil to one and the same source”, the co-existence of “good” and “evil” in the “Man” if it is considered to be a source can hardly be denied. It might seek refuge to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus for support. He accounted for the fact of harnessing the pair of opposites together, and made them owe their origin to the same source :

“Rejecting a dualistic approach, he formulated the idea that any pair of opposites formed a unity, that the tension between warring contraries is, as it were, the main spring of the Universe and that wisdom is the understanding of this unity. He wrote, ‘that which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony’.”³

“Non-Black” plays i.e. the plays which had been composed after 1960 bore the stamp of “self-abandonment”. But his early plays contained a sense of “self-absorption” where the artist limited himself to what he had experienced. Perhaps, that was at the same time a cause of his artistic decline as well as the reason for conducting his life to realize his self.

Now, what according to Williams are the “quieter elements of existence” or “Non-Black” traits ? Robert Frost in For Once Then Something, strives at a definition of “Non-Black”,

“I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,

Through the picture, a something,

White uncertain, something more of the depths -

And then I lost it....

..... What was that Whiteness ?

Truth ? A pebble of quartz?”⁴

The “Non-Black” elements as discerned from the plays of Williams are mainly -“joy”, “search for hope”, “optimistic outlook”, “mutual trust in human relationships”, “sincere expression for man’s reaching towards perfection”, “endurance”, “come back attitude to life” or “acceptance of life”, “redemption through love and compassion”. - almost all meaningful and positive aspects of life to be lived are identified

as “Non-Black” traits. Though the late plays of Williams hardly display special “positive” characteristic features on the very first reading, repeated reading and close analysis of the plays make us not to lose sight of the “Non-Black” values that underlie the veneer of “Black” stigmata, the seeming ambience of confusion, uncertainty, and, nonsensical void.

The birth of “paradox” in Williams finds its seed embedded in the emergence of the New South. “Both the old and the new culture abounded in sharp contrasts and logical paradoxes There were remnants of European culture framed in intolerant Americanism. There were romance, beauty, glamour, gaiety, comedy, gentleness and there were sordidness, ugliness, dullness, sorrow, tragedy, cruelty. There were wealth, culture, education, generosity, chivalry, manners, courage, nobility and there were poverty, crudeness, ignorance, narrowness, brutality, cowardice, depravity. The South was American and un-American, righteous and wicked, Christian and Barbaric. It was a South getting better, a South getting worse. It was strong and it was weak, it was white and it was black, it was rich and it was poor.”⁵ So it was nothing astounding that Williams felt an urge to deflect from “Black” to “Non-Black” plays. It was perfectly in accordance with the tune of the era.

The plays which have been included for analyses in this chapter are : Period of Adjustment(1960), The Night of the Iguana (1961), The Milk Train Doesn't stop Here Anymore (1963), Kingdom of Earth (1968), The Two Character Play (1975), A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1979), and some plays from Dragon Country (1970).

“Joy” is a streak which is more conspicuous in the “Non-Black” or late plays than the early plays. Some critics hold the view that Tennessee Williams’s late plays are melodramatic or blasted ; the “Non-Black” elements once traced in the late plays add to them the prestige of well-written plays. “These later plays are the most difficult that Williams has written, but they are also, in many ways, the most rewarding. For in these plays he has succeeded in plunging deep into his own existence so that he could display to us areas of common experience that are usually deeply hidden and

inaccessible”.⁶ Of course, from the point of theatricalism, it is true that the late plays of Williams have inclination towards the absurd drama, in modicum. “Joy” is a mental plight which is quite rare in everyday existence. The famous romantic poet John Keats expresses the elusiveness of “Joy” in his “Ode on Melancholy”:

“She dwells with Beauty - Beauty that must die,

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips Bidding adieux”...⁷

The evanescence of “Joy” finds a full expression in Tennessee Williams’s plays. Even then, the playwright has striven to catch it by its forelock and has made it to linger, at least for sometime, in the late plays.

In Period of Adjustment, “mirth” has a significant role to play along with light comic touches, in different places in snatches. Especially when the dubiousness of the pair of couples is dispelled gradually, the joyousness of the play begins to assert in and pervade throughout the play. While both Ralph Bates and Isabel are seen cheering each other up, a new dimension of the play is brought to the fore. Both of them are waiting eagerly for their spouses - Ralph is looking for Dorothea’s arrival, who has left him in anger; Isabel waits for George who has gone away keeping her in Ralph’s house. A conversation between them presents two persons feeling for each other when they are in almost the same deplorable plight. Perhaps, that is the “joy of living” as manifested in the following extract :

“ Isabel : You are very kind, Mister Bates. I’m sure you were more understanding with your wife when you were going through this ...

Ralph : Period of adjustment? Yeah. That’s all it is, it’s just a little - period of adjustment....

Ralph : Little Bit, Little Bit - You had a sleepless night in that motel - why don’t

you put in a little sack time now. You need it, honey. Take Dotty's bed in there and think about nothing till morning.

Isabel : You mean you know, now, that George is not coming back ?

Ralph : No I mean that Dotty's not coming back.

Isabel : But, Mister Bates, if your wife does come back here I would'nt want her to find a stranger in your bed-room.

Ralph : Honey, finding a stranger in a bedroom is far from being the biggest surprise of a lifetime. So you go on in there and lock the door.

Isabel : Thank you, Mister Bates" (Act I, Period Adjustment).

As Period of Adjustment trundles on to the concluding part, the "real joy" makes the conversation among the characters - Ralph, George, Isabel and Dorothea appear lambent. The morass of misunderstanding dispels and they can enjoy living on this earth and can trust each other. Obviously, they find meaning of existence through love and compassion. Both the couple - Ralph and Dorothea, Isabel and George complement each other in the span of existence. They get things "ironed out between them" (Act III) because "they need each other".(Act III)

"'Adjustment' is different from any of my other plays. A little more upbeat, I'd say, and I didn't write it for 'big name' players. I hope that you will think there is considerable humor in it. But in any case, I'm happy to say that both married couples stay married at the end. I'm through with what have been called my 'Black' plays. *May be analysis has helped me to get them out of my system*"⁸

In The Night of the Iguana, the tinge of sadness has been superseded by the element "joy". Hannah Jelkes, who strives to add an iota of meaning to the life, otherwise sterile, becomes keen on befriending her grand father, Nonno, who is absolutely alone. She tries to comfort her grandfather. On the contrary, Maxine Faulk is vibrant with

malicious wit, mirth and is aware of the ways of making the best of life. The play does not remain confined to the superfluous traits like “joy”, “love of life” but reaches to a further extent, the “come back attitude to life” wherein lies the playwright’s success as a “Non-Black” dramatist. Reverend Shannon could not turn a blind eye towards life and he responded to the call of life. Man’s eternal quest for perfection too finds expression in Shannon and Grandpa Nonno (Hannah Jelkes’s grandfather). Besides, a “search for hope” and “longing for togetherness” are traits that sustain the play. “Although Shannon experiences a fall from an ironically elevated self-image, he neither withdraws into insanity because of it nor suffers violent retribution for his past crimes or inherent corruption. Instead he survives and is reformed if not transformed by the ministrations of Hannah, who also represents a new departure in Williams’s characterization for she is elevated to a heroic stature and remains undefiled - a model of limitless compassion, selfless devotion and stoical courage in the face of the world’s suffering and her own loneliness and despair.”⁹

“Acceptance of life” is a common element which all the characters in the play share. According to Robert Heilman, in The Ways of the World : Comedy and Society just such an attitude of “acceptance” constitutes hallmark of comic style: “the acceptance of world”. Heilman defines¹⁰ “acceptance” as “a perception of the world as a liveable middle ground that is not celestial but is not infernal either, it is an accommodation to actuality”. Thus, the protagonists of these plays (late plays) are neither emotionally transfixed by memories of the past nor violently destroyed by conflicting desires, instead they survive, by making the necessary adjustments to a life which cannot level the heights of their expectation. Their comic strength lies in “being unillusioned without becoming disillusioned.”¹⁰ It cannot be wholly in tune with the remark that “Williams has so altered the fundamental patterns in these plays that what is perceived as an irrevocable loss in the plays of his predominantly tragic mode is instead accepted in the comic spirit of compromise, albeit often a ‘dark’ comedy marked by the acceptance (or over-acceptance) of the minimal, the expedient, the corrupt or the ‘second best’. The comic spirit of survival

that remains a secondary motif or foil in the plays of Williams's predominantly tragic mode is fully developed in these plays as a viable alternative to *romantic despair* and *existential angst*."¹¹ (italics mine)

Reverend Shannon's ruptured trust in human beings and his surroundings is complemented by Hannah Jelkes's accentuation of "mutual trust". Hannah prescribes reaching out to people as the only solution to Shannon's problem of mistrust. The tête-à-tête between Hannah Jelkes and Reverend Shannon is a cogent example that can be put up in its favour -

“ Shannon : What is my problem, Miss. Jelkes ?

Hannah : The oldest one in the world - the need to believe in something or in someone - almost anyone, - almost anything something.

Shannon : Your voice sounds hopeless about it.

Hannah : No, I'm not hopeless about it. In fact, I've discovered something to believe in.

Shannon : Something like God ?

Hannah : No.

Shannon : What ?

Hannah : Broken gates between people so they can reach each other A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other ?” (Act III The Night of the Iguana.)

Later, in this act, Hannah strives to add more importance to see God in the faces of “suffering humanity” as she is “unsure” about the presence of God. But it has been refuted by critics like Delma Eugene Presley, who says in her famous essay The Search for Hope in the plays of Tennessee Williams that, “Hannah's point is that the

problem of belief will more or less take care of itself if Shannon will try to live in community with someone. But Shannon's problem is not isolation, but belief or lack of it. Hannah insists that he deals with the question of disbelief with the answer of human isolation ... community. The logic is reminiscent of that used by Catharine in Suddenly Last Summer. She raises the question about Sebastian's daemonic vision of God and then answers it with a simplistic statement about the importance of caring for other people."¹²

In The Night of the Iguana, Williams puts forward a feeble solution to the fundamental problem of "death". All the characters are aware of the ultimate reality - "demise". But, the central characters round which the play pivots, keep taciturn about any solution, perhaps they cannot reach it. Hannah's old grandfather - poet Nonno holds up the mirror to the Truth - "Courage"; even when "death" tolls its parting knell :

" O Courage! Could you not as well

Select a second place to dwell

Not only in that golden tree

But in the frightened heart of me?" (Act III The Night of the Iguana)

In the same poem, that is the last poem, grandfather Nonno, puts too many irons in the fire - he cries against the clutch of despair, he lends his voice to the cause of combatting "corrupting love" :

"How calmly does the orange branch

Observe the sky begin to blanch

Without a cry, without a prayer

With no betrayal of despair." (Act III The Night of the Iguana)

So, in The Night of the Iguana, the presence of the non-black elements

like “search for hope”, “mutual trust in human relationship” is frequently felt. As for Shannon, “going back to church” might be beating a retreat to the cold ecclesiastical routine negating the demands of “life”. It is Maxine who shoves him to the “normal” life which he desires :

“Maxine : Your socks are shot. Fred’s socks would
fit you too, Shannon. [she opens his
collar]. Aw-aw, *I see you got on
your gold cross. That’s a bad sign,
it means you’re thinkin’ again
about goin’ back to the Church.*”(italics mine)

(Act I The Night of the Iguana)

Shannon is annoyed with these words of Maxine and he refutes sharply with a Joycean urge of “never saying no to life”, in somewhat anti-Daedalian manner:-

“Shannon : This is my last tour, Maxine I wrote my old Bishop this morning, a complete confession and a complete capitulation.”

(Act I, The Night of the Iguana)

The long conversation between Hannah Jelkes and Reverend Shannon is wriggling for a better expression for defining “loneliness” and cogitating a solution to it. Man’s “reaching towards perfection” finds manifestation in Hannah’s pledge of assisting her grandfather for ever; in Shannon’s sharing of Hannah Jelkes’s solitary feeling.

When Hannah says, “We make a home for each other, my grandfather and I I don’t regard a home as a ... well, as a place, a building ... a house of wood, bricks, stone. I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can ... well, nest, rest, live in, emotionally speaking,” (Act III The Night of

the Iguana) we seem to derive a definition of “search for togetherness” from it.

The “chill of loneliness” — the “black” element, “the need of someone to care for” the - “non-black” element all mingle and change their places, when Hannah at the end of the play, wants their nomadic life halt to a full stop, after the death of her soul-mate grandfather Nonno:

“Hannah : Oh God, can’t we stop now, finally please let us. It’s so quiet here now.

She starts to put the shawl about Nonno, but at the same moment his head drops to one side. With a soft intake of breath, she extends a hand before his mouth to see if he is still breathing. He isn’t. *In a panicky moment she looks right and left for someone to call to. There’s no one (italics mine)*. Then she bends her head to the crown of Nonno’s and the curtain starts to descend.”

(Act III The Night of the Iguana)

We get a “Non-black” play heading to “Black” end, where the playwright is reticent about any immediate solution, perhaps, groping for it in existential void.

Now the play for detailed analysis, is The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore. Here, “Non-Black” traits which enjoy being cynosure are ... “acceptance of life as well as death”, “search for reaching out to another heart”, “love for life”, “ a practical vision of life” (sense of realism). Here, the “comic mode” figures prominently. To account for Williams’s comicality, Von Szelski has veritable reason to offer : - “Perhaps when you push pessimism to its limit long enough it must come full circle and find its form in a kind of comic vision. Perhaps many new writers are defended in Schiller’s observation that comedy could have higher aims than tragedy, and make tragedy superfluous, its ultimate end being ‘to attribute more to chance than to destiny, and rather to laugh at inconsequence than to rage or weep at wickedness’”.¹³ Christopher Flanders,

the young visitor, an “itinerant poet priest” is here the harbinger of death. “Chris has assumed the mission of easing into death the wealthy, aged, infirm and hopeless”¹⁴. Life and death alike were not acceptable to Mrs. Goforth until Chris Flanders inspired her to ponder over both, in the same way. However, in Scene V, the sharing of views between the two characters makes the point clear :

“Chris (who has come down to her) : Mrs. Goforth are you still afraid of ...
(He hesitates)

Mrs. Goforth : Death | Never even think of it !

(She takes his arm and they move down to a bench and sit).

Chris : Death is one moment and life is so many of them.”

(Scene V , The Milk Train Doesn't stop Here Anymore)

“Love for life” is equally evinced in Mrs. Flora Goforth’s nostalgic delve into the past. While describing her husband’s death, she is eloquent about her “frightened heart”, about her “fear of death” and “love for life.” When death approaches, she sees “death in his eyes”, she gets out of the bed “as if escaping from quicksand.” In fact, she wants to “move away from death, terror.”(Scene IV,The Milk Train.....)

Reaching out to the other’s heart for escaping from the clasp of loneliness is a Williamsian forte. Naturally, being a “Non-Black play” how can “The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore” stand out the mainstream ? So, we see in Blackie, the attendant of Mrs. Goforth as well as Mrs. Goforth herself, a “longing for togetherness”, a desire to feel the warmth of a soul beside theirs. When, Blackie comes in rescue of Mrs. Goforth, while she trudges along the terrace, the response evoked from Flora Goforth is, no doubt, touching :

“Mrs. Goforth (she staggers to the edge of the forestage) :

Wind, cold wind, clean, clean! Release! Relief!. Escape from - [She reaches

the edges of the orchestra pit. A wave crashes loudly [below].

I'm lost, blind, dying, I don't know where I ...

Blackie (rushing out behind her) : Mrs. Goforth !

Don't move! You're at the edge of the Cliff !

Mrs. Goforth (Stopping, her hands over her eyes) :

Blackie ! (She sways ! Blackie rushes forward to catch her).

Blackie, don't leave me alone ! (italics mine).

(The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore Scene IV)

Towards the close of the play, when Mrs. Goforth slouches down the horizon of her existence, she screams :

“Mrs. Goforth : Don't leave me alone till...

Chris : I never leave till the end”.

Her valedictory words shake us from within.

“ Mrs. Goforth : Be here, when I wake up”.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore(Scene VI)

Her life draws to its close. Even at the threshold of death, she shudders at the inkling of loneliness.

The “sense of realism”, “man's urge for attaining perfection”, “practical vision of life”, “endurance” are the other “Non-Black” stigmata, we come across in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. The “fright” that engulfs Mrs. Goforth's heart or Chris's bosom, is a universal feeling. Chris in Scene Five of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore muses :

“Chris (standing above her) : Unreality! **L**ostness! Have you ever seen how two little animals sleep together, a pair of kittens or puppies ? All day they seem so secure in the house of their master, but at night, they curl up against each other, and, now and then, if you watch them, you notice they nudge each other a little with their heads or their paws, exchange little signals between them. The signals mean : we are not in danger - sleep! We’re close : its safe here ... we’re all of us living in a house we’re not used to ... too ... A house full of voices, noises, objects, **s**trange shadows, light that’s even stranger We can’t understand”.

The message it preaches is ... “mutual interdependence of man and man”. “Because Flora’s physical demise is accompanied by a sense of spiritual awakening, the play concludes in the comic mood of rebirth and resurrection rather than in a tragic mood of loss;it ends appropriately with the bugle sounds of “Reveille” not “Taps”¹⁵

Kingdom of Earth (1968) : “Williams’s 1968 comedy,”¹⁶ has little to show Non-Black characteristics though “the longing for togetherness”(Non-Black element) is complemented by “a sense of insecurity” and “oppressor-oppressed complex” (the “black traits”). Lot, a “tubercular transvestite”, Myrtle, “one time showgirl down on her luck”, Chicken, Lot’s half-brother, a man with sinister motive - all hanker after a safe, secure existence. “It is a droll, idiosyncratic, ornery comedy about the contest between half-brothers, Lot and Chicken, for the ownership of a farm. Myrtle is the pawn tossed between them, She is Lot’s new wife who ends up being Chicken’s whore”.¹⁷ However, Myrtle’s frantic quest for a secure existence is an optimistic quality though it boils to nothingness.

The comicality comes to the fore when diseased Lot is being disturbed, time and again, by his collusive half-brother, Chicken, and Myrtle running berserk over snatching the marriage-license off him.

“ Lot : What are you doing? What did you take from my coat ?

Myrtle : Our marriage license : Your half-brother wants to look at it as if to see if its real (she starts out again). Lot begins to laugh softly as she closes the door. She pushes it open again and says -

“... What are you laughing at?

Lot : *At life ! ... I think it's funny.*(italics mine) Myrtle closes the door rather softly, Chicken waits in the hall. She descends.”

Kingdom of Earth (Act II Scene I)

Just to satiate the longing of Chicken for wangling Lot's property and accruing “security” from it, Myrtle goes to such as inhuman extent. Just after Lot's demise, and, the advent of flood, Myrtle cries out ...

“Don't leave me alone here !” (Act II, Scene II)

Chicken, on the contrary declares “Chicken is King” He gets carried off his feet by the property he inherits. So, “security” is all they search for , and try to attain it by any means.

The Two Character Play employs the technique

“play-within - a play”, where the “existential world appears as a locked, abandoned, empty theatre from which there is no exit and the divided psyche (two actors: brother and sister) condemned to ‘solitary confinement’ inside their own subjective experience, i.e. a ‘two-character play’”¹⁸

Being a Non-Black play, The Two-Character Play, tries to add meaning to existence, intends to stress upon an optimistic view of existence :

“Felice : We must n't start counting things, that can't be counted on, Clare.

Clare : We must trust in things.

Felice : Continuing as they are,

Clare : Continued.”

(The Two Character Play, Act Two)

Felice and Clare are left alone in this cruel world by their parents who killed and committed suicide subsequently. They try to survive hugging each other, just as Hamm and Clov of Beckett's Endgame. At the concluding part of the play both of them take a decision to shoot each other. But, both of them fail and stick to the decision of carrying on “life” together. “A come-back attitude to life” elevates the play to a prestigious plane.

The later day critics like Rexford Stamper have kept the play aside vilifying it as “artist's greatest struggle ... within himself”.¹⁹ Even, Stamper is not confident about the search for “optimism” in the conclusion. His pen scribbles: “Felice and Clare begin searching for a conclusion to The Two Character Play. They skip rapidly through the work until they reach the dialogue concerning their father's murder-suicide and the location of his revolver. Both intuitively grasp that the logical conclusion of the imaginary work is that Clare should kill Felice and then herself. At this point the play ends for the final time.”²⁰ But, Stamper has perhaps, missed the point that both of them drop the revolver, as none can shoot the other. They, at last, surrender to the “Saga of Life”, they have to live - “together”. The search ends in “togetherness”, when Williams is eloquent about it.

“There is a pause. Felice raises his eyes to watch the light fade from the face of his sister as it is fading from his : in both their faces is a tender admission of defeat. They reach out their hands to one another, and the light lingers a moment on their hands lifting toward each other. As they slowly embrace, there is total dark...”
(Concluding part of The Two Character Play)

So, Felice and Clare seeks support in each other, deciding to lead “life”, bidding adieu to the pernicious thought of “Death.” Williams is triumphant at this point.

I can't Imagine Tomorrow, (1966) is a "Non-Black play" (according to the period during which it had been composed) included in Dragon Country, (a collection of some early and late plays of Tennessee Williams). But it manifests mostly the "black" components, like "sense of time fleeting by", "inescapable loneliness", "sense of frustration". One and Two are the only characters who speak of their stale existence. Two (a man) has none to visit but One (a woman). "Sense of loneliness" gnaws into the entrails of both One and Two. One opens the door ajar, everyday, to usher in Two, saying, " Oh it's you" and Two rejoinders, "Yes, it's me". They hardly converse, but they stay in proximity to see the other acting without words or "to sit and hear each other groan".²¹ He has nowhere to go, Two is a victim of "paralysing depression". One is no less, being in the grip of intolerable "frustration". One narrates a yarn of a small man who rams his head at the gate of Death, imploring to let him in. He wants to evade the mesh of everyday solitariness saying, "if you won't let me in for twenty years, I'll wait twenty years at the gate, I can't go back down the mountain. I have no place down there. I have no one to visit in the evenings, I have no one to talk to, no one to play cards with, I have no one, no one. Its a real imprecation to be alone, *all all alone, on earth.*" (*italics mine*) (The Two - character play)

"One" has lost interest in existence. To her, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow/Creeps in this petty pace from day to day./To the last syllable of recorded time."²²

She feels like the underdog facing discomfiture by the relentless flux of time. On a piece of paper, she writes for Two to read : -

"Two; if there wasn't a thing called Time.... we might be able to count on things staying the same, but Time lives in the world with us and has a big broom and is sweeping us out of the way, whether we face it or not". (The Two Character play)

Jerrold A. Phillips observes : "In I can't Imagine Tomorrow, it is not only the past that paralyses the central character, but the future as well. That which is to come will be as overwhelmingly disastrous as that which has already occurred. The

individual is now perched between two untenable existence At the end of the play the spectator is left with the central character still unable to commit herself to either life or death and there are no hints as to how the matter will be resolved.”²³ Thus, though “acceptance of life” or “come back attitude to life” has been the watchword to *One and Two* under duress, it is not spontaneous at all.

In A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur we can appreciate a positive view and healthier attitude towards life. Even in hours of dejection, Dorothea instead of yielding to depression, comes back to life. She had pinned her hopes on the Principal of Blewett School. She might have flung to fury or to utter despair while she learnt from Helena that he had already shed off his garb of bachelorhood to tie nuptial knot with some other woman. Dorothea, even after this unexpected betrayal, calmly accepts the reality and rings up Miss Bodenheifer, her room-partner, asking her to let her join the picnic that had long been fixed up. Sophie Gluck, a nubile girl, manifests the black stigma “loneliness”. Her parents have passed away and she seeks security in the affection of Dorothea and Miss Bodenheifer. In another play, The Mutilated (1967) of Dragon Country, “burying the hatchet” between Trinket and Celeste (the two fallen women), stresses the presence of “Non-Black” element in the play. “Search for togetherness”, “love for life” are the tenets which the play asserts. While Trinket Dugan calls Celeste to have wine with her, their enmity ends and mutual interdependence comes to ^{be} revealed. Though, it might be the harangue of a carousing woman, Trinket finds the breast - pain she had been troubled with, vanish like “a miracle : Beatific smile hovers on their lips” and the play ends on a positive note assuring “warmth of friendship” and “love for existence”. The presence of “singers” and “carollers” add an antique charm to this modern play. In an interview, while asked whether his plays had been optimistic or pessimistic, Williams replied - “I think its 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. In that sense, I think I am mostly optimistic. I

believe very strongly in the *existence of good*... I don't think I'm as gloomy as a lot of people who write."²⁴(*italics mine*)

The other plays of Dragon Country, The Frosted Glass Coffin (1979), In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel (1969), and the full-length plays like Small Craft Warnings (1978), Vieux Carre' (1978), The Red Devil Battery Sign (1979), Clothes for a summer Hotel (1980), in spite of being "Non-Black plays" verge on "Black" ones. Again, some of them display characteristics of the absurd drama. The language of these plays is disjointed, monosyllabic, insipid and the conversation between the characters mostly trails off to silence. Sometimes, they end up being non-sequiturs. Williams of the early plays, e.g. The Glass Menagerie, A Street Car Named Desire, even Sweet Bird of Youth had a poetic inclination. But, the late plays, are remarkable for the dramatist's experimentation with theatre language. Adler finds reasons and supports, - "At first glance, Williams's innovations in theatre language, particularly in the two failed plays, might remind one of similar techniques employed by Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. Seeing Williams's practice against the background of these dramatists, however, makes it clear that the verbal techniques new to Williams are used to express a metaphysics very different from that of the absurdist playwrights. ... Beckett might have found 'there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express' but for Ionesco, there is something to communicate, but it is very nearly incommunicable: 'There are no words for the deepest experience' ... but with Killinger, 'there is a world where every individual is condemned to his own private hell and discovers that language is only a tossed yoyo, either coming back upon the speaker or dribbling out flatly and uselessly between him and the world he is trying to reach'."²⁵

Perhaps Williams, so eloquent, verbose and poetic in The Glass Menagerie turns to incomplete sentences and non-sequiturs just because of the sense of language becoming "tossed yoyo", the speaker seeming nonsensical, the listener quite inattentive.

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Chapter V

CHAPTER VA JANUS-FACED PERSONALITY UNMASKED : A COMPARISON OF THE
“BLACK” AND THE “NON-BLACK” PLAYS

“Because of its (theatre’s) apparently natural tendency towards the unnatural, the theatre has perpetually to be recalled to nature, to ‘real life’, as it is called, which often in our time is taken to mean the sordid part of reality. Sordid reality easily turns to unreality when it is artificially separated from non-sordid reality and nothing is more unreal than much of our realism”.

Eric Bentley : “What is theatre? Incorporating
the dramatic event and other reviews 1944-1967”

p. XV.

I

“Black” and “Non-Black” elements : Points of difference.

Much ink has been spilt over adumbrating the lines of contrast between the early (plays written before 1960) and the late (plays written after 1960) plays of Tennessee Williams. The “Black” stints that abound in the early plays are no less viable in the late plays, though, the playwright promised to make a dent on the “quieter elements of existence”.¹ In fact, the inherent inclination of the playwright towards pessimism foundered

his brilliant idea of painting all post-sixty plays “white”.

It is already known that, neither the early plays are totally “Black”, nor, the late plays are free from “Black” tinge. As the playwright, of course, had undergone a lot of changes after 1960, the plays written after sixty are different from the early plays, but, they seem not to be of a different playwright altogether. The plays of pre-sixty and post-sixty era share some characteristics and differ sharply from one another in some significant points. However, all the plays irrespective of their belonging to the early and the late era of Williams’s writing tenure, bear the stamp of the dramatist’s psyche.

In the early plays, which brought for the dramatist wide acclaim, the dramatist’s perturbed psyche intruded and cast influence on the characters. Williams had been candid in his avowal that Alma Winemiller of Summer and Smoke (1948), Blanche Du Bois of A Street Car Named Desire (1947) were none but Tennessee Williams himself. “Women have always been my deepest emotional root, anyone who’s read my writing knows that”² such was Williams’s opinion on women.

As he felt women’s anguish deeply, he breathed life into the feminine characters, and, thus experienced their pain vicariously. In the late plays, too, Williams’s characters were none but portraits borne of playwright’s mind. “Williams’s recent plays have become exercises in which he uses the actors as projections of his own mental anguish, with his personal psychosis serving as his thematic basis.”³

While pondering over the question of “optimistic view of life,” “humanitarian outlook”, and, “comeback attitude to life”, Tennessee Williams of the early and the late plays stand on the same pedestal. However, the quest for realization of ultimate reality persists in him unabated. Any discussion on Williams’s “optimism” remains incomplete without reference to his self-revelation : “I was broken as much by repeated failures in the theatre as by Frank’s death. Everything went wrong. My life - private and professional - and ultimately my mind broke. But it’s come back - I trust its

partly back. I still have periods of hysterical behaviour, but then I always have had. I'm in my right mind now. I feel no pain anymore.”⁴ The promptness with which he could come back to the bosom of real-world actualities and accepted it, finds reflections in his plays too. In The Two Character Play (1967), Kingdom of Earth (1968), A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1978), Period of Adjustment (1960), Williams drives home the message of “acceptance of reality.”

Of course, Williams was never taciturn on this point in his early plays, despite the fact that the characters were not pliant enough to accept the reality. They either revolted meekly against the usual course of the universe, and, allowed themselves to lead wanton lives, [The Rose Tattoo, Summer and Smoke] or, felt at their wits' end when they had to encounter the cross-current (The Glass Menagerie, A Street Car Named Desire). In spite of all intractable problems, undergoing all oppressions, the protagonists never had yielded to O'Neillian death-wish or Millerian self-ruinous proclivity. Laura, even at the teeth of utter desperation accepted the irretrievable dejection and tried to brace herself against all odds she might have to face in future. Towards the close of the play The Glass Menagerie, even after learning that the gentleman caller, Jim O'Connor, had actually been the paramour of another girl, Betty, - Laura pretended to pull herself together and offered Jim a souvenir - the unicorn with broken horn and went to wind up the victrola. Williams kept his eyes on the peephole of grave reality - “There is a look of almost infinite desolation.” Amanda tried to comfort Laura saying, “You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream. You manufacture illusions”. Laura seemed to imbibe invigorating warmth from the caring words of Amanda. Amanda's meek protest against Tom's fatuous action of inviting Jim O'Connor - a man, engaged already to another girl, - could hardly heal the shock, Laura received. But the presence of “Non-Black” appraisal of life could not evade the analytical sight of a critic.

Pointing to the “comic” face of Williams, A.D. Chaudhuri had argued quite cogently : “Menagerie uses the humour of situation in a double way. Sometimes, humour

is a simple device to make situations more plausible and homely, but, humour often verges on the ridiculous or the pathetic, and the ironic... And at least, once (Scene VI) Williams's sense of the comic transports a situation to a higher level, Jim is moving Laura about the room in a clumsy waltz and gives her one of the finest moments in her life. This funny dance makes the mediocre and well-meaning Jim fully credible, and it also demonstrates the playwright's sense of pity for Laura. Out of the mist of Tom's musings, the comic scenes suddenly appear to establish, as it were, the substantiality of a dream picture."⁵ Another critic, Charles Brooks went a step further to probe into the early play of Williams to pick out the germs of comicality. Thus, he observed : ... "But his greatest power and appeal derive from a comic vision which he seems unwilling to trust fully. The comic vision was first and most completely manifested in The Rose Tattoo (1951)".⁶ Even, Williams's comic vision hardly spared certain obsessions America had about marriage, as voiced in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955). A family feud over an inheritance of property might not be novel, but Williams's treatment of "child-worship" seemed to be "fresh and vigorous". Brooks even dared pull Williams and O'Casey on the same plane and remarked : "Williams's mixture of comedy and tragedy is not the same as O'Casey's. O'Casey is successfully ambivalent at every moment seeing both the comic and serious aspects of characters and action. Williams shifts from comic exposure to sympathy, with the result that his plays tend to fall apart."⁷ Denis Michael Calandra, badly cooked out some observations on Williams's comic satire especially in connection with the late plays : "Williams's late plays (The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Kingdom of Earth) also depend largely on comedy, but emerge as inferior plays Williams's comic satire is directed at two distinct character types. One, the vulgar representative of a crass American society and the other the eccentric, but harmless 'outcast' from society. The laughter at the first type is a form of bitter condemnation, while at the second type is a genial appreciation of the peculiarities of human nature."⁸

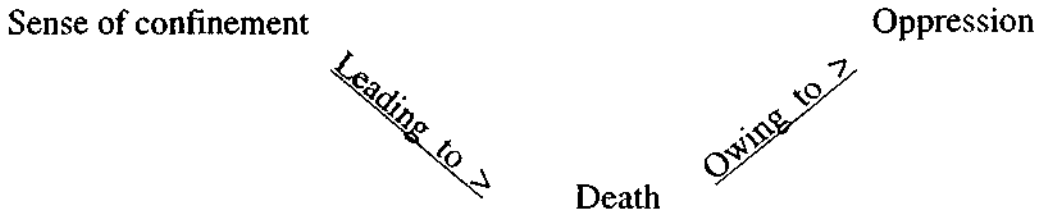
Change in the Setting is a remarkable point of difference in between the

early and the late plays of Williams. "Whereas the plays of the fifties and early sixties take place in society, these of the late sixties and seventies are set in a highly ambiguous environment."⁹

In the early plays like The Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Sweet Bird of Youth, the setting is a sliver of the society, brought to life on stage. As for example, in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, the anti-realistic touch is a much-felt phenomenon. In "Notes for the Designer", Williams writes : "The set should be far less realistic than I have so far implied in this description of it. I think the walls below the ceiling should dissolve mysteriously into air, the set should be roofed by the sky, stars and moon suggested by traces of milky pallor, if they were observed through a telescope less out of focus". He reasoned for creating such dim-dream ambience as... "this piece of furniture(?), this monument, is a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with" In the late plays, the characters are few, the settings too need not have any refuge to anti-realism. But, the characters never appear to draw the "society" on stage. They are more of "oppressed individuals" than representatives of "repressed society". For example, while talking about the elaborate stage-setting of The Two Character Play Williams shreds off "expressionism" -philia and advises: "It must not only suggest the disordered images of a mind approaching collapse, but also, correspondingly, the phantasmagoria of the nightmarish world that all of us live in at present, not just the subjective but the true world with all its dismaying shapes and shadows". In I Can't Imagine Tomorrow, Williams is quite brief and direct : "ONE and TWO are respectively, a woman and a man approaching middle age : each is the only friend of the other. There are no walls to the set, which contains only such pieces of furniture that are required by the action of the play". Thus, the difference is being distinct, well-marked.

"Oppressor - oppressed syndrome", "sense of the claustrophobia", "confinement" i.e. the "Black" elements that were present in "Black" plays and sometimes

in “Non-Black” plays had their origin in Dante’s Inferno. “In Dante as well as the modern artists, one important sense pervades the variations of a personal inferno, it is the sense of confinement and of the ineluctable repetitiousness of torture. The sense grows out of a metaphysical speculation about “Death” - be it spiritual, emotional or physical namely a fear of absolute stasis”.¹⁰ Thus, the “Black” and the “Non-Black” plays cannot repudiate the vicious chain :



“A state of incompleteness is the condition of the oppressed people who inhabit Williams’s world, and, their struggle to overcome their condition is the action which his art describes. The unique part of his vision is that it is infused with a compassion for the plight of his character which reaches to the deepest part of our understanding, it gives his early work a brooding often melancholic texture which no other American playwright possesses.”¹¹ Usually, the menfolk play the role of the “torturer” and the womenfolk are “tortured”. But, they lack the courage to take the gauntlet thrown at them mercilessly, and, wobble when they face male - aggression . They have hardly any voice of protest.

Henry Taylor too opines that Williams mirrors his unhappy youth in portraying “the endless and cannibalistic assault of the *insensitively powerful upon the*

pathetic and defenseless".¹² (italics mine)

The women of the early plays and the late plays of Williams are set apart from each other by the dividing criterion - voice of protest. The women of early plays, like, Laura Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche du Bois in A Street Car Named Desire, Alma Winemiller in Summer and Smoke, Lady Torrance in Orpheus Descending, Boss Finley's daughter Heavenly Finley in Sweet Bird of Youth had no voice to raise in protest.

Laura, in The Glass Menagerie, could not fight against the ignominious, deceptive attitude of Jim O'Connor, the only gentleman-caller she had had in her life. The conversation between Laura and Jim, a pal Tom had in his working-place and whom he invited to dinner, on his mother's fervid appeal - had ended in smoke. Jim tried to boost Laura's flagging spirits saying, "Yep-that, what I judge to be your principal trouble, lack of confidence in yourself as a person. You don't have the proper amount of faith in yourself." (The Glass Menagerie). His tart remark was "Knowledge zzzzp ! Money - Zzzzp! Power! That's the cycle democracy is built on" (The Glass Menagerie). For the first time, Laura had to budge an inch from the dim-dream world of her "glass menagerie", and she could not put up with the concept of Faustian ambition, the mystique of the American dream that Jim preached. Even after admiring her, kissing her long, expressing his deep concern for her, he hardly had been in dithers to say, "Being in love has made a new man of me." He loved Betty and as she left for visiting her ailing aunt he could accept Tom's invitation to dinner. The holy candles in the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation". (The Glass Menagerie). Here, Laura in a depressed abandon, sought solace in her mother's lap she could not raise her voice in protest against the cruelty of menfolk, against the ways of the world.

Blanche du Bois of A Street Car Named Desire, had hardly any peremptory voice in her sister's menage. She had been affronted by her brother-in-law Stanley

Kowalski, but, she could not raise her voice to a shrewish pitch and protest against it, though lastly, she had to pay heavily for it. She was manhandled, treated shabbily, driven to madness and, in the concluding scene, we are moved by the aggrieved voice of the “oppressed” woman clung to the arms of the Doctor, “Whoever you are, I’ve always depended upon the kindness of strangers.” But she did not protest against the mean plotting of her brother-in-law, she followed the Doctor to the infirmary, mutely. Only for a moment, she cried out, that too, in panic, when Stanley assured her to send anything she forgot to the hospital, “I don’t know you, I don’t know you, I want to be left alone - please !” (Scene XI, A Street Car Named Desire). But that was uttered when she reached the deadlock.

Alma Winemiller in Summer and Smoke, was too timid to denounce any wrong behaviour of John Buchanan - her paramour. She could construe that, John was undergoing a drastic change but in a Miriam - like (Lawrentian character) fatuity she turned her back to it. When life demanded her to face the stern reality, she lost her psychic balance, that verged on insanity. She, on her own, preferred corporeal enjoyment with a travelling salesman to a dishonoured bondage with an honourable young doctor. A girl, once too puritan, gradually slipped down the slithery path of cheap mundane pleasures. She too was found echoing Blanche (A Street Car) in the closing scene, when she got the salesman to pity on her condition, as she was in the doldrums. She said, “Life is full of little *mercies* like that, not being *mercies*, but comfortable little *mercies*. And so we are able to keep on going”. (Scene XII, Summer and Smoke) (*italics mine*). So, the word “mercies” was pronounced thrice. Alma’s voice of protest trailed off to silence. She yielded meekly to the wanton life that beckoned her. At last, she was heard mumbling, “Yes I feel like a water-lily on a Chinese lagoon” (Scene XII, Summer and Smoke).

Even in Orpheus Descending (1957), Lady Torrance, could not protest against her cruel husband’s meaningless wrath. She had a life throbbing in her womb, the seed sown by Val Xavier (the salesman in her shop-counter). Lady Torrance cried her

heart out, being jubilant over her success in conceiving a zygote in her uterus, "I've won, I've won, Mr. Death, I'm going to bear" (Act III, Scene III, Orpheus Descending). Jabe Torrance got flung to fury and shot her dead. As she raised her voice to the level of feeble protest against Torrance's oppression, Torrance put an end to her life, ruthlessly and deliberately. At last, the Lady bit the dust being shot by Jabe. Even then, she appeared to be magnanimous counting her last moments, "she turns to face him (Jabe Torrance) still covering VAL with her body, her face with all the passion and secrets of life and death, in it now, her fierce eyes blazing, knowing, defying and accepting." (Act II, Scene III, Orpheus Descending).

In Sweet Bird of Youth Princess Alexander Del Lago, built rapport with Chance Wayne for dependence and love. She was torn to pieces, and her heart had undergone fatal blows and she felt the pangs of loneliness. Chance Wayne came as a saviour to her. Princess entreated him to be a good lover to her. She wanted to forget her sorrowful past through "love". She uttered frenziedly, "That's the only dependable distraction, so when I say now, because, I need that distraction, it has to be now, not later." She needed Chance for love, for affection, above all, for the sake of security. But, gradually, Chance Wayne moved further and further from Princess. Chance made a frantic effort to be intimate with Heavenly Finley, the daughter of the colluding, mean, political bigwig Boss Finley, whom he had loved with all his heart. But, Boss Finley did not allow him to meet his daughter, suspected him of having harboured germs of an incurable sexual disease. Chance Wayne receded further from Princess who needed him most. Perhaps, he sensed "Time" clasp him in its fatal grip. He screamed: "To change is to live, Miss Lucy, to live is to change, and not to change, is to die". (Act II, Scene II, Sweet Bird of Youth).

On the one hand, Alexandra Del Lago, the Princess, who provided Chance Wayne with shelter, needed him to stay by her side. Again, despite losing her capability to give birth to a child, and knowing well that Chance had been attacked by an intractable

disease, Heavenly Finley wished to start her life with him. But, Boss Finley's commanding tone passed the final verdict, nipping both Chance's and Heavenly's wishes in the bud. The instances are not far to seek.

When Heavenly's pitch gained in a protesting baritone, Heavenly could not put up with her father's illicit relationship with an "other" woman. Here, she is remarkably similar in attitude to Biff of Death of a Salesman :

"Heavenly (shouting) : Yes, I am Papa, I am. You married for love , but you wouldn't let me do it, and even though you'd done it, you broke Mama's heart. Miss Lucy had been your mistress

Boss : Who is Miss Lucy ?

Heavenly : Oh Papa, she was your mistress long before Mama died. And Mama, was just a front for you. Can I go in now, Papa ?"

(Act II, Scene I, Sweet Bird of Youth).

But Boss Finley hushed her fulminating voice peremptorily, "I have power, which is not an illusion". (Act II, Scene I, Sweet Bird of Youth).

The other instance can be drawn from Princess Kosmonopolis's or Alexandra Del Lago's statements. She found a male gigolo in Chance Wayne, just to quench her thirst for the warmth of youth. However, she promised to help her get the girl he loved in St. Cloud, But, when the gigolo rode roughshod over her jaded nerves she never faltered to dissent. She could not forget the harsh treatment she received from Chance, when she desperately needed his assistance :

"Chance . Here, Here, get her back on this phone.

Princess : Do what ?

Chance : Talk about me and talk about Heavenly to her (Sally, Alexandra's

friend, Hollywood columnist),

Princess : Talk about a beach boy I picked up for

pleasure, distraction from panic ? You've just been ^{using}*using me. Using me.*

When I needed you downstairs you shouted "Get her a wheel chair !" Well, I didn't need a wheel chair, I came up alone, as always. (*italics mine*).

(Act III, scene III, Sweet Bird of Youth).

In the late plays, the voice of protest is far more incisive. The women here, are aware of their needs and demands. When they stake their claims to the object rightly demanded, they hardly loosen their grip. They can stand against all odds in time. They are up in arms against all tortures inflicted upon them. They are determined enough to win their rights. Mrs. Kane and Mrs. Lane of The Demolition Downtown (1971), Tye in Vieux Carre (1978), Zelda Fitzgerald in Clothes for a Summer Hotel (1980) had courage to remonstrate against all kinds of injustice inflicted upon them.

In almost all the late plays both the men and women transcended worldly sorrows and sufferings, and, chivvied themselves to accept life, as it had been. Their propensity to "come back" to life toplisted their priorities. Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Kane were found gainsaying their husbands' intolerable cowardice on the one hand and obdurate dominating tendencies, on the other. In their own sphere, they knew the art of asserting their points of view. Bomb-shelling, dynamite-blasts, sniping continued unabated. While the Kane and the Lane family sat confined in an upper-middle-class living room at the outskirts of a capital city. When Mr. Kane and Mr. Lane decided to fly off to the mountains to avoid the imminent peril, the ladies took decision to meet the army generals and stop the devastating operation, by placating them. It seemed, as it were, a sort of unsavoured adventure. In fact, they did so. The conversation testifies the contrast between men and women sharply :

"Mr. Lane : What about the mountains ?

Mr. Kane : We would go to the mountains ! Why don't we go to the mountains ?

Mr. Lane : You girls are too nervous.

Mrs. Kane : You boys are nervous too.

Mr. Kane : We've got the responsibility of decision.

Mrs. Kane : Your wives don't have that responsibility too ?

Mr. Lane : Men make decisions.”

(The Demolition Downtown).

For an instant, the women remain mute. They display their pluck and wit, at last, when they decide to go downtown and surrender to the general, instead of absconding to the mountain like their consorts. Their decision seems to be courageous as well as blood-curdling.

Their action finds support in an interview of Williams where he expressed: “Williams : Women are closer to life really, they're more naked, more like naked life.

Interviewer : You mean they are not afraid as men are ?

Williams : They are closer to life, it seems to me. I may be mistaken, it seems to me that men busy themselves in business and moneymaking competition and that sort of thing, *women seem to me organically closer to love which is where life is. Where it began, where it is.*”¹³

(italics mine)

Zelda Fitzgerald, in Clothes for a Summer Hotel bore acrimony towards her husband, F. Scott, Fitzgerald, who won wide acclaim as a writer. Zelda, too, had a bent for writing. But, she restrained herself from writing as it might put hindrance to F.

Scott Fitzgerald's literary career. As the "ghost play" opened, the novelist was seen standing in front of an asylum where Zelda passed her days in utter internment. Scott was solicitous to meet her, but, she was reluctant to see him, though, she loved him long ago. The novelist's selfish attitude was evident in his conversation with Gerald Murphy, a warden of the asylum:

"Murphy : Scott, we feel she was driven to it, because....

Scott : I had to discourage her attempt to compete with my success as a writer: precocious. I face that now, have to bleed for it now. Have you seen Zelda's writing ?

Murphy : Yes. That was her talent. I hear you made her promise not to publish Save me the Waltz till your Tender is the Night had come out .

Scott : Without apology, yes, I did."

(Act I, Scene I, Clothes for a Summer Hotel)

Zelda , though sent to an asylum and a confirmed "lunatic", had not lost gumption to give vent to her umbrage, she bore against Scott Fitzgerald. Twice we hear her whimper:

"Zelda (striking out) : *What was important to you was to absorb and devour!* (italics mine)

Scott : I didn't expect to find you in this-agitated mood. Zelda, I brought you a little gift. A new wedding band to replace the one you lost.

Zelda : I didn't lose it, Scott, I threw it away."

(Act I, Scene I, Clothes for a Summer Hotel)

Zelda Fitzgerald seemed to chime in with Nora of The Doll's House of Henrik Ibsen :

“Zelda : I want an answer to my first question, “What about my work ?”

Scott : You are the wife of a highly respected and successful writer who works night and day to maintain you in

Zelda (overlapping) I still say, What about mine , meaning my work?
Answer ? None ?

Scott (Throwing the bottle away) : Your work is the work that all young Southern ladies dream of performing someday. *Living well with a devoted husband and a beautiful child.*”

(italics mine).

Ibsen’s Nora at last spoke through Zelda :

Zelda : Excuse my interruption. I’ll not prolong it. I’ll not do it again, I’ll find my own way somehow. (Act I Scene II Clothes for a Summer Hotel)

In another late play, Vieux Carre’ (1978), the couple Jane and Tye were faithful to each other, loved and missed each other, but, Jane still got inclined to Writer who inhabited a cubicle in the same tenement they stayed in. Jane sought for a company in Writer, Jane wanted attention and care which Tye was too fatigued to provide her. In part Two, Scene Twelve of the play the dialogue between Jane and Tye revealed Jane, somewhat rebellious, conceited :

“ Jane : I watched you dress, I didn’t exist for you. Nothing existed for you but your image in the mirror. Understandably so.

[With her last strength she draws herself up]

Tye : What’s understandable, Jane ? ... You got a fever ?

[He rises too, and stretches out a hand to touch her forehead, she knocks it away]

Jane : What's understandable is that your present convenience is about to become an encumbrance The person you loved assuming that you did love when she was still useful - is now, is now absorbed in preparing herself for oblivion as you were absorbed in your ... *your image in the mirror*."(Part II, Scene Twelve, Vieux Carre) (italics mine)

The voice of protest, a touch of vehemence are all that Jane possesses, and thus she can claim to be a "New" woman, seeking liberation, setting "oppression" especially male-oppression, at naught.

If Williams of the forties be labelled as Whitman's "child" from the Adamic garden he made a comeback in the sixties to discover himself as the symbol of "fallen humanity". In the early plays, Williams used to dramatize what he had seen, heard and felt; he successfully fused experience into an art-form. In the late plays he encumbered this experience with bizarre forms and complex symbols, and at times portrayed a situation that dispersed in several directions. Plays like Gnadiges Fraulein, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel and Out Cry portray even greater tortured states of mind and a dogged determination to continue in the face of despair. Williams had to create a maze of illusion to ensconce "Reality" with e/clat. For that reason, he had recourse to "lies" in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, "magic" and "fabricated truth" in A Street Car Named Desire, "illusory dream of love" in The Rose Tattoo, "unflinching devotion to soul hoodwinking lust for body" in Summer and Smoke. But in late plays, he had to bid adieu to the world of illusion in a huff and descend to the last step REALITY.

Sense of Loss, or Passage of Time is an "element" which leads the early and the late plays to share the same platform. Loss, decline, betrayal ... the distortion of a delicate sensibility in the direction of a lurid and gothic self-destructiveness, are remarkable motifs of Southern writing. But, it must be admitted that the frightening distortion of Williams's sister's mental plight gave him a model for his many portraits of the individual pressed beyond the point of rational control. The sense of "Time" fleeting

by, perturbed Chance Wayne, and Alexandra Del Lago of Sweet Bird of Youth (1959). Chance Wayne implored : “I don’t ask for your pity, but just for your understanding ... not even that, - no. Just for your recognition of me in you and the enemy time in us all”. (Act III). On the contrary , Alexandra Del Lago in Act II, Scene II heaved a sigh in pain, “All day I’ve kept hearing a sort of lament that drifts through the air of this place. It says, “Lost, but, never to be found again” (Act II Scene II). As “sense of the past” is hand-in-glove with sense of flux of time, Mr. Charlie in the Last of my Solid Gold Watches (1947) reminisced : “In and out from the time I arrived till the time I left, the men of the road who knew me, to whom I stood for things commanding respect ! Poker-continuous ! Shouting, laughing, hilarity! Where have they all gone to?” In another, short early play, Talk to me like the rain and let me listen (1946), the woman went on muttering : “I won’t have any idea of what’s going on in the world. I will not be conscious of time passing at all”, as if, she feels assailed by the “passage of time”.

Both the wives, Miriam in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel and Zelda in Clothes for a Summer Hotel experience a romantic horror over time passing and death approaching, a fear of the decaying process shared by the Princess in Sweet Bird of Youth and Sissy Goforth in The Milk Train Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore (1968). Zelda felt restive and asked - ‘A flame burning nothing? Not even casting a shadow’?¹⁴

In O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into the Night too, the protagonists shuddered at the sense of the past which was nothing but an instant derivative of sense of time fleeting by :

“ Tyrone : Mary ! For God’s sake, forget the past.

Mary : Why ? How can I ? The past is the present, isn’t it ? It’s the future: this we all try to lie out of that but life won’t let us.”

(Long Day’s Journey into the Night)

Perhaps, Mary foreshadowed Big Mama’s (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof) feelings:

“Big Mama : Time goes by so fast. Nothing can outrun it. Death commences too early - almost before you’re half acquainted with life - you meet with the other”.
(ActIII)

As time fleets by, an anticipation of death creeps in, in both early and late plays. Big Daddy in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Woman Downtown and King Del Rey in Red Devil Battery Sign, the characters in The Mutilated encounter death, through their experiences.

Use of symbols in early plays was much more than the late ones. In an early play, The Rose Tattoo, rose tattooed on Serafina’s husband’s breast had been the symbol of ushering in a baby in the family, the piece of silk that Estelle brought to Serafina for making a shirt for a man she was in love with, stood for snapping of human bondage; “the urn” symbolised Serafina’s unflinching love and faith to her husband, Rosario delle Rose, which ultimately was crashed to pieces when Serafina came to know of her husband’s clandestine affair with Estelle Hohengarten.

In a late play, use of symbols was fewer in number. As for example, Kingdom of Earth, a late play of Williams was in dearth of symbols. “The wind that blew as sharp as knife”, “the knife with which Chicken had been carving something on to the table” are all images of “destruction”, foreboding omen. “The flood crest” that intimidated Lot, Chicken and Myrtle was the symbol of “restoring order to the crazy world”.

Williams had followed “plastic theatre”, technique in early plays. The Glass Menagerie, A Street Car Named Desire, Summer and Smoke, Camino Real, Orpheus Descending made use of expressionistic device. Hence, the profusion of symbols. The expressionists stressed the symbols to a greater degree. “Never in the plays by Ibsen and Chekhov does the symbol interfere with the illusion of fidelity to tangible reality, as it often does in expressionist plays. Distortion of objective reality may easily result from the expressionist’s attempts to reveal a character’s emotional response to a

situation".¹⁵ Thus, prologue and last scene set in the park "near the angel of the fountain", at about dusk in Summer and Smoke and the "snakeskin jacket", which in the concluding scene of Orpheus Descending was "held up" by the CONJURE MAN with a "toothless mumble of excitement" (Orpheus Desc. Act III, Scene III) objectified the fugitive tendency of an oppressed individual.

Tennessee Williams was indebted to Wagner for his "concept of synthesis and the ideas of symbolist followers whose goal was to create a new syntax of poetic conventions that transcended ordinary language."¹⁶ Williams's theatrical goal was "transformation through sensual evocation by synthesizing all artistic components."¹⁷ Actually, the aesthetic crisis in theatre can be resolved by our knowledge of "combining the resources of realistic and theatricalistic artistry."¹⁸ A Street car Named Desire is a brilliant example of such a medley.

"As music released the mood of a scene, projecting the deepest emotional meaning of an event as well as its apparent action, so the fluctuating intensities of light could transfigure an object and clothe it with all its emotional implications."¹⁹ Hence, the chiaroscuro of light and darkness is in Williams's plays. Expressionists followed the theories of stage-lighting promulgated by Adolphe Appia. So, Laura and Amanda are left in a pool of light as Jim O'Connor leaves, which again shifts and concentrates upon Laura, who seeks comfort in Amanda's lap, the altar candle projects its faded light on Virgin Mary, or the dim paper-lantern turns on to Blanche's face to give her a magical appearance as she is fond of "magic" (A Street Car Named Desire). Varsouviana in A Street Car Named Desire, circus music in The Glass Menagerie, the tune played on Val's guitar in Orpheus Descending add special dimensions to the respective plays.

Williams commingled prosaic literalness and poetic yearning, half pathos and half-genuine vision. Early plays are embellished with poetic aura, the late ones trail off to pathos and mannered sentimentality. The allusiveness of language in The Glass Menagerie, A Street Car Named Desire, Summer and Smoke, reclines to hollow rhetoric

and drab prosaic mutterings in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore and Kingdom of Earth. "In the early plays sexuality has a dangerous and even subversive quality, it threatens to destabilise the arrogant assertion of those who command the public world. Later, in a play like Small Craft Warnings, it is tainted with sentimentality and a deeply suspect desire to appeal to what was a contemporary fad for prurience. In much of his later works, originality defers to parody."²⁰

II

"BLACK" PLAYS, "NON-BLACK" PLAYS - COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

While comparing the early and the late plays, we obviously bring the "Black" and the "Non-Black" elements into focus. But as we may be biased with their hackneyed mention in the above chapters the early "Black" and "Non-Black" plays may be compared and contrasted from the point of "theatricalism", "character-delineation", "stage-design", "use of music", "colour", and "language".

The Red Devil Battery sign (1975) can draw comparison with Sweet Bird of Youth (1951) on the points of political skulduggery. Sweet Bird of Yough, of course, had a political setting, with a local colour while in The Red Devil Battery Sign, the political stigmata shifted from local background to a more expansive arena, Red Devil Battery being a right-wing group which plotted in toppling off the government and catapult

to the helm of affairs. The characters, in both the plays, share some points of similarities. The husband of Woman Downtown, “the big business mogul”, leader of Red Devil Battery group had taken to “violence”, “cruelty” and hesitated in the least, to slither down the tortuous lane of corruption.

Boss Finley, who bragged of “power” hardly stayed back in wielding his command in the blind alleys of corruption. He compelled her daughter, Heavenly, to stay immured and forced Chance Wayne to get castrated. In The Red Devil Battery Sign (1975) the Woman Downtown had been kept a prisoner in the Yellow Rose Hotel, as her husband suspected her to broach all his heinous motives to a Congressional Committee. Forced confinement had turned to be their lot.

Heavenly Finley had been severely tortured by Boss Finley; Woman Downtown had to bear her husband’s oppression. The only difference between Heavenly Finley and Woman Downtown was that, the latter could ignore her husband’s tight vigil and went off to stand beside King Del Rey, when he needed her beside him. A phone call from King shook Woman Downtown deeply, she could smell peril in his voice :

“Woman Downtown : I can hear you breathing.

King : Yeh, still breathing. I started to come downtown, but only got to the drugstore on the corner.

Woman Downtown (controlled) : That’s all right, I’ll come there in a cab. Barman call me a cab quick. See I’ve called a cab. Now give me the address. *I will come and get you. (italics mine)*

(The Red Devil Battery Sign Act III, Scene III)

On the contrary, in Sweet Bird of Youth, Heavenly Finley dared not flout the command of Boss Finley. She was not allowed to meet Chance Wayne. Once she was angry and protested, but, all her ire lost its edge when Boss Finley whimpered her to

silence. She could not go to meet Chance Wayne. She dared not defy her father's order.

Woman Downtown, sometimes seemed to echo the psychological nuances as seen in Alexandra Del Lago, alias Princess Kosmonopolis of Sweet Bird of Youth. Alexandra wanted to bask in the warmth of youth with the aid of Chance Wayne. "He represents the seamy side of the American dream. He means to take whatever he can snatch, he is the perpetual adolescent steeped in *gaudy illusions* of success and grandeur."²¹ (*italics mine*).

Chance Wayne had come to alleviate the chill of "loneliness" that made Heavenly shiver. Chance Wayne had no attraction for Lady at all. Alexandra del Lago too accepted the reality after uttering a few words, "Is Heavenly why we stopped here?... So I'm being used, why not?... Even a dead race horse is used to make a glue". (Sweet Bird of Youth, Act I, Scene II) But "sick envy" irked her, and made her sling one more comment on Heavenly, "Is she pretty?" On the contrary, Woman Downtown, in The Red Devil Battery Sign was madly in love with King Del Rey despite his family - wife Perla, daughter Nina. Surprisingly enough, King responded to her love and had been faithful to her. Neither of them could dream of exploiting the other, just for the sake of using the other to serve one's need. Woman Downtown declared brazenfacedly:

"Woman Downtown : Do you remember the night I first saw you ? My life began that night and going to *end* this one. Can you hear me, King? All I hear is your breath We have to go but, we have to go *together*."

(Act III, Scene II) (*italics mine*)

Both Chance Wayne (Sweet Bird of Youth) and King Del Rey (The Red Devil Battery Sign) were nursing ailment in them. The former had germs of venereal disease and the latter toted a brain tumour that might cause end to his life, at any moment. But the difference in their solicitousness for the women they cared, had been quite remarkable. In Sweet Bird of Youth Princess Kosmonopolis was anxious to see Chance

Wayne, after his departure to meet Heavenly Finley. Alexandra rushed to see Chance Wayne and proffered help in distress, though her “love” was not equally reciprocated. In Act II, Scene II, the dialogue between Princess and Chance Wayne brought to focus the indifference of Chance towards Princess :

“ Princess : There’s no one but me to hold you back from destruction in this place.

Chance : I don’t want to be held

Princess : *Don’t leave me*. If you do, I’ll turn into the monster again - I’ll be the first lady of the Beanstalk country.

Chance : Go back to the room.

Princess : I’m going nowhere *alone*. I can’t”(italics mine)

(Sweet Bird of Youth, Act II, Scene II)

But even after such fervid entreaties, Chance called a “wheel chair” for her and forced her to hold the “anonymous arms,” of the “Bellboy” and exist.

In The Red Devil Battery Sign, Woman Downtown hurriedly came to King’s help when he was in dire need of it, and King too saved Woman Downtown from the clutch of a stymied situation, even at the cost of his life. The Drummer, a hired assassin whom the Red Devil Battery Wing appointed, was paid handsomely for killing Woman Downtown. He followed her but lastly his efforts proved fruitless, as King rushed to her rescue. When the Drummer’s satanic attitude was revealed, King Del Rey could not help but kill him. When Woman Downtown accused the Drummer of tiptoeing close behind and molesting her, King Del Rey aimed his revolver at the Drummer and did not hesitate to kill him. Both of them responded to each other’s love.

The cry of “loneliness”, “search for togetherness”, “getting love and its

true reciprocation” seemed to be the need of the hour for both *Woman Downtown* and *Alexandra del Lago*. Sometimes we hear the voice of Blanche du Bois of *A Street Car Named Desire*, being echoed by *Woman downtown* of *The Red Devil Battery Sign* as unhinged by King’s death, she moaned over “King’s dead body”. While Wolf tiptoed and lifted her to her feet “she offered no resistance”. Moreover, in his supporting hold, she recognised or sensed something rightly appointed as her final fate. She frantically entreated : “Yes, you take me Away”(Act III, Scene III). A stoical abandon betokened tragic close of the play, The audience was miffed to draw a hazy conclusion to the whole affair.

Again, the concluding part of *The Red Devil Battery Sign* reminds us of *Suddenly Last Summer*. The furious gang of the urchins and their hilarious bustle and maddening action in the former play have resemblance to the description of the cannibals in *Suddenly Last Summer*.

In both the plays, *The Red Devil Battery Sign* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the paucity of the use of light, music and other novel stage-designs leave them impeccable, so far as the question of theatricality is concerned. So far as dramatic language is considered, *Sweet Bird of Youth* is much richer in complete sentences, poetical exuberance than *The Red Devil Battery Sign*. In the former part of Williams’s career the poetic lyricism reigned supreme, while the latter half is predominated by prosaic taciturnity.

The Glass Menagerie (1945) can be compared and contrasted with *The Two Character Play* (1975) a late play. Both Tom and Laura of *The Glass Menagerie* and Felice and Clare of *The Two Character Play* are victims of execrable loneliness. Felice and Clare are moral and emotional supports of each other, and like Tom and Laura, they have no Amanda to share their feelings, cry for their failings. “Their present imprisonment in the darkened theatre echoes their reclusive childhood, when they were entombed in a dark house, surrounded by sunflowers.”²² They have a “solitary, confined existence”.

their “bohemian” father shot their “strait-laced” mother, and then committed suicide. Thereafter, they stayed “trapped in a house”. Laura, Tom and Amanda were as solitary as Felice and Clare remained estranged from the world outside. Laura was thrown in dumps by Jim’s evening visit. Felice and Clare were driven to the edge of “neurosis” by the absence of their parents. They felt dejected, lonely. Jim O’Connor, the gentleman - caller left bidding adieu to Laura while shattering Amanda’s hopes. Laura tried to find solace in the lap of her mother. Perhaps, Laura’s neurosis took a sharp bend towards “neurotic need for love” as opined Dr. Karen Horney in her Neurotic Personality of our Time. (New York, 1935). Towards the end of the play, The Glass Menagerie, “we see as through sound-proof glass, that Amanda appears to be making a comforting speech to Laura, who is huddled upon the sofa.”

But, in The Two Character Play, inextricable web of loneliness and pangs of alienation drive Felice and Clare berserk and their neural failure tends to drive them to death. But a “come back penchant to life” and “inordinate desire to live the life” help them cling to each other, like Beckett’s Hamm and Clov in Endgame. The end of the play is full of theatrical stunts and wonders, though embedded in realism. Their conversation here seems to be starting and, imbued with “optimistic view of existence” at the same time:

“ (She quickly relieves the revolver from beneath the sofa cushion, and resolutely aims it at Felice, holding the revolver at arm’s length. There is a pause).

Felice (harshly) : Do it while you still can!

Clare (crying out) : I can’t!

(She turns convulsively away from him, dropping the revolver as if it had scorched her hand. As it crashes to the floor, Felice turns from the window,

his motion as convulsive as hers. Their figures are now almost entirely lost in dark but light touches their face).

”
 “Can you ?” (The Two Character Play, Act II)

Of course, they failed to succumb to the clasp of the last resort “Death”. Thus, the “hindrance towards living life” is nothing but the “centrifugal force” component which is automatically nullified by the equal and opposite “centripetal force” component, i.e. a “come-back attitude to life.” Amidst “confusion of existence”, “despair” “lack of faith”, “a search for hope” is noticed in Amanda’s words to Tom - “I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent, why then, you’ll be free to go wherever you please.” (The Glass Menagerie)

But, the pain of loneliness grips everyone of Williams’s The Glass Menagerie and The Two Character Play.

Williams’s The Glass Menagerie is a play about a family of three people who are trapped in a room. The play is set in St. Louis, Missouri, in the early 1940s. The characters are Amanda, Tom, and Laura. Amanda is a former socialite who is now a housewife. Tom is a young man who is bored with his job and wants to escape. Laura is a young woman who is physically disabled and is very shy. The play is a tragedy that ends with the death of Laura and Tom’s departure.

In The Glass Menagerie, an early play, the language is quite poetic, the playwright is here an artist in words. As we see, Amanda reminiscing her brilliant days of youth or Tom aspiring after a journey to the lunar realm, we are carried away by the rhetoric.

But the language of The Two Character Play is disjointed, monosyllabic, insipid and conversation among the characters is mostly edging towards silence (non-sequitur). We detect the same in a dialogue of Felice and Clare :

“Felice : Was that a sign of clearance ?

Clare : It was a sign of ability to go on with....

Felice : Customary habits.

Clare : An appearance of

(The Two Character Play Act II)

Williams might have followed “Nietzsche’s attitude to language, which is intimately bound up with what philosophers call his ‘perspectivism’. Perspectivism means here that for Nietzsche all perception is relative, because it takes in only the surface of things, their appearance, their apparent meaning. This is not because he thought like Plato, that things were pale representatives or copies of remote ideal things, he is simply saying that what we see and understand is not all there is to see and to understand. But this way of seeing is by definition limited, and therefore we have to ‘recognize untruth as a condition of life.’²³ And this is one of the reasons why Nietzsche thinks that words are not to be trusted. They can only describe what little of the world we can understand”.²⁴

From the point of theatricalism, too, there is a remarkable similarity in technique. In The Glass Menagerie, the “signifier” is the glow of light that centres upon the depressed countenance of Laura. While in The Two Character Play, the light is focussed upon Felice’s and Clare’s faces, leaving their bodies amidst darkness. The “signified”, here, are the “black” elements - “Confusion of existence” and “solitariness”.

Vieux Carre^l (1978) and The Glass Menagerie (1945) are both memory plays. But the late play lacks in dramatic conflict, “sense of insecurity” dampens the spirit of Laura Wingfield, Amanda Wingfield, and this sense irks Tom to escape the limits of this worldly barrier. A “sense of security” puffs up the Writer in the form of a vision, a vision of his grandmother, the “angel” keeps on visiting the “Writer” in moments of crisis or despair, “and when he no longer sees her”.

Even Williams works up a sense of the characters' confinement, - their confinements within their room as well as their entrapment of each other-is emphatically conveyed. Even then, a proffer of help strengthen their ties, as we see in Vieux Carre:

“ Tye : Now, Babe.

Jane : If you approach the bed -

Tye : Just want to comfort you, honey. Can't we just rest together ? Can't we ? Rest and comfort each other ?”

(Vieux Carre Part Two, Scene Nine)

In The Two Character Play, the “sense of confinement” annoys Clare who pines to “go out” :

“ Clare : I want to go out! Out, out, human outcry, I want to go out !

Felice comes by her side, she feels assured of a company, “Not alone!” she declared.

In The Glass Menagerie, Tom is aware of Laura and is reminded of the future. And in Vieux Carre, Mrs. Wire points out : “Be careful of future. Its long ways for the young. Some makes it and others get lost”. Writer here is more confident with a pat reply - “I know” (Vieux Carre, Part II, Scene XII). The meaning of existence is not romanticized or hazed with illusion like Tom's, but, clear and realistic. The positive note is *white*, not *black* . (italics mine)

“The play (Vieux Carre) is a monument to his (Writer's) survival and, he seems to have avoided being haunted by his youthful opacity, unlike Tom in The Glass Menagerie whose pain we feel, understand and identify with Vieux Carre is not redemptive in its thrust, for it seems to fix human, as doomed creatures and belies the existence of compassion as an element of human nature.”²⁵ In style too, it foreshadows the ghost

technique of Clothes for a Summer Hotel (1980).

The late play In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel (1969-70) may find its counterpart in the early play Suddenly Last Summer. In both the plays “the art and the artists are totally destructive.”²⁶ Mark in In the Bar of A Tokyo Hotel has been so engrossed in his canvas and creation that he cannot wrench himself from it. Sebastian Venable in Suddenly Last Summer can hardly extricate himself from the realm of poems and concentrate upon the mundane matters. In both the plays, the women are shook from within after the protagonists’s unusual demise.

Miriam in In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel promised to disown Mark, who yielded to the canvas and his art. She professed independence. But after the decease of Mark, she got transformed altogether and whimpered at the end of the play, “I have no plans. I have nowhere to go”. Even “with abrupt violence, she wrenches the bracelets from her arms and flings them to her feet”. (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel). Catharine Holly, in Suddenly Last Summer, after narrating the story of her cousin-poet Sebastian’s mysterious death to Doctor Cuckrowitz and Sebastian’s mother Mrs. Venable, had become maniac depressive. She was the sole witness to the brutal end to Sebastian’s life, but, she could not relate the fact to anyone. The traumatic experience as she expressed was : -

“When we got back to where my cousin Sebastian had disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows, he - he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won’t believe, nobody has believed it, nobody could believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don’t blame them! *The had devoured parts of him*” (Suddenly Last Summer, Scene IV). (italics mine)

George Niesen brilliantly indicates the watershed : “It is the victory of art over man, however, that separates the play In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel from the early ones and tends to align it with the late plays. Art for Mark becomes a virtual impossibility, and while Sebastian’s death is a rather *clear statement*, Mark’s death

results from his *inability to make a statement*.²⁴ (italics mine)

In The Bar of a Tokyo Hotel can also invite comparison with another early one-act play, "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix" (1941). Both are dramatic renditions of Williams's view on "a continuing preoccupation with the relationship and interdependence of life and art".²⁵ In I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix, the artist Lawrence while facing the close of his life in the Alpes Maritimes, had both Frieda his wife and Bertha (his spiritual companion) beside him. He drew sustenance from both "Bertha's cool understanding and Frieda's physical fire". (I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix) "In the end", he cried out, "there is going to be light - *Light, Light! Great light! - Great, blinding, universal light!* And I - I'm the *prophet* of it!" (I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix) (italics mine) Later, he toddled to the window, clutched his mouth and died.

In the late play, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel, Williams presented another portrait of a dying artist. Fatigued by his unstinting effort to achieve a breakthrough in his style of painting and being sure that his wife had broken with him, "Mark Conley gave up the struggle and died in the artificial light of an Americanized Cocktail bar in a still exotic land." (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel) Lawrence tried to captivate the world by his *art*, Mark did actually hold on to the *art-object* itself. He entered the bar with his clothes blotched with paint, and his wife, Miriam discovered him once "Crawling naked over a huge nailed-down canvas". His art failed to reflect life any more, it served as a mere substitute for it :

"I've understood the intimacy that should, that has to exist between the painter and the - I ! It! Now it turned to me or I *I turned to it, no division between us* at all any more! The oneness.. the...!"

In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel) (italics mine)

The reactions of the artists' wives to the demise of their husbands are

remarkable. In I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix, Frieda, at least, rushed to the breathless body of Lawrence solicitously. But Miriam being a woman of a late play, does not bother to cast a glance at the corpse of Mark. The words they utter at their husbands' death show remarkable difference between the wife of the early play (Frieda Lawrence) and that of the late one (Miriam Conley).

In I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix, Frieda at least, felt alarmed, when Lawrence was about to breathe his last :-

“ Frieda : Lawrence.

Bertha (terrified) : What is it ?

Frieda : The bleeding.” (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel).

Frieda allowed Lawrence to pass away peacefully and desisted Bertha from going near him. She kept Lawrence's last appeal :

“ Lawrence : Don't Touch me, you woman. *I want to do it alone (italics mine)* - Don't move till it's finished [Gradually as though forced down to the earth by invisible arms, he begins to collapse - his hands clutch onto the curtains - his knees collapse].

Bertha (struggling fiercely with Frieda) : Let me go, let me go, I want to go to him !

Frieda : Not yet, not yet - one moment! [His fingers let go. He slides to the floor. *He is lifeless*] (italics mine)

Frieda : (releasing the other woman) : Now - go to him

It's finished.” (Last scene, I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix)

Mark seems to echo Lawrence of the early play while approaching “Death”.

When Leonard touches his weak shoulder, he squeaks : “Don’t *touch* me - I can’t stand to be *touched*”. (*italics mine*) (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel)

But, Miriam of the late play (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel) had not been compassionate to her husband, Miriam’s behaviour might uphold a brilliant contrast to Frieda’s. Mark was eloquent over his last achievement and shouted at the top of his voice, “*I think I’ve done a painting ! I never did more than think I’d done so, you see Nobody even gave me a magnum or a quart or a baby’s bottle of confidence*” (*italics mine*).

He staggered and fell and collapsed. When the barman dragged the lifeless body of Mark, we are taken aback to hear Miriam saying :

“Miriam : Released ?

Leonard : Yes, he’s released from

Miriam : *I meant that I’m released* (*italics mine*).”

(In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel)

Histrionic marvels are almost absent in all the three plays mentioned above - Suddenly Last Summer, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel and I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix. The language of late plays is rationally disjointed, incomplete, sometimes drab. Backettian stints add to the de’cor of the dialogue of the late play like In the Bar of a TokoyoHotel, the incomplete sentences sometimes affect the continuity of the play. It appears to screech to a halt and, accelerate again. The dialogue between Mark and Miriam here, is an apropos :

“Mark (Slowly) : I’ve always approached my work, with a feeling of frightened timidity because the possibilities are -

Miriam : You are making an effort to explain a mystery that I.

Mark : The possibilities of a canvas that presents itself for.

Miriam : The assault of a madman. You're destroying.

Mark : I suppose I might say, it's.

Miriam : Crock

Mark : Adventure...

Mark : I'll

Miriam : You'll stay here with your work. (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel).

In the late plays, theatrical effects are conjured up more by acoustics than by lighting or any other histrionic devices e.g. gesticulations, laughter, buzz of wind etc. When Mark is about to breathe his last, the stage-direction runs : "His voice dies out, the wind chimes are heard." (In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel). Again when his corpse is carried out of the bar, the dramatist directs in parentheses : "They carry the body of Mark out of the bar, Miriam appears to see and feel nothing. Again, wind chimes are heard", to interrupt the conversation between Leonard and Miriam just after Mark Conley's demise. "Tinkling Chimes" too "are heard", while Leonard and Miriam are busy in conversing with each other.

In the early play, as in Suddenly Last Summer the use of lighting, music, colour is not profuse, not even sparse. In the opening scene, while giving an elaborate stage direction, Williams cannot lose sight of colour and sounds. "The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature"....(Suddenly Last Summer)

The jungle tumult continues a few moments after the curtain rises, then

subsides into relative quiet, which is occasionally broken by a new outburst. During the conversation between Doctor Cuckrowitz and Mrs Venable, “we hear faint music”, a stage-direction snippet being “The Encantadas music then fades in again, briefly at a lower level, a whisper.”(Suddenly Last Summer). Uses of “lyric music”, “jungle music”, “birds’ warble”, “cymbals’ percussion” are in abundance. Ingenuous use of light adds a dimension to the play, when Catharine Holly tends to narrate the incident of Sebastian’s brutal murder, to Doctor Cuckrowitz :

“ Doctor : Yes, and what did you do there ? (He still stands beside Mrs. Venable and the light gradually changes as the girl gets deeper into her story : the light concentrates on Catharine, the other figures sink into shadow).

Did anything happen there that disturbed you about it ? ”

(Suddenly Last Summer, Scene Four)

Language, too, is not disjointed, sentences are rarely incomplete and quite comprehensible.

An early play A Street Car Named Desire and a late play Kingdom of Earth are now in focus to see both the similarities and dissimilarities between them. Perhaps, this idea is supported by a comment. Much of the criticism - theatrical as well as textual has labelled Kingdom of Earth as a parody of Williams’s earlier work, especially A Street Car Named Desire. For Judith J. Thompson Kingdom of Earth is a “comic revision of A Street Car’s predominant tragic mode.”²⁴ The lines of comparison and contrast between these two plays have already been inculcated by Judith J. Thompson, as she says, “The play’s three characters - the vulgar, phallic Chicken, the disillusioned but resilient Myrtle (who prides herself on having always “kept my haid above water.”³⁰) and Lot the weak aspirant to Kingdom of Heaven are clearly the comic versions of A Street Car’s Stanley, Stella and Blanche respectively. Unlike Blanche, Lot is an essentially unsympathetic character-selfish, sexless and fully as depraved in his own way as Chicken Dressed in his mother’s gaudy white dress and a picture hat ... trimmed

with faded flowers, the transvestite Lot parodies Blanche du Bois. To Chicken, as to Stanley, ‘There’s nothing in the world, in the whole kingdom of earth, that can compare with one thing and that one thing is what’s able to happen between a man and a woman? Finally, Myrtle, like Stella, descends to corruption in order to survive, a descent which is at the same time a literal ascent (really a symbolic ascent) to life.’³¹

The points where these observations can be refuted are : Chicken is a cruel folly of Stanley Kowalski, though he is more diplomatic than Stanley. Stanley rapes Blanche, shatters all hopes of her wedlock with Mitch, and lastly accusing her of insanity, dumps her into a lunatic asylum. But, Chicken nullifies all traces of Lot’s existence, sanches Myrtle from his possession, the last straw Lot can catch hold of and swindles him. He broaches a natty solution to the problem of flood-rise to Myrtle. Myrtle being the counterpart of Stella, is a bit fool-hardy to reach the solution of getting along with Chicken even at the expense of Lot’s life. Stella, can not support Stanley wholeheartedly as her sister Blanche is being oppressed and cornered. Again, she has no other way but to stay with Stanley as it has been a year-long association, which no woman dares break off. She is a rung higher than Myrtle, where her feeble voice of alarm has rent the air :

“ Stella: Oh my god, Eunice help me : Don’t let them do that to her don’t let them hurt her ! Oh God, Oh please God, don’t hurt her! What are they doing to her ? What are they doing”?

(Scene Eleven, A Street Car Named Desire).

But the pitch of her voice is much drowned under the dire need for “security” when Myrtle is heard mumbling after Lot’s decease :-

“What I’m doin’, I don’t know, what I’m doin’ I” (Kingdom of Earth) Was it a matter of feeble protest or qualms of conscience ? Again, she quips in “Lot is?” Chicken’s pat reply is : “Isn’t”. Myrtle lacks in the courage to finish her sentence - “God

have mercy on my ...” (Kingdom of Earth).

In consideration of the theatrical techniques, and poetic language A Street Car named Desire (1947) ranks higher than Kingdom of Earth (1968). The use of music, other sounds and colour in A Street Car is a whopping triumph over the late play. As the play opens, “The Blue Piano” lilts and expresses the spirit of the life which went on there. The “rhumba music”, “honky-tonk music”, “paper-doll”, “Polka music”, “Varsouviana” have significance of their own, and when played in appropriate places they add extra meaning to the play itself. The riot of colours in different scenes being apt to the demand of the situation, elevates the play to a higher plane. Of course, the colours have unusual association with Stanley Kowalski. “Red” has a queer purport in the play. In Scene Two, Blanche comes out of the bathroom in a “red” satin robe and talks to Stanley gaily.

In Scene Three Mitch to whom Blanche is inclined puts on a red-and-white chequered shirt. But this red-colour, so far has proved to be the emblem of “love” and “harmony”. Tragic radiance in this play turns lurid, when Stanley pounces upon Blanche and rapes her in brilliant hued silk pyjamas. The light works wonder in the rape-scene (Scene X), when Stanley approaches the bedroom, and “Blanche got blanchéd in fear.” (A Street Car Named Desire) The stage direction given here is : “Lurid reflections appear on the walls around Blanche. The shadows are of a grotesque and menacing form”. Again, as she trudges to the phone and asks the operator to help her contact Shep Huntleigh, a man she waits for, the lighting makes audience veer their attention to “the shadows and lurid reflections” moving “sinuously as flames along the wall spaces”. “Blue Piano”, the bass and treble of the music are, no doubt, suggestive. Cries and noises of the jungle are symbolic. “Use of light” impresses the connoisseur when Blanche enters Stella’s ménage walking close at her heels. There stage-design as mentioned goes : “She gets up and opens the downstairs door. A light goes on behind the blind, turning it light-blue. Blanche slowly follows her into the downstairs flat. The surrounding areas dim out as

the interior is lighted.” (A Street Car Named Desire) Even Blanche talks in a high-flown poetic language in Scene Four where she talks to Stella about her husband, Stanley :

“ Blanche : Yes, something apelike about him, like one of the pictures I’ve seen in - anthropological studies ! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is - Stanley Kowalski - survivor of the stone age ! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle ! And you - you here waiting for him !” (Scene Four, A Street Car Named Desire).

But Kingdom of Earth runs short of innovative use of light, colour, music, etc. Even the language smacks of hackneyed vocabulary, with no touch of poeticity. Chicken, Myrtle, Lot all have down-to-earth attitude towards life. Even when Lot reminisces on her mother’s memories, he hardly sounds poetic :

“ Lot : The Chandelier is crystal, but, the pendants are dusty, they’ve got to be all taken down, one by one dipped in hot, soapy water. Then rinsed in a bowl of clear water, then dried off with soft tissue paper and hung back up.”
(Act I, Scene I, Kingdom of Earth)

Myrtle seems to have only one mission in life i.e. “to find security” and that goal leads her to put up with all odds. Even, after the demise of Lot, she feels secure with sinister Chicken. She says - “I pray for *protection* and right now I feel like that prayer is going to be answered”.
(Act II, Scene III, Kingdom of Earth)

The plays for reconsideration are Something Unspoken (1953) and A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur (1978). The relationship between two ladies in respective plays is our immediate concern. In Something Unspoken Grace Lancaster is a woman of forty or forty-five, nearly fifteen years younger than Miss Cornelia Scott, her employer. Grace carries out all her orders sincerely, though “there is between the two women a mysterious tension, an atmosphere of something unspoken.” (Something Unspoken) . In A Lovely

Sunday for Creve Coeur too, we get a pair of ladies sharing an apartment - Dorothea, a marginally youthful but attractive woman and, Miss Bodenheifer (Bodey) an early middle-aged woman. They have compassion and understanding for each other.

In the early play, Something Unspoken Miss Cornelia Scott is avid to know the result of the election-meeting of "Confederate Daughters" at Mrs. Horton Reid's residence. She prefers to remain aloof by being absent from the hustings. Her secretary, Miss Grace Lancaster, is receiving the phone-calls on her behalf, and Cornelia likes to talk to Miss Esmeralda Hawkins, who has gone to the election-meeting.

While Cornelia's nerves rack to the point of snapping, Miss Grace tries to comfort her, with a certain twitch in every word, she utters - Miss Cornelia too can smell rat in the election-meeting, she anticipates some sneaky movements going on against her, in the club. She tries to build forces to oppose it. "Grace retorts: 'Your forces?' and, her lips twitched slightly as if she had an hysterical impulse to smile." (Something Unspoken). Cornelia feels that a strain of jealousy or of inferiority complex syndrome builds walls between her and Grace Lancaster. Even when, Cornelia wants to share some intimate moments with her, her efforts fail her. Grace admits to her utter dismay, that, Cornelia's possession of wisdom wealth and fortune has placed her superior to herself. So, she prefers "silence" to communication. After a long wait, Mrs. Hornsby's name is announced as the elected "Regent" in lieu of Miss Scott. As Miss Scott decides to resign from the amoral association, the reaction of Grace is worth noticing :

"Grace leaves the table ... just at the edge of the lighted area, she turns to glance Cornelia's rigid shoulders and a slight, equivocal smile appears momentarily on her face, not quite malicious, but not really sympathetic. Then she crosses out of the light. A moment later her voice comes from the outer dark.

Grace : What lovely roses ! One for every year."

(Something Unspoken)

Grace seems to be grateful to the “beautiful roses”, for it stands as a symbol of shattered dreams of her proud mistress.

On the other hand, in A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur, the relationship between Miss Bodey and Miss Dorothea is laudable. Unlike Grace Lancaster, Miss Bodenheifer is less sentimental, quite adapted to the situation, and, she has no such temperamental tantrums which Grace(Something Unspoken) always had. When Bodey comes to know that Dorothea has a crush on T. Ralph Ellis, the lewd principal of Blewett School, she does not hesitate to warn Dotty (Dorothea). Moreover, she scissors off the newspaper clipping where Ellis’s wedding news is emblazoned. Thus, she proves to be a real friend to Dotty.

Even, Bodey does not force Dorothea to get along with her brother “Buddy” against her will. But, on a lovely Sunday when Buddy and she plan for a picnic, everything goes haywire on Helena’s coming with an overture to Dorothea for sharing another apartment with her :

“ Dorothea : Bodey, you know I’m sorry to disappoint your plans for Creve Coeur picnic, but you must realise..... I can’t allow this well-meant design of yours to get me involved with your brother to go any further.

Bodey : Well, I did fry up three chickens and I boiled a dozen eggs, but well that’s....

But I really was hoping....

expecting (Tears appear in Bodey’s large childlike eyes).”

(A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur Scene II)

However, when truth dawns upon Dorothea and she reads the “crumpled paper”, collecting it from the waste-basket, announcing the engagement of Mrs. Constance

Finley to Mr. T. Ralph Ellis, she shrugs off her conceit, turns down Helena's request to shift to Westmoreland apartment and decides to join Bodey and her brother Buddy, on picnic. The last scene of the play evinces a "come-back attitude to life," an "acceptance of reality". She picks up the phone and says,

"Dorothea : Creve Coeur car-line station ? Look , on the platform in a few minutes will be a plumpish little woman with a big artificial flower over one ear and a stoutish man with her, probably with a cigar. I have to get an important message to them. Tell them that Dotty called and has decided to go to Creve Coeur, with them after all so will they please wait. [..... she begins to sob as she hangs up the phone]"

(Scene Two, A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur)

Here unlike Cornelia of Something Unspoken, Dorothea herself prefers a pledge of "meaningful bondage" to Bodey without waiting for her turn to be compassionate to her. Of course, the underlying tension of envy and rancour that sours Cornelia - Grace relationship in Something Unspoken is totally absent in Dorothea - Bodey nexus. In both the plays, the language, stage design, use of music, light, colour are so usual and common that they need no special mention.

However, Judith J. Thompson brings forth a comparison between A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur and A Street Car Named Desire. "The ethereal Dorothea resembles another comic version or caricature of Blanche du Bois, while Bodey, like Stella, serves as her earthly antithesis. Accordingly, Blanche's romantic tragedy approaches parody as retold by Dorothea said to suffer from a "Southern Belle" complex. Dorothea like Blanche, insists that, 'without romance in my life, I could no more live than I could without breath'."²

Talk to me like the rain and let me listen is a short play written in 1946-1947, the setting being mid-town Manhattan. It bears some points of similarities and

dissimilarities with a late play Period of Adjustment (1961). The early play seems to be a piece of poem where a man goes out on work and gets time to talk to the woman on a Sunday. When asked by the man, "What have you been thinking in silence, while I've been passed around like a dirty postcard in this city? Tell me, talk to me! Talk to me like the rain and I will lie here and listen", the woman replies, "I want to go away". The man asks: "How?" "Alone!" woman retorts. (Talk to me like the rain and let me listen)

The woman feels pestered by the feeling of loneliness, wants to break all ties, all social bondages and have resort to a hotel where she'll turn a blind eye to the passage of time. At the same time, she'll watch her hair growing grey to hoary, her weight slumping down, and other changes time might cause to her. The man calls her but she being in a brown study goes on muttering - "I want to go away! I want to go away!" Lastly, her ire ends in responding to his call to bed. She seems to be Zelda Fitzgerald (Clothes for a Summer Hotel), Serafina (The Rose Tattoo), Frieda Lawrence (I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix) all rolled into one. She, of course, makes a positive and timely return from the horizon, she scaled so high.

In Period of Adjustment (1961) Isabel is left in Ralph Bates's apartment by her newly wedded husband George Haverstick. She waits for him to turn back. But Ralph had a squabble with her wife, Dorothea, who went off in a huff. Unlike "Woman" of the early play Talk to me like the Rain and let me listen, Dorothea fails to ease off her relation with her husband, until Isabel their friend intervenes. But, "Woman" has to shun her poetic dream of "going away" and "stay back" in the loving arms of her husband. Dorothea, too, comes back to Ralph bidding a farewell to her parents. Like "Woman" of the early play, Talk to me like the rain and let me listen, she in a refined tone says: "All right I sent them home, much against their (parents) objection. I just slammed the car-door on them". Just a few moments back, Isabel makes Ralph understand;

" Ralph : She came back for the fur coats.

Isabel : I think *she came back for you.*

Ralph : She *walked out on me* this morning, because I had liberated myself from a slave's situation ! and she took the kid with her.

Isabel : You're just going through a *period of adjustment*?.... (italics mine)

(Act III, Period of Adjustment)

Thus, strengthening the connubial bondage is the aim of both the plays. The early play is much poetic in thought and language, the late one consists of dialogue of day-to-day existence, somewhat jejune, lacking in charm, poetic touch or any high-flown aura.

This property is condemned (1947) is an early play, that can bring "mendacity" to be the measure for comparison with Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Maggie in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof announces herself "pregnant". But it is a whopping lie. No doubt, it is the demand of the time. This property is condemned, too, displays a lie that is innocent. When Alva, the only sister of Willie is about to breathe her last, she wants to get her lovers around her.

Alva lastly, dies of lung infection. Willie's Mama eloped with a brakeman. Her father took to drinking. The family dwindled to shambles. Alva's lovers left her, to quote Willie in verbatim ... "Like rats from a sinking ship! That's how she used to describe it. O, it - wasn't like death in the movies". (This Property is Condemned). But Willie had to boost her drooping spirits up by declaring their (lovers') presence. He says - "I used to *lie* to her". Tragically enough, she was beware of his "mendacity". No doubt, that is a healthy way to keep a dying person happy and alive. In Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, Willie Loman used to lie nonchalantly. But, that was not harmless, rather that inflicted harm upon his sons, and ruined himself altogether.

In gamut, the comparison of the early with the late plays is an attempt to bring the points where they coincide with each other or deflect from each other. "Come back attitude of life", "acceptance of reality", "voice of protest of women," "longing for togetherness" are non-black elements which dominate the late (Non-black) plays. These sterling qualities were not much pronounced in early (Black) plays. "Sex", "violence," "cannibalism", "mendacity" blur our vision. Anyway, Williams's The Interior of the Pocket is the poem in apropos, to draw in support of "Non-Black" plays :

"The very small animals nudge one another at night,

As though to whisper we're close!

There is still no danger."

It's a Williamsian oracle to keep us fearless in a peril - ridden society where we are prone to all "Black" snares. He stresses 'joie de vivre' in an otherwise hollow ambience. No doubt, "Janus-faced" Williams makes us acquainted with both the "Black" and the " Non-Black" faces of the world.

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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 :

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 of 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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