A Study of Characters in the Works of Tennessee Williams

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A STUDY OF CHARACTERS
IN THE WORKS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Every artist has a basic premise pervading his whole life... and that premise can provide the impulse to everything he creates. For me the dominating premise has been the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances.1

Tennessee Williams is a contemporary author whose themes are extremely controversial. Among the questions concerning his works are whether he is a poetic dramatist or a sensational and bizarre writer who vulgarizes sex; whether he is a defeatist or a pessimist; and whether he deals with individuals or universals. This thesis is not concerned with these questions, because the writer believes that Williams has made a major contribution to drama. He has delineated the private world of frustrated, maladjusted, and weak individuals; and, by laying bare their weaknesses and fears, Williams has given his audience opportunity to recognize, pity, and understand those who cannot escape their sordid existences. He believes that "Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence."2 Although he asserts that "truth is fragmentary,"3 he optimistically maintains that "men pity and love each other more than they permit themselves to know."4 Williams asserts that

1Tennessee Williams, Quoted in Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXXIII (February 16, 1948), 116.


3Ibid., p. viii.

4Ibid., p. ix.
through sympathy, understanding, and love, the stronger persons can
aid the weaker ones who are too insecure and lonely to devise solu-
tions for their problems.

Williams is concerned with specific aspects of the sensitive
individual and his weaknesses. He exaggerates bizarre behavior and
exposes the repressions of extremely weak and unhappy persons. He
urges his audience to view itself and to find sympathy and understand-
ing for the degenerates who are too deeply involved within themselves
to see outside themselves. His characters cannot understand their
limitations; this is necessary to lead to understanding of themselves
within their environment. His characters are victims of their own
inabilities to comprehend life and their positions in life. Each of
them seeks solace in his shortcomings, but cannot realize or face what
his shortcomings are. Williams explores the problems of the sensitive
personalities, and he strives to portray that which will enable man
to have a better understanding of individual aberrations. He wants
the viewer to feel sympathy for the weak persons caught in the web of
frustration. He does not suggest that the solutions made by the mis-
guided persons are satisfactory answers to their problems; but he
shows that these are answers that particular individuals have made,
because they knew no other answers.

Williams writes about sensitive persons who are confused by
the harshness of what they consider to be reality. His people need
illusion, as Blanche, in A Streetcar Named Desire, explains:

I'll tell you what I want. Magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to
give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't
tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!—Don’t turn the light on!}

Tom Wingfield, in The Glass Menagerie, suggests that reality does not exist merely in the truth of appearance and underlying actuality.

What may be real for one may be illusion for another:

Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.

According to Williams, illusion is more than the condition of deception by false appearances; it may be also a reality, because an individual’s perception and misconception can change reality. Because sensitive persons are acutely responsive to particular conditions, they may not react logically or coherently. And, if reality is too harsh, they may seek to escape from it completely. Few accept complete illusion; but, on the other hand, Williams agrees with T. S. Eliot—"Humankind cannot bear very much reality." Consequently, a union of illusion and reality becomes the most satisfactory solution for existence. This solution is found in Williams’ first major play, Battle of Angels, and also in its revision, Orpheus Descending.

It is significant to note that Williams spent seventeen years revising and refining Battle of Angels, because it concerns a central

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theme of illusion which he wanted to clarify for himself. Also, the characters of this play may be regarded as the archetypes for all the major characters of his other works. There are, of course, various changes; but, basically, one finds a similarity in personality and circumstances. Sometimes there is a fusion of two characters into one. Moreover, there is a sharp division between the insensitive persons and the sensitive ones. The sensitive are obsessed with finding something to hold them to other human beings, who can then give them a reason for being. In addition, the sensitive people lack the ability to communicate in a conventional manner, and they lack insight into their capabilities. They seek release from their frustrations. Some turn to complete escape through insanity or death; others turn to the partial escape of neuroses; and some, finding no escape from truth, face actual reality. The insensitive persons have a reasoning power which gives them a control over the less-reasoning minds. They do not understand the irrational behavior, and, furthermore, use the sensitive persons to gain their own satisfaction. There is a recurrent contrast of the sensitive persons with the insensitive throughout the words of Williams.

Williams' view of the insensitive man is less elusive than his view of the sensitive one. The bold and the self-sufficient members of society do not take time to question themselves of their society. They are not disturbed by reality and responsibility, nor concerned with what others feel about them. They are not frustrated, because they are not compulsive; what they have, they accept. They do not fight against wrongs or injustices, but accept blindly. They have no
compassion for sensitive persons, because they do not understand them. They are not adverse to torturing the weak people by ignoring them or using them.

The insensitive persons could gain friendship from those they disdain and use. The sensitive ones could gain assistance from those who have strength. Instead there is a conflict, because neither type understands the other.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the character-types with which Williams is vitally concerned. His are individuals trapped by circumstances. Each has a conflict of illusion with reality. Since Battle of Angels is the first work to include all four sensitive archetypes and the incipient view of the insensitive persons, this play is discussed at length.

Chapter I includes a short synopsis of the play in order that characters in relationship with their actions can be fully developed. All four major protagonists are sensitive individuals, but they have different reasons for being so. Since their frustrations are derived from similar basic needs, it is necessary to show how each reacts differently. No one central character is portrayed as the insensitive man in this play. However, with the exception of the four protagonists, the remaining persons fall into this category. A study of them is included, because they serve as an important contrast with the sensitive persons. A more extensive investigation of the sensitive persons is presented, because Williams is mainly concerned with them. The motivating forces behind Williams' lonely, insecure, repressed, and frustrated people are explained. And, since Williams
prefers to deal with the sensational aspects of human behavior, this writer shows the actions to which his characters respond.¹

Chapter II shows a relationship between the protagonists in Battle of Angels and those met in the remaining short stories, one-act plays, and major plays. (The poetry is not included.) The characterizations vary; but the problems, overt actions, decisions or personalities remain closely identified with the principal archetypes. No chronological order has been followed in placing the following works. Instead, order is established through Williams’ progression towards full definition of each archetype.

To date, there have been few satisfactory analyses of the works of Tennessee Williams. William J Fisher's doctoral dissertation, "Trends in Post-Depression American Drama,"² a study of the American drama during the 1940's, is restricted to an investigation of Tennessee Williams, William Saroyan, Irwin Shaw, and Arthur Miller as products of a decade of protest against the dominant standards of materialism and success. Fisher feels that these authors speak out for the individual, and that they denounce commercialism, mass production, insensitivity to art and to the individual spirit in the middle-class society. While Fisher’s study of trends is astute and

¹No attempt is made to show Williams as a product of his own obsessions. Although he writes about perversions of nymphomania, dyspsomania, homosexuality, masochism, sadism, and mental degeneracy, this does not mean that he is exposing himself to scrutiny by curious readers who can then delight in assuming that Williams is an advocate of perversion.

informative, his analysis of Williams' individual plays is superficial and slight. Williams is not studying people in class structures. He chooses to explain why the different persons react to the same situation in different ways. He shows in corresponding stories, poems, and plays that there are many possibilities for solutions. Fisher's categorization of Williams' works by sociological trends ignores Williams' concern with an individual's deviation from the conventional pattern.

Nancy Marie Patterson's doctoral dissertation, "Patterns of Imagery in the Major Plays of Tennessee Williams," concentrates upon the images found in his major works, makes no attempt to relate the images to the themes or central ideas. Miss Patterson suggests the patterns of conflicts found in his characters, but she gives no full explanation. In the course of her dissertation, Miss Patterson does summarize Williams' world as one of pessimism. This paper is indebted to her for her many insights into background material and for her extensive analysis of Williams' symbolism.

Constantine N. Stavrou's article, "The Neurotic Heroine in Tennessee Williams," argues that all the major heroines (Alma, Laura, Bianche, Serafina, Myra, Matilda, and Mrs. Stone) are basically the same women, observed at different stages of regressive neurosis. Also, Stavrou, like Fisher, attempts to generalize the characters into

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1Nancy Marie Patterson, "Patterns of Imagery in the Major Plays of Tennessee Williams" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of English, University of Arkansas, 1957).

universals. Both feel the characters are personifications of mechanical industrialism. This would appear to be more simple than Williams intended, because he deals with individuals and individual problems and solutions. No character is a symbol for the degenerate world, the frayed society, the overworked layman, or—as Stavrov concludes—the decayed South. To be sure, Williams places most of his works in the South; but he does so only because that is the part of the United States he has known so well since childhood and has loved after many adventures in many parts of this country and Europe. Stavrov's understanding of clinical psychology has been helpful in the present discussion of the motivations and manifestations of frustrations which are discussed at length in Chapters I and II.

Williams is neither a psychologist nor a sociologist. His approach to character is poetic rather than scientific. He argues that love and partial reality can smooth the lonely, short existence for the sensitive persons who are repressed or inhibited, uncommunicative or introverted, and insecure or unaccepted. But Williams laments that few people find the love which they need. He finds that too many people remain rejected outcasts of society.
CHAPTER I

BATTLE OF ANGELS: INTERPRETATION AND CHARACTER STUDY

Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years in fact? Well, nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call Orpheus Descending. On its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop.

But beneath that now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them, a difference represented by the four major protagonists of the play, and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quagmire.1

In conveying to his audience the need for a better understanding of man's needs, Williams sympathetically displays the individual aberrations. Williams feels that people who understand can help the weaker ones to find a more comfortable existence. If a person's needs are left unfulfilled, then he is twisted out of nature. Those who are the archetypes of unfulfilled individuals, for Williams, are first seen in Battle of Angels. In this play, only one of his sensitive characters is able to see through his problems. No one is able to solve his satisfactorily. Some are unable to understand their problems, because they do not see what the problems are. Others are not aware that problems exist. Insensitive and uncomprehending members of society prevent others from coping with their frustrations. The title

of the play exposes the conflict of sensitive man fighting against his own problems and misconceptions. The play further develops a battle of sensitive persons with other sensitive ones, and sensitive with insensitive. Those in conflict are hardly Angels. They are poor, lost neurotics whose needs are small and unostentatious. Williams does not belittle them; he strives to show how their problems are magnified within their own misguided world. And he poignantly urges his audience to sympathize with them.

There are four protagonists in *Battle of Angels*—Valentine /Val/ Xavier, Myra Torrance, Cassandra /Sandra/ Whiteside, and Vee Talbott. Each of them is an extremely sensitive person, but each has different reasons for being so. Those who are insensitive include the other ten characters in the cast. It is interesting to note that the insensitive persons are less clearly defined. They are not necessarily bad people, but they are vulgar, crude, and uncomprehending.

Williams' view of life is clearly set forth in *Battle of Angels*. The battle occurs in a Mercantile Store in the very small and old-fashioned town of Two Rivers, Mississippi. The action centers around Valentine (Val) Xavier, who is a kind, quiet, and sensitive young man of about twenty-five years of age. He has wandered into the town in an attempt to find employment. Through the kindness of Vee Talbott, whose husband is the local sheriff, Val secures sleeping space for the night. Vee plans to help him procure a job at Jabe Torrance's "Mercantile" store. She knows that Jabe is dying of cancer and that his wife, Myra, needs help with the customers and heavy work. Jabe is an evil, selfish, and loathsome bigot who has married
Myra out of some perversity. He knows that she has been in love with a wealthy young man who rejected her in order to marry a wealthy girl. Jabe has aided in the destruction of Myra's father and his vine gardens, the Moon Lake Casino. The casino has been the gathering place for all the young couples, married or unmarried, who sought to escape from their daily drudgery. At the casino they could drink and dance in a dark and romantic river setting. Myra is a worn-out and rejected woman who is resigned to a sterile life. She has borne no children; the only place she has loved, the Moon Lake Casino, has been burned down by the townspeople because of her father's generosity in admitting Negroes as well as white people. Cassandra (Sandra) Whiteside has also been thwarted in her ambitions. However, while Myra is much like a piece of dry goods sitting on the shelves in her store, Cassandra fights back. She becomes talkative, extroverted, and promiscuous.

Each of the women, Myra, Vee, and Sandra, is attracted to Val. Myra has been devoid of any comfort from sensitive persons. Her husband is crude and coarse. He hates life and gives vent to his disagreeable attitude by torturing Myra. The townsmen are crude and vulgar like her husband. They contribute nothing stimulating in their narrow and dull lives. The prattling women of Two Rivers have nothing to talk about, so they malign each other. Their gossip includes vilification of Myra. She has only her memories of the casino and the good times she had there before its fire. Striving to be busy and happy, she attempts to construct a paper rendition of the casino in her store confectionery. When Val enters town, she realizes that he
is also a possibility for bringing her back to life. Because of her propriety, she fights against her desires for his companionship; but she does not succeed.

Vee is a painter of very peculiar pictures; she calls them Apostles, but they look like men around town. Her husband, as sheriff, has the opportunity to bully and torment his prisoners. Vee cannot tolerate his delight in doing so. The prisoners write pornographic words on the walls and draw obscene pictures. This also distresses her. Vee cannot tolerate the vulgarity of those with whom she comes in contact. In order to escape from the realities of her restricted life, she turns to religious painting. She paints the Church of the Resurrection as she sees it—with a red steeple. Her hopes for a change in her environment are as ironic as the name of the church she paints. She has longed for the "Vision" so that she can have the opportunity to paint Christ's head. A subconscious attraction to Val is shown when she misconstrues seeing him as the long-awaited visitation of Christ. From her "Vision," she paints a portrait of Val. It is another omen of Vee's continued subjection and unhappiness.

Sandra compares herself with Val.

... You--savage. And me--aristocrat. Both of us things whose license has been revoked in the civilized world. Both of us equally damned and for the same good reason. Because we both want freedom. Of course, I knew you were better than me. A whole lot better. I'm rotten. Neurotic. Our blood's gone bad from too much interbreeding. They've set up the guillotine, not in the Place de Concorde, but here, inside our own bodies!1

1Ibid., p. 161.
Sandra’s family belonged to the aristocratic south, but their fortune has diminished. She is searching for something, but she does not know what. Like Val, she keeps moving around, only meeting with strangers, wanting to belong somewhere, but always feeling as if she must run. She makes love with any available man but cannot find pleasure. But she feels that one must "catch at whatever comes near you with both hands, until your fingers are broken!"1

None of these characters understands his search, nor does he find gratification. Val does not want to be connected with any of the women. Although he makes Myra pregnant and feels that he loves her, he insists upon his freedom. He wants to return to the desert. Sandra continues to drive her car at fast speed through various parts of the country. Finally, she runs the car over a bridge. Ve continues to paint her peculiar pictures, accepting various townsmen for the apostles. But Val does not escape to freedom. Jabe realizes that an affair has developed between his wife and his helper. Rather than allow his wife to have any vestige of happiness, he accuses Val of stealing and calls everyone to help him catch the thief. Although Jabe is awaiting death, he refuses to allow Myra to live. She is shot in the stomach, where, for the first time she has felt life. On Good Friday, Val is burned in final atonement for being. He must expiate the sin of being sensitive. It appears that the insensitive townsmen’s sacrifice of a sensitive person shows their need of a scapegoat to give vent to their resentment of sensitivity. They have

1Ibid., p. 216.
a false excuse to kill him. Val suffers the consequences. Glorified
as a Christ figure, he dies as a martyr. Jabe's domination continues
to be stronger even in his dying days.

The play ends unhappily for all the protagonists. Dwelling
in an insensitive society of daily disillusionment, each is torn from
his cherished ideals and aspirations.

To show that archetypes in Williams' early play frequently
reoccur in the major plays, it is necessary to note the dis-
tinction among the sensitive types. With the exception of Stanley
Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire, all Williams' major char-
acters are insecure persons who lack direction from stronger ones.
Complexity is added in later works when combinations of traits from
two or more persons from the original play are fused within one
character.

The four major protagonists are distinct types of sensitive
personalities. They are distinct in two ways. Each responds dif-
ferently to the insensitive society and to other sensitive persons.
And each has a different view of reality.

Val cannot distinguish between illusion and reality. Further-
more, he is incapable of learning from past experiences. Consequently,
he is caught in a web of unceasing frustration. Many times, other
sensitive persons have offered him love as a relief from his isola-
tion. He misconstrues love as entanglement and rejects it. Yet he
wishes to communicate. It is through his own lack of logic and per-
ceptivity that he is defeated. His help must come from other per-
sons. Myra urges him to realize that their love is reality and that
his escape into the desert alone could not bring him happiness. With matters not contingent upon his own problems, he sees more clearly and can evaluate more logically. He sees Vee's needs for friendship, and he gives her that which he can. He understands Sandra's compulsions but refuses to be involved. He recognizes Myra's capacity for tenderness; but, since she projects this upon him, he accepts only temporarily and then rejects it. This is, again, evidence that when he is involved, he cannot distinguish between illusion and reality.

Val is a thirty-year-old wanderer seeking to write his Book of Truth. Wandering from town to town, existing by working at odd-jobs, he becomes tired of moving around and "being lonesome and only meeting with strangers."¹ He tries to belong somewhere so that he can "live like regular people."² Unfortunately, wherever he goes, he seems to bring trouble with him. When boarding with an oil-field superintendent and his wife in Waco, Texas, Val was forced to leave his job as a grease-monkey. The wife of the superintendent seduced him, and he was revolted. When he told her, afterwards, that he wanted no relations with her and that he was leaving Texas, she informed the police that she had been raped. She did not want to lose him, but he drove his jalopy out of Texas before she could reach him. By the time he reached Two Rivers County, Mississippi, the Wanted signs were pasted in all the public buildings. He was the victim of a situation in which he was not guilty. The woman had come to his

¹Ibid., p. 165.
²Ibid., p. 165.
room and seduced him. She was lonely and wanted Val. He was lonely and searching, but he knew that he did not want to be involved in an affair with someone else's wife.

Unwittingly, he again becomes involved with women when he arrives in the small southern town, Two Rivers County. On his first night Val encounters Vee Talbott. She wants to become his protector. She wants to help him gain employment. Then she wants to purify his soul at her church. Cassandra Whiteside is a lewd exhibitionist "with an instinct for self-destruction." She immediately sizes him up as a male stud and proceeds to take him for a ride in her car. Vee paints his picture, mistaking his appearance for a vision of Christ. Myra needs someone to love. She fights against her attraction for Val, but she later succumbs and becomes pregnant. As does the woman from Waco, Myra becomes possessive. When he tries to leave town, when threatened by the men, Myra is determined to go with him. Even the giggly high school girls come into the store to try on shoes so that they can have him touch their feet. The women are infatuated with Val's physical attractiveness. He becomes to them a substitute gratification as they cling to him in their frustrations and lack of fulfillment.

The men, too, find in Val a scapegoat for their own inadequacies. "Some red-neck peckerwood with a nighthun edjication's tellin' us how we oughta run our niggers!" they insist. The men

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1Ibid., p. 161.
2Ibid., p. 186.
assume that he is trying to reform the South in its racial segregation because he protects a Negro, Loon, from the bigoted brutes who want to put him in prison as a vagrant. Val employs Loon as his guitar teacher and also gives him $10.00 in payment for the guitar so that Loon cannot be imprisoned for being penniless and irresponsible. The men use any slim opportunity they can to torment Negroes. They are determined to show their white superiority. In a small town such as Two Rivers County, there is very little amusement. Yet, the people are suspicious of any new intruders who might think differently from them. Since Val is kindly towards people and not so rigid as they are, he is immediately suspect.

There are individual men who also have personal prejudices against Val. Sheriff Talbott, a cruel and merciless jailer, does not understand justice. He receives pleasure through tormenting his prisoners. Knowing that his wife vicariously escapes from the knowledge of their mistreatment by turning to religious fanaticism, and knowing that she has found comfort in a friendship with Val, the Sheriff tries to find a way to make Val suffer. Val makes no ungentlemanly advances towards Vee, but the Sheriff accuses him of doing so in order to force him to leave Two Rivers. The Sheriff appears to dislike any warm relationships that might develop between people. He is a tyrant who wants to keep his weak wife subjugated to his commands.

Jabe Torrance is another insensitive man who enjoys making other people miserable. Between Val and Jabe’s wife, Myra, a friendship has developed. Both need someone to love in order to avoid
loneliness; they find their lives endurable by having each other. Although Jabe has never loved his wife, has aided in burning her father's orchard across from Moon Lake, and has caused her father's death, he refuses to give her any peace or happiness. Jabe hates his wife, and he certainly refuses to allow her to receive love from Val. In addition, he causes more destruction by falsely accusing Val of robbing the store and murdering his wife. Actually, Jabe deliberately shoots her in the stomach. Then, he arouses the townsmen to riot against Val. All of them burn Val to death.

Val is misunderstood by everyone. He is a simple man in need of love and kindness. He wants to find a town where he can settle down and find his niche, but skeptical people do not want sensitive persons around them. They do not understand sensitive people and are suspicious and resentful of anyone who tries to seek anything other than what he already has. Val dies, rejected but undefiled, lonely and uncomprehending. He had learned early in life that he was destined to loneliness, but he continued to search for something. He admits to Myra that:

... nobody ever gets to know anybody. ... We're all of us locked up tight inside our own bodies. Sentenced—you might say—to solitary confinement inside our own skins.1

Myra is the most rational of the protagonists. She recognizes illusion for what it is. She also sees reality for what it is, but tries to escape from it, by building illusions. She knows that she cannot recapture the romance of the Orchard at Moon Lake Casino, but

1Ibid., p. 166.
she attempts to build a paper copy in her Confectionery. It is through the efforts of outside sources that Myra is thwarted. The insensitive persons tear down her character, her romance, and finally, her life. Even the sensitive persons about her help destroy her.

Sandra tries to take Val away from her; Vee causes dissension between Val and her Jabe; and Val rejects Myra's attachment. Myra is short of what little illusion she tries to build.

Myra has lived in Two Rivers County since her father brought her from Italy when she was a child. The community has been against her and her father since their arrival, because her father was a striving romanticist trying to bring happiness into a few tired lives by creating the Orchard across from Moon Lake. There, they danced, drank and made love; their cares were left in Two Rivers. When "the Wop" was discovered serving liquor to the Negroes, the white people rebelled and burned the casino with him in it. With the loss of her father, the casino, and her lover, Myra felt as if she were dead. But still clinging to life, she married Jabe Torrance, a ruthless, selfish, and cruel dry goods entrepreneur.

Despite Myra's being the victim of people around her, she has a relentless will to find happiness. Although her husband is dying, she continues to work hard for the opening before Easter. When Vee Talbott brings Val to the store to seek employment, Myra, at first, hesitates to hire him. Myra realizes that there is something peculiar about Val; she also is attracted to him. Later, she clings to him as a last vestige of hope for a reason for being.
Just as the little fig tree in Myra's backyard was believed to be barren, Myra felt that she, too, was barren. But the little fig tree once bore a fig. In her delight, Myra hung Christmas tree ornaments on it to celebrate its fertility. Feeling the life stirring within her body, she feels fulfilled. She becomes determined to keep Val with her. She has learned that:

... Being clever, Val, isn't enough when you're up against something as big as life is. Sure, you can make keys for a door. That's clever, Val, but somebody comes along and breaks the door down. That's life! And that's what happened to me. Oh, God, I knew that I wouldn't be barren when we went together that first time. I felt it already, stirring up inside me, beginning to live! The first little fig on the tree they said wouldn't bear. What a mistake they made! ... So now, you see we can't be separated! We're bound together, Val!1

Knowing that he has been forced by the Sheriff to leave Two Rivers before sundown, and feeling that he can never be bound to anyone, Val returns the beautiful black suit to Myra and puts on his old snakeskin jacket and pants. He loves Myra but cannot stay in Two Rivers. He plans to return to the desert that "stretches clean out 'til tomorrow... and there ain't nothing else in between, not you, not anybody, or nothing."2

Myra tenaciously clings to him and to life. Life with Jabe has been a death for her. But she knows that she cannot win. Certain as death, Jabe enters the room, causes Myra to reveal the truth, and climaxes the futile argument by shooting his own wife and accusing Val of the act. Myra is struck down just as her little fig tree

1 Ibid., p. 223.
2 Ibid., p. 225.
had been killed by a storm in the spring when it was going to bear.

"Why?" Myra questions. "For what reason? Because some things are enemies of light and there is a battle between them in which some fall!" 1

In a restless and insensitive society, Myra was forced to seek love. Her first lover rejected her in order to marry someone with money. Her husband was incapable of loving anything or anyone. He loved only to destroy. Val loved her but was confused by loving. He wanted more than love from the world. Although Myra could have been satisfied with having Val anyway or place she could have him, she failed to accomplish even this simple desire. Val preferred returning to the freedom and open spaces of the New Mexico desert. There he could wait for some inscrutable something to flow into him, to give him the answers to life and truth. He never learns what he is seeking. His death precludes further adventures.

Sandra shifts from illusion to reality as she finds each unsatisfactory. She would like to escape the emptiness of her life by escaping into illusion, but she is too rational to be able to do so. She cannot forget that she is groping for love and a reason for being. She tries to deceive herself into believing that she can escape into momentary happiness through illicit behavior. Yet she is uncomfortable when participating in promiscuity. Since reality means to her coarseness, and vulgarity and illusion mean the same, she prefers to escape both of them through suicide.

1Ibid., p. 232.
Sandra, tired of making love to insensitive men and unsatisfied with drinking, realizes that she will form no better relationship with people, because she does not know how. She chooses to drive her car over the edge of a bridge and end her temporal existence. A series of disappointments with society has made her feel that life is not worth the battle.

Vee is a complete escapist into illusion. She has interpreted the reality of everyday life as vulgar and unacceptable. She seems to erase possibility of any existence other than her own concern for painting and proselytizing. She is unaware of how other persons, sensitive or insensitive, view her. She is not reinforced in her endeavors to reform persons. But she does not try to evaluate why. Her requirements do not include questioning her contributions to others. In her complete retreat from reality, Vee is the most satisfied character in the play. She does not withdraw from society, but she cannot communicate with it.

Vee continues her dreary existence--painting, searching for Visions, and being laughed at by her neighbors who are more concerned with their bridge and drinking parties than with understanding lonely, needy, and frustrated people.

The insensitive persons close their minds to the needs of others. They ignore the possible enrichment of their own lives which could result from the sympathetic association with those who need security.

There is no one individual in *Battle of Angels* who typifies what Williams considers to be the insensitive man. Aside from the
protagonists, the remaining members of the town all show aspects of insensitivity. Dolly and Beulah are matrons who take delight in gossiping. They perform no actual harm to anyone. Nor do they do anything constructive. Their lives are idle, dull, and ineffectual. Their husbands are also idle and dull, but they are destructive as well. They love stirring up trouble and manage easily with such misguided individuals as Myra and Val. Jabe and the Sheriff are actually aware of their sadistic pastimes. Both of them enjoy torturing others who have done them no harm and could benefit from their help. Each of these crass persons has perverted values; yet each is realistic in his acceptance of the grim world that lies about him. Each is submissive to the patterns of corruption from which he is unwilling to contemplate escape.

These coarse, calloused, and insensitive people continue to survive in their dead, unfeeling society. Dolly, Beulah, Sheriff, Pee Wee, Eva, and Blanche are little affected by the tragedies of Myra, Val, Vee, and Sandra. Instead, they can profit by the sensational murders and suicides, by setting up a memorial of the Mercantile Store. Like rapacious vultures, they take all the mementoes like the snake-skin jacket of Val, the ecstasy blue dress of Myra, the size 4-a shoes of Sandra, and the weird paintings of Vee. These are parts of the exhibit which the paying public can view as they listen to the grotesque story of the morbid love affair of the employer and her salesman, the aristocratic southern belle and her car-racing escapades, and the religious fanatic and her misconstrued visions. The insensitive persons turn the misfortunes of the
sensitive seekers into profit. Not only does the exhibit put money into their pockets; it also gives them something to talk about. None of the self-sufficient, average citizens has attempted in any way to make the lives of the weak, misguided, tortured ones more pleasant or endurable. They have looked on with cruel and malicious enjoyment.

The sensitive protagonists meet with utter failure, and the insensitive lesser characters gain success in Battle of Angels. Thus, Williams establishes his viewpoint concerning the struggles of illusion and reality. Those who try to escape from reality cannot do so. Their attempts are foiled, because society does not want illusion to erase or ease the coarseness of reality. Consequently, the sensitive persons become isolated, frustrated, lonely, and insecure. The calculating, insensitive members of society, who see the weaknesses of the sensitive people and use them to gain their own gratifications, succeeded, that is, they cope with life as they see it and make no effort to help those who cannot do so. However, there was no majesty or kindness in their behavior. They are defeated in this. They remain crass and unfeeling. Their lives have no depth of human emotion. They merely exist. Williams does not respect the insensitive survivors. Moreover, he judges their lack of feeling as contemptible. His sympathies are with the sensitive failures. In addition, he seems to plead for a better understanding: the strong people should aid the misguided ones, because only with a union of the sensitive and the insensitive can man achieve satisfactory existence.
CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ARCHETYPES IN BATTLE OF ANGELS

TO PROTAGONISTS IN OTHER WORKS

Seventeen years elapsed between the original play, Battle of Angels, and its final revision, Orpheus Descending. And, Williams admits, the play is not finished; he merely stopped working on it. The works written between 1940 and 1959 seem to portray different aspects of the sensitive persons with similar problems and failures. Their attempts to grasp some vestige of happiness fail. No one finds a pleasant solution to his needs; all the results are painful. Frequently, as with Val, one is unable to understand; the desire for satiation is increased but inevitably meets with forces of destruction. Mutilation, suffering, or death is the result. Sometimes the search meets with failure through one's own rejection, as with Sandra. One has an easier existence through ignoring the problems. Vee escapes—but not happily—in this way. More often utter disillusionment is put upon the searcher who tries, like Myra; outside forces refuse to allow her happiness. None of these results of the human dilemma is pretty. Reality is difficult to accept, but illusion is fruitless.

In this chapter, each protagonist in Battle of Angels is discussed. The relationship of persons from other works who resemble them follow. The order is not established by chronological publication. Order is based upon the growth towards full exposition of the
archetype in all his motivations and manifestations. In his latest works, Williams adds dimension by combining the traits of two or more archetypes into one character, thereby adding complexity and scope to the personalities. Also, he takes the liberty of deleting archetypes and refining his insensitive characters. Thus, there is a development shown of the archetypes. In his most recent play, Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams modifies his viewpoint concerning conflict. There is acceptance and resignation. Each of these aspects of Williams' drama is discussed in turn.

Val and His Successors

Val is a distinct type of sensitive individual whose inability to learn from past experiences and whose inability to distinguish between illusion and reality result in failure. He is a social outcast, because he has remained a vagrant, moving through different parts of the country. He continues to look for a stationary home where he can know people and find friends. But he is thwarted, because he is mistrusted and misunderstood. Also, he is frightened by the very thing that he needs--association. Williams shows that neither Myra nor Val can be stable without the other, but Val does not realize this. Val never learns that this could have been his answer to the questions he has asked throughout his life. He has misinterpreted reality. With Myra, he could have had permanent friendship and love, but he felt that she wanted a stranglehold on him. If he could have escaped from Two Rivers, he would have had nothing again. As it was,
neither of them had anything, but death. Val could not accept
guidance offered from anyone.

In "Desire and the Black Masseur," "The Important Thing,"
"The Field of Blue Children," and The Night of the Iguana," the Val-
like characters have little development in insight; but each finds
some form of satisfaction.

Anthony Burns, in "Desire and the Black Masseur," is much
like Val. Both are lonely sensitive persons searching for a way to
communicate with others who might understand them. Neither is a
competent judge of his actions. Neither learns from past experiences.
Unlike Val, Anthony does not search for satisfaction; he accepts that
which is offered. His sense of aloneness becomes mixed up with his
compulsion for atonement, which develops into a masochistic perver-
sion. "From his very beginning this person . . . had betrayed an
instinct for being included in things that swallowed him up."¹ He
came from a family of fifteen children, graduated from a large high
school class, and worked in the largest wholesale house in the city,
and felt more secure at the movies than anywhere else. When he
developed a psychosomatic back ailment, he submitted to treatment
by a masseur. The treatment was, in effect, "a surrender of self to
violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's
self of guilt."² The church across the street holding Easter services
combines with the physical atonement which Anthony is undergoing with

¹ "Desire and the Black Masseur," One Arm and Other Stories.

² Ibid., p. 85.
the Negro masseur. The purity of the flames, which result when the	house behind the church burns, adds an air of completion to the per-
fect atonement when the masseur eats the flesh of the dead Anthony
who has been killed by the harsh manipulation of the erotic masseur.
The cinders of the fire and the bones of the dead Anthony are pure as
the masseur leaves town to look for another man to absolve of his guilt.

Anthony Burns resembles Val in his inability to escape into
fancies. Neither is able to discriminate or reason clearly. Each
harbors beliefs that common sense would reject immediately. Yet both
have made unsuccessful attempts to become integrated members of some
town. Their isolations and failures are self-imposed, because they
cannot distinguish between common sense and irrationality. Like
Val's, Anthony's attempt to form emotional ties ends with defeat and
death. Both were lonely and isolated before. Val never learns when
he has established satisfaction; but Anthony likes what little asso-
ciation he has with the masseur.

On a much less bizarre level, Williams shows in "The Important
Thing" that normally sensitive people have difficulty in establishing
reality, also; but they have more ability to see what the problem is.
Both Flora and John, students at State University, have a feeling of
incompletion which they try to understand. They try to find satis-
faction out of ordinary experience. They learn that the important
thing that exists between them is not sex. It is the realization
that no two people can communicate completely. They accept this and
search no further.

For the first time they stood together in the dark without any
fear of each other, their hands loosely clasped and returning
each other's look with sorrowful understanding, unable to help each other except through knowing, each completely separate and alone—but no longer strangers.\(^1\)

Such an insight into understanding his frustrations was beyond Val's grasp.

Much like Val in that she has undiscerned yearning is Myra, a State University student in "The Field of Blue Children." She constantly feels that she has forgotten something. She does not know what. Unlike Val, she questions her behavior and her associations in order to find out what is missing. One with whom she feels the same longings as herself is Homer Stallcup. He is an awkward, sensitive author of poetry who dates a peculiar girl, "Bertha, Bertha or something or other."\(^2\) Together Homer and Myra visit the field of blue flowers. A friendship develops that both know will not continue. Homer returns to his odd-behaving, loud-mouthed, rebelling girl friend, and Myra marries Kirk Abbott, who likes what he has and desires nothing more. Myra lives in an efficiency apartment with everything materially needed, but she still feels as if she has forgotten something. After she runs away and visits the field of blue flowers, she realizes she will never do such a ridiculous thing as that again, "for now she had left the last of her troublesome youth behind her."\(^3\) She accepts the efficiency apartment and the world of practicality found in Kirk. She

\(^1\)"The Important Thing," Ibid., p. 134.

\(^2\)"The Field of Blue Children," Ibid., p. 160.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 166.
wants to forget the sensitivity of Homer Stalcup. She knows that she cannot be happy when longing for anything more. In her rejection of illusion and her acceptance of reality, Nyra finds some semblance of satisfaction which Val never attains.

The acquisition of formal education does not assure one success in finding a niche in society. And social success does not follow professional ability, necessarily. Miss Edith Jeikes, in "The Night of the Iguana," has the same longings that Val feels. Both need friendship. Neither is capable of accepting that which is offered. Although she has been an instructor in art at an Episcopal girls' school in Mississippi, Edith has suffered a nervous breakdown. Unlike Val's, her vagrancy is refined. She has money which has enabled her to travel comfortably from one country to another trying to paint and procure friendship. Her disturbance in Acapulco at the Costa Verde Hotel derives from the fact that two men, an author and a young athlete, also staying at the hotel refuse to acknowledge her presence. When an iguana is tied up by the Mexican children to be prepared for food, she uses her indignation of the disturbance it causes as an excuse to talk with the two men. She finds the author struggling with insecurities of his own inadequacies; but when he attempts to make love to her in order to reinforce his own needs, she scorns his advances. Like Val, she runs from that which she is seeking. Both Edith and the author return to their own rooms to take their sedatives so as to escape into sleep. Like Val's, their inability to communicate and understand reaches failure. After finding a means of satisfaction, Edith cannot accept it. Despite her
educational background, Edith's failure to achieve friendship is the same as Val's.

The Val-like characters in *One Arm and Other Stories* meet with failure because they have neither the environment for educational opportunity nor the insight into their own behavior. But in *27 Wagons Full of Cotton* and *Other One-Act Plays*, the conditions of the persons seem to result from society's producing these quirks within the individual.

The Writer in "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" is an alcoholic who is always in the process of writing his 780-page masterpiece, a work which clearly never will be completed. His book, like Val's, is a *Book of Truth*. But neither man is capable of discerning what is truth. Val escapes from permanence when seeking it; he retreats from reality and tries to avoid illusion. The Writer knows that he has slipped into illusion through the liquor bottle, but he prefers holding on to his illusions, knowing reality. He is well aware that Mrs. Hardwick-Moore, a fortyish dyed blonde, is not an owner of a large Brazilian rubber plantation on the Mediterranean near Dover Beach. She is a poor lonely woman earning her rent by sleeping with the man she brings back to her room. Yet, the Writer supports her against the hard-headed landlady, Mrs. Wire, who calls Mrs. Hardwick-Moore a liar and has no desire to understand the desperate woman. The Writer rejects submission to complete reality. "What good does it give to tear apart illusions?" He will never write and she will

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continue to receive nightly callers. They should continue lying to themselves. This cynical application of the theme of the profitless-ness of accepting truth is not seen in Williams' later plays.

While Val in *Battle of Angels* has been restricted to impermanence of location and friendship through his inability to learn through his experience, Lucio in "The Strangest Kind of a Romance" is insecure because he cannot perform well. He has no ability to communicate or to perform. His landlady has kept on the dirty walls a tally of all her roomers. It is also a memorandum of all the people with whom she has slept since her invalid husband has owned the boarding house. To her, Lucio is only another outlet for sexual relationships. He is afraid of association with her, as he is afraid of his failure. His inhibitions stifle any act he performs. "The body is only--a shell," he says. "It may be alive--when what's inside--is too afraid to come out. It stays locked up and alone! Single! Private! That's how it is--with me. You're not talking to me--but what you think is me!"¹

The names on the walls are the individuals' bids for immortality. "Even a sparrow--leaves an empty nest for a souvenir."² Impermanence is a note that is struck again along with the hopeless insecurity. But while Val escapes into temporary love with Myra, Lucio succumbs to an unnatural love for his cat, Mitchevko. He looks forward to watching the cat lap up its milk. After that operation is

performed, he takes the cat to bed with him, for he wants the warmth from it. He needs to know that something knows that he is alive in the world. Val's bid for immortality is to be left in his book which he continues to write. It will be his sparrow's nest.

Another Val-like character, in this case a woman, is seen in "Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen." The Woman causes no trouble for society; she is not perverted in any way. She has only a sense of defeat, utter disillusionment, and a lack of insight as to what can be done to alter her situation. The Woman wants to leave her miserable existence with a man who frequently gets drunk, leaves her, and never knows where he has been when he returns. Neither the Man nor the Woman has a name. They are a couple who between his escapades listen to each other's problems. They admit their desires. And then they continue to live together. Their conversations are fruitless and desperate. Like Val's life, theirs has been a death-in-life. Their boring lives continue, but Val's is terminated by death.

A resemblance to Val's incapabilities is seen in most of the characters in Camino Real, a fantasy. With the exception of Gutman, it would appear that most of the characters are Val-like wanderers trying to find their niches in the world. Each tries to make his life less despicable, but is unable to learn from his own mistakes or from those of others. Each is incapable of finding a way to do so,

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1This major play was developed from a shorter play, "Ten Blocks on the Camino Real," American Blues: Five Short Plays (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1948).
because stronger members of society pretend that they do not know the
lonely ones exist. Each has arrived at the emptiness of the Camino
Real: the dead end where acceptability is never achieved.

Don Quixote, the classical symbol of fruitless wandering,
becomes an example, for Williams, of one who finds loneliness accept-
able. Quixote chooses to find someone with whom he can wander. He
admits that "New companions are not as familiar as old ones but all
the same—they're old ones with only slight differences of face and
figure, which may or may not be improvements, and it would be selfish
of me to be lonely alone."¹

A guitar player strums through the scenes, as Gutman, the
Siete Mares Hotel proprietor, manages to make as much profit as he
can from each of the unfortunate persons who come into the desolate
area of the Camino Real. To none of them is the road royal as its
name implies. Instead, it is a lonely and uncertain path towards
emptiness. To some, this means a vacant, meaningless existence; for
others, it means death followed by an insulting autopsy.

Kilroy is a twenty-seven-year-old broken hero. He is a for-
mer boxer who was forced to quit his profession because he developed
heart trouble. He leaves his wife, Mary, so that she cannot be
troubled by his approaching death. When he leaves her, he finds that
he has nothing else to sustain him except his golden gloves that he
had won and a ruby-and-emerald-studded belt with the word CHAMP on it.

What little money he possessed had been stolen from him. In order to
buy food, he decides to sell his belt, which is "not necessary to
hold on my pants, but this is a precious reminder of the sweet-used-
to-be in order to finance his present situation." Divested of good
health, his belt, and his money, Kilroy continues to defy the empty
road. He spies a sign for exit. But he is awayed from the unknown
paradise when Esmeralda lures him to her bedside. He pawns his golden
gloves to spend his last night with her before he confronts death.
Too fatigues to participate in sexual relations with Esmeralda, Kilroy
fails even in temporary escape from his loneliness. The time allotted
for their love-making along with that time allotted for his life is
spent. When he leaves her chamber, he must face the streetcleaners
who eventually carry away all bodies. Again, he refuses to lie down
and die. Kilroy swings at the streetcleaners as they circle about
him until he "collapses flat on his face." The fantasy includes
action occurring after Kilroy's death. As the medical doctors perform
the autopsy, he grabs his golden heart, which is as big as the head
of a baby. He cannot bear to watch the cold and calculating doctors
teach the students about his physical anomalies. Clutching his heart,
Kilroy joins Quixote in his wanderings. Against all obstacles, they
find some appeasement of their loneliness. For them, "The violets in
the mountains have broken the rocks!"

1 Ibid., p. 32.
2 Ibid., p. 147.
3 Ibid., p. 161.
Other characters in this fantasy who wander about the world accomplishing no gratification include Marguerite Gautier and Jacques Cassanova. But none of these persons has the fighting spirit that Kilroy has. Marguerite Gautier is a Camille turned dope addict, who alternately wishes to leave Camino Real to find love and independence and to escape into her dreams by taking dope at the hotel. Her problem is not the lack of money or beauty. She has both. She lacks the stamina to withstand the problems that may arise with ending her status quo. For her, it is easier to continue as she is and to accept simulated love and existence. Thus, she accepts her impotent lover, Jacques Cassanova.

Marguerite:
Oh, Jacques, we’re used to each other, we’re a pair of captive hawks caught in the same cage, and so we’ve grown used to each other. That’s what passes for love at this dim, shadowy end of the Camino Real.

What are we sure of? Not even of our existence, dear comforting friend! And whom can we ask the questions that torment us? "What is this place?" "Where are we?"—a fat old man who gives sly hints that only bewilders us more, a fake of a Gypsy squinting at cards and tea-leaves. What else are we offered?

The never-broken procession of little events that assure us that we and strangers about us are still going on! We’re frightened.

... So now and then, although we’ve wounded each other time and again—-we stretch out hands to each other in the dark that we can’t escape from—-we huddle together for some dim-communal comfort—-and that’s what passes for love on this terminal stretch of the road that used to be royal. ...

Jacques Cassanova knows that Marguerite is incapable of consistent fidelity, but he accepts her when she needs him. Despite the fact that the crowd crowns him King of the Cuckolds on the Camino Real, he believes that with trust one can find love. Marguerite pays

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Ibid., pp. 96-97.
his tabs at the hotel; she gives him respite of reinforcement whenever she is capable. He asks for nothing else.

Camino Real presents a defeatist picture of persons who, like Val, are unable to find kindness and love in their fight against loneliness. The insensitive persons such as the gypsy and Gutman survive in their self-sufficiency. They prey on the weaknesses of the sensitive persons. The gypsy cheats people of their money. She pretends to loan them illusions, but actually takes them away. Her daughter Esmeralda is rented, annually, to the man of her choice. She is pawned off as a recurring virgin to her paying customers. No one wants to admit that his life is futile. Each waits for the airplane Il Fugitive to arrive; but no one is able to flee. Even when the carrier could take them to another way of life, the characters have not the passports, the money, nor the inclination to change their lives. The question is asked by Gutman:

But there is a moment when we look into ourselves and ask with a wonder which never is lost altogether: Can this be all?... Is this what the glittering wheels of the heavens turn for?

At the time of writing Camino Real, apparently, Williams assumed there was nothing else. Because of their lack of insight unaccepted into themselves, the inhabitants of Camino Real must either accept the emptiness or follow along with Don Quixote, who wanders through lands for centuries and gains nothing. Like Kilroy, Val would have wandered with Quixote, never finding what he really wanted, because he never knew how to get it. Perhaps it was fortunate that their lives

1Ibid., p. 55.
were stopped. Like Kilroy, who had his wife, Val had Myra. But they
did not realize the value of their possessions. Kilroy tries to spare
his wife, but he gives her only empty grief. Val thinks that he can-
not be restricted by Myra, but loses any sense of belonging.

Another aspect of Val is seen in Kamrowski of "Rubio y Morena." Kamrowski has redeemed his self-possession, temporarily, through a
satisfactory love affair with Amanda, a strange, horse-like Mexican
girl who gives him the assurance that he need not continue the strange
sexual desires that have oppressed him. Before meeting Amanda, he
knew that he could not desire a woman until after she had fallen
asleep. Then he would brutally awaken her and force his desires upon
her. But with Amanda, he makes love less sensationally. With unthink-
ing ingratitude, he leaves the kind, faithful "equine" and forms
relationships with other women. And, like a wounded animal, she
returns to her family to be taken care of until her death. When in
need of her companionship, he seeks her again. But he finds her dy-
ing. He runs from her but in Laredo, clasping a doll which he has
taken from a child. It is something to hold on to for security. Val
had his guitar and his snakeskin jacket, too. But, just as
Kamrowski is actually empty-handed, so is Val. The relationships
that they have formed through touch have gained them nothing mentally.
Both are destitute vagrants.

1"Rubio y Morena," New Directions in Prose and Poetry, Number
Except for Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Change in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the Val-like archetype does not occur so clearly again. Val's characteristics become more complex in that they are combined with those of other protagonists of *Battle of Angels*.

In Brick, even, there is an added complexity which does not occur in the original character. Brick is a latent homosexual who refuses to admit to himself that he would like to have had an affair with Skipper. Both of the young men have been football heroes; but they find it difficult to face the world of responsibility after they leave high school. Skipper is not a good athlete to begin with; but his athletic weakness is not fully known until Brick breaks his ankle and Skipper must carry the game without him. Then Skipper weakens. He needs Brick's support. Without it, he is nothing. Marriage has also separated the two men. Maggie, Brick's wife, is jealous of the closeness of the two men and knows that it goes beyond the usual male relationships. She tries to prove this to Brick. She guesses that Skipper is impotent and entices him to sleep with her. She learns that her supposition was well-grounded, but at the expense of losing her husband. Brick, afraid of his guilt feelings, escapes into alcoholic oblivion. He does not want to face his attraction to Skipper. He feels that it is dirty and wrong. Thus, he refuses Skipper's love and uses Maggie's promiscuity as a means to avoid further contact with her. But Maggie is stronger than Byra, and she forces Brick into pseudo-success. By refusing to allow him to escape into drinking unless he first makes love to her, Maggie keeps a partial hold on Brick. He
wants that click to occur that only comes when he has had enough to
drink. If Maggie holds the key to the liquor cabinet, she gains the
victory of the cat on a hot tin roof: "Just staying on...as long as
she can." 1 Like Val, Brick tries to escape from the loneliness of his
private life into some form of understanding. But the truth is
terrifying to him, and he cannot face it or speak of it. The only
comfort that Brick has found has been through falling back on lies—
social lies, lies about health, about the past, and about the future.
None of the lies are vicious, because Brick is not vicious. He would
prefer to be kind, but the lies and the liquor are the refuge he must
have from the ugly truths that possess his mind.

Brick's personality is submerged under the masculine aggressiveness
of Maggie. Submergence is found also in the short story, "Three
Players of a Summer Game," 2 which preceded the major play. Brick, after
an interlude with Isabel Grey, finds that he does not want to accept
responsibility. He withdraws from it by returning to his wife,
Margaret, who continues to maneuver Brick Pollitt's Pierce Arrow tour-
ing car and his life. Val has not needed to escape through liquor.
He escapes by leaving the environment of difficulty.

The Val-like character in Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams' most
recent work, is Chance Wayne, a twenty-nine year old failure who
finally faces his dilemma and resignedly awaits his fate. Chance has

1 Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (New York: New Directions

2 "Three Players of a Summer Game," New Yorker, XXVIII
(November 1, 1952), pp. 27-36.
been in love with Heavenly, his hometown girl, who is the daughter of a big political boss. Her father has refused to allow them to marry because Chance is beneath her social status. Consequently, rather than be parted, Heavenly and Chance resort to an illicit affair. Even then Chance loses all sense of propriety. He is not satisfied with this. He sublimates his frustrations by having affairs with other women. When he contracts a venereal disease, he neglects to tell Heavenly. She, in turn, receives it also. Not knowing what is the matter with her, she reaches an advanced stage before going for treatment. As a result a hysterectomy must be performed. Chance has deluded himself into thinking that he can find some way to reach success in the movie kingdom. At seventeen, he had hints of failure when he made only honorable mention in a state drama contest. He missed his cues. After trying to win success in the movies by becoming gigolo to many of the fading stars who are willing to support him, he finds the affairs are only digressions. Chance needs to work, study, and concentrate on his profession. When he allows himself to look at truth, he admits to himself that he cannot remember lines and becomes too frightened to involve himself in the role he is playing. As an escape from the problem, he forms a liaison with Princess Pazmezoglu, a fading star. She tries to escape her failure through the "sticks" of hashish, but she knows that nothing but facing reality is right for her. She believes that if she has Chance, they could face their failure together. But he refuses to reach her nadir and hopes that Heavenly will help him start over again. He returns to his hometown,
Saint Cloud, in the hopes of returning to Hollywood with her. Instead, Chance finds a mob of townsmen preparing to repay him for the injustice he played upon Heavenly.

The only thing that Chance has which has kept him floating has been his sex organs. With the coming castration, he will have nothing. Val was obsessed by the fear of being burned, just as Chance was afraid of impotency. But Val is burned to death, and Chance is awaiting castration. With a plea Chance urges his pursuers:

Chance:
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!

This statement is Williams' request to society for all the Vals, Chances, Bricks, Kamrowskis, Kilarleys, and Lucios. These are sensitive victims of their inescapable insecurity and loneliness. They cannot be successful. They cannot bridge the gap of loneliness and misunderstanding. They are failures who have fought and lost.

**Myra and Her Successors**

Myra is a distinct type of sensitive individual whose failure is derived from sources outside herself which she cannot control. She strives for an objective attitude towards her own behavior and tries to solve her problems rationally. Unfortunately, she is not guided by facts and circumstances. Instead, she frequently withdraws into her wishes and desires for a better way of living; and she deludes herself

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into believing that these can be fulfilled. Her insight into her own
conduct gives her some strength to ward off irrational behavior, but
more often she resorts to compensating rationalization. Her reactions
are inconsistent. She is a nervous insomniac who must take sleeping
pills in order to relax. She has not withdrawn from society. She has
continued to ward off lethargy. She is unlike Val, who has become a
social outcast through his inability to settle in a permanent home.
On the surface, Myra is a stable woman running a Mercantile Store.
She works consistently and profitably. However, she feels herself to
be a lonesome outcast. Any efforts that Myra makes to escape from her
sordid existence are met with failure. The happy days of youthful
love that she spent with David Anderson are never to be recaptured.
Again she makes a final attempt to build a reciprocal love with Val.
This also fails.

Myra's life appears to be a series of defeats. When she finds
that the reality of the people about her is too harsh, she tries to
build illusions. These are torn from her, too. The insensitive
people tear from her hope of escaping from grim reality.

Myra's positive attitude is pathetically portrayed in Gloria
Bessie Greene in "At Liberty." In this one-act play, Gloria, a con-
sumptive actress in her thirties, places an advertisement in Billboard
and dreams of her next big job in show business. Her mother is a cold-
hearted realist who knows that her daughter cannot reach success in
the theatrical field. She calls her by her common name, Bessie, and
reminds her that "The past keeps getting bigger and bigger at the
She wants Bessie to stop being optimistic and face her defeat. But Bessie insists that "Everything can be mended; it's only a matter of time." Her fruitless endeavors in advertising, in applying youthful make-up, and wearing dramatic clothing are like Myra's needless efforts to rebuild the Confectionery into the orchard across at Moon Lake. Time cannot be turned back for either woman. No acting job is awaiting Bessie, and none will come.

Both the elderly ladies in "Something Unspoken" appear to project what might have happened to Myra if she had been allowed to reach old age. Their lives remain dull, lifeless, and uneventful; yet, they are unable to change them. At Myra's age, she has less sense of defeat, utter disillusion, and lack of insight into what can be done to change her situation than the two spinsters who cannot communicate. Miss Cornelia Scott is a wealthy Southern spinster. Her only time-consuming interest appears to be in her becoming regent of the Confederate Daughters in the city of Meridian. She wants people to like her, but she is afraid to test them. If she is not elected unanimously, she refuses to have her name on the ballot. She also wants no other candidates besides herself. She feels that she can avoid finding out her strength in popularity in this way. Miss Grace Lancaster has been Cornelia's mousy, quiet secretary for fifteen years. When Cornelia is not even nominated for regency, but is offered the opportunity to be

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2Ibid., p. 180.
placed on the ballot for vice-regency, Grace has a sympathetic, not quite malicious smile on her face. She is rather pleased that her seemingly self-sufficient employer is not successful. Their impenetrable silence will continue between them. Both are sensitive women and like Myra, unable to communicate with others. Grace questions whether some things are better left unspoken. "I know that when a silence between two people has gone on for a long time it's like a wall that's impenetrable between them! Maybe between us there is such a wall. One that's impenetrable. Or maybe you can break it. I know I can't. I can't even attempt to." ¹

Myra's determination to rise above her unhappy environment is seen, again, in the mother, Mrs. Amanda Wingfield, in "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," and The Glass Menagerie. Amanda is an escapist who lives in a tenement district in St. Louis. She constantly reminisces over her girlhood in Blue Mountain, where she had—or preferred to believe that she had—many gentlemen callers. She would like Laura, her introverted, crippled daughter, to have callers also, but the girl clings to her world of glass animals and worn out records played on an old-fashioned victrola. Amanda refuses to see that her daughter is incapable of meeting with people. She forces Laura to attend business school, but the girl cannot face typing tests and, instead, escapes to the park where she sits waiting for the end of the school day so that she can return home. Amanda pressures her son, Tom, into bringing home for dinner a friend of his, Jim Delaney. She hopes that Jim will

become Laura’s gentlemen caller, but Jim has a girl. Tom, disgusted with his mother’s prodding and bored with his job at the factory, follows his father’s action and leaves Amanda. She loses her means of financial support and still has Laura who "made no positive move towards the world but stood at the edge of water." ¹

Although Laura becomes the main character in The Glass Menagerie, Amanda remains strong in her contrast with Laura. Neither accepts the life she leads, but Laura hides among her glass and records, while Amanda continues to fight her losing battles—to place her daughter among people and to return to her life at Blue Mountain. Like Myra, Amanda is a fighter. But Myra dies when she first feels life. Amanda continues to fight, but she does not have the ability to comprehend her true situation. Her hopes for the return of her carefree youth cannot continue. Her introverted daughter cannot be forced out of her withdrawal.

Amanda, having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions, but Laura’s situation is even graver. A childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. . . . Stemming from this, Laura’s separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf. ²

Various defeats are caused by the rationalizing woman whose failure derives from sources outside herself and beyond her control.

Myra, Williams’ archetype character, is murdered after all her efforts

¹ "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," One Arm and Other Stories, p. 97.

to solve her problems fail. Amanda lives in her illusions after failing to establish reality. Eventual deterioration from illness prevents Bassie Greene from furthering her career. Two elderly ladies, Grace and Cornelia, are doomed to impenetrable silence, because their efforts to find friendship have been rejected by others. Each has attempted to fill her needs in order to escape the aching loneliness and insecurity. Neither escapes. No acquaintance cares about their needs or tries to direct them in fulfilling them. Delusions are torn from them rudely and nothing but failure is substituted.

Vee and her Successors

Vee is a distinct type of sensitive individual who has completely repressed her view of reality. She finds things much too oppressive to accept. She escapes completely into illusion. Vee is a dull-witted, middle-aged woman who never realizes that she has resigned herself to a bleak existence as the wife of the sadistic sheriff. She dislikes his treatment of the prisoners; but, instead of taking constructive action to prevent further mistreatment, Vee retreats to painting. She is unaggressive. Caught up in her anticipation of Visions, she has no time to concern herself with what is happening around her. In her endeavors to reform her neighbors in their cardplaying and drinking parties, Vee antagonizes them. They, in turn, try to disillusion her about her Visions. They taunt her with the fact that the apostles look like the men of Two Rivers. They enjoy showing her that the Vision she thought was Christ is actually the vagrant Val, who is hardly an example of the perfect man. Her
size and her clumsy actions make her bait for insensitive people. She tries to be an example of correct behavior, but people see her only in humorous situations. She does not reform the prisoners, either. Her approach is more irritating to the wayward people than constructive. There can be no help for Vee, because her associates are not interested in helping her. They prefer to tease her and make her the brunt of their jokes. Vee's existence is perpetually insane. However, in her own way, she believes that she is doing what she should. She is martyr-like in the acceptance of her fate of ridicule.

Vee continues to live in an ineffectual world of phantasy and delusion, because she cannot endure the standards of the people around her. Instead of withdrawing to shut out the impressions of her environment, she perseveres in attempting to reform her associates. Her hallucinations have no external stimulus other than coincidental meetings with townsmen. She recognizes hallucinations as religious visions. They appear to extend from her grandiose desire to be something that she is not. Consequently, as an adjustive mechanism to her real life, Vee substitutes visions. She is happy in her anticipation of them and becomes angry when people show her conclusive evidence that she is deluded.

As is Vee, Oliver Wundemiller, in "One Arm," is perfectly assured in knowing what he wants to gain from life until he loses his arm. Thereafter, he can no longer be the light-heavyweight champion of the Pacific Fleet. An automobile accident severs his arm and he loses

\[1\text{One Arm and Other Stories, pp. 7-39.}\]
his aim in life. He becomes a drifter picking up odd jobs. He deludes himself into believing that he is heroic in selling his body. As does Vee, Oliver prides himself upon his mission. He is to be generous to lonely and frustrated men. Male hustlers introduce him into the lucrative profession of homosexual hustling. When he is offered a large salary for making a blue movie with a prostitute, he accepts and then becomes revolted and refuses. A quarrel ensues and his employer is murdered. Oliver is convicted of the murder he did not commit and is sentenced to die as a martyr in the electric chair. All his former male lovers write him letters of sympathy. These become his only hold on something personal before his death. He carries them with him into the death chamber. Like Vee, Oliver might have been a more successful citizen if people had taken the time and effort to give him understanding and direction. Nothing traumatic enough occurs to Vee to alter her experience. She continues her martyr-like existence.

Persons are considered martyrs when the voluntarily suffer death or discomfort for refusing to renounce their principles. Vee fancies herself as a religious martyr. This gives her an incentive for enduring her otherwise empty life. Characters in other works lead martyr-like lives and die martyr-like deaths.

Rosalio, the son, in "The Purification" commits suicide, because he feels that through his death the wrongs he has committed can somehow be absolved. Because of his incestuous love for his sister, Elena, he has caused her murder by her husband, the Rancher.
He has reduced her husband, a man of dignity and force, to a "burnt out shell that drove him to violence." The murder has brought the wrath of God upon his people, causing no rain to fall until the sin is expiated. The Judge tries to find who is guilty at the trial. He lets the involved persons decide.

Judge: Rain's the treatment for a forest fire. For violent deeds likewise the rain is needed. The rain I speak of is the rain of truth, for truth between men is the only purification.

The Rancher has been kind and good until his wife refuses to accept the role of his wife. His jealousy results in separating her from her brother and her life. Rosario has committed the wrong by his violation of blood. "It is the lack of what he desires most keenly that twists a man out of nature." Both men know their participation in the guilt of the crime. Both stab themselves to purify their acts. Like Vee, Rosario feels he must suffer although he has not wielded the ax to Elena. The Rancher has committed the act of murder but has been led to it by other persons' wrongs. Misplaced love has led to three deaths. The truth of incest and murder is revealed, and the rains come. Rosario's escape by suicide is as misdirected as Vee's proselytizing. Neither accomplishes anything by these efforts.

In "Auto-da-Fe," Eloi, Mme. Duvenet's son, wants to be an exemplary member of conventional society; but he is obsessed by his

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2 Ibid., p. 32.
3 Ibid., p. 56.
love of pornographic pictures. When he has the opportunity to reprimand a nineteen-year-old boy for sending obscene pictures through the mails, he cannot force himself to return the photo. Instead, he locks his mother out of the house and sets fire to the house, himself, and the picture. In his perverted sense of justice, Eloi has purified himself and accused for his secret compulsion. His actions are much more degenerate than those of Vee; but there is inference in Battle of Angels that Vee wants to give strong evidence that she, too, is behaving in her peculiar patterns to justify her need for visions. However, her lot appears to be that of continued existence in martyred subjugation to the cruel people surrounding her.

In "The Long Stay Cut Short, or, The Unsatisfactory Supper," Aunt Rose's unreinforced love for people who do not see it or accept it is less sensational but equally sad. She has devoted her life to various members of the family who have needed help in babysitting, cooking, cleaning. As she gets older, she is of less use. They do not want to have her around, because they are not interested in helping her. They only want to take from her. Although she is aware of her relatives' selfishness, she continues to wander from one to the other, when needed. At an elderly age, she has nothing else to do, no other way to survive. She has to look forward to the satisfaction the insensitive people can gain at her lonely expense.

Serafina delle Rosa, the central figure of The Rose Tattoo, Williams' only comedy, is a highly emotional martyr for whom love is stronger than death. She has established her own code of ethics and
behavior. Everything is centered around Rosario, her handsome Sicilian husband. As far as she knows, he has been as completely satisfied by their nightly love-making as she has been. She has desired nothing beyond complete satisfaction in Rosario. Her rules are self-imposed and self-regulated. After Rosario's death, when Father de Lao argues that his body should be buried, Serafina rebels against that facet of the church rules. Instead, she has the body cremated so that she can keep Rosario's dust in an urn. She continues to be faithful to the dust as she was to the man. He remains her consuming purpose for living. When Estelle Hohengarten, a former mistress of Rosario's, reveals her affair with him, Rosa is shaken. Her delusion of superiority because of perfect love is broken. With the same gusto of her former love, she becomes certain that Our Lady gives her a sign for indulging in love with Alvaro Mangiacavallo, who is a banana truck driver as Rosario was. Even though he does not have contraband underneath his produce, he has a body, as did Rosario, and the Oil of Roses in his hair. Serafina is not deluded into thinking that Alvaro is a superior man. She accepts him for what he is and what happiness he can bring to her. She breaks the urn with the ashes of the dead and prepares to live with Alvaro. The vision of the Rose Tattoo on her breast proves to her that she has conceived his child.

In her irrational conclusions and resolutions, Serafina justifies her change of beliefs. She deludes herself when it is more pleasant to escape into illusions, but she has learned truths about
her relationship with her husband. This has made it possible for her
to accept imperfections in other people. Her own existence becomes
more bearable. She forsakes the lonely life of the martyr, and
happily indulges in her attractions for Alvaro.

Thus, the lonely and isolated figure just seen in the charac-
ter of Vee has reached a comparatively happy ending in this major play.
Williams' sympathy for the misdirected martyrs shows a possibility
for a semblance of gratification.

... Truth is fragmentary, at best: we love and betray each
other not in quite the same breath but in two breaths that occur
in fairly close sequence. But the fact that passion occurred in
passing, that it then declined into a more familiar sense of
indifference, should not be regarded as proof of its inconse-
quence. ...

Various adjutantive mechanisms are used by the completely
repressed escapist. Vee, Williams' archetype character, prefers the
unsensational and ineffectual escape of painting and proselytizing.
Oliver Winemiller seeks the lurid profession of homosexual hustling.
Equally perverted, Rosalio escapes first into incestuous acts and
then suicide. Martyr-like, Elia tries to repress his obsession for
pornographic pictures. When he loses self-control, he also commits
suicide. Aunt Rose submits to servant-like attendance upon relatives
who give her nothing in return. She justifies her repressed longings
in knowing that she is needed. Only Serafina delle Rosa achieves a
semblance of success by casting aside her illusions and accepting
truth.

1 "The Timeless World of a Play," The Rose Tattoo (New York:
Sandra and Her Successors

Cassandra (Sandra) Whiteside is distinguishable from the other archetypes in Battle of Angels because she is too rational to escape into illusion and too repelled by reality to face it. She must escape from both. Sandra is, perhaps, the best-defined and most complex character in the play. She is surely more provocative than the other persons. Unlike the other protagonists, she has been reared in the aristocratic class of Southern society. Because of her genteel upbringing, she has never learned to cope with the problems of responsibility. When landed gentry degenerates with the rising industrialization, her family falls in power, along with the rest of the landowners. She is left with time which she does not know how to use constructively. At first, she makes small attempts to dedicate herself to social and political projects; but the townspeople become antagonized by her liberal beliefs. They force her to leave town. She resorts to squandering her time and herself on drinking, promiscuous dating, and carousing. Outwardly, Sandra appears to have disdainful ease, "not deliberate or conscious, but rooted in her class origin and the cynical candor with which she recognizes herself and the social contradictions and the tragic falsity of the world she lives in."¹ However, she continues to search for someone to help her rise above her aimless wandering. To satisfy their own wants many men take advantage of her need to escape from loneliness. She knows this advantage and hates it. Yet, she is not strong enough to find other outlets.

¹ Battle of Angels, p. 128.
She submits to defeat: "There's nothing on earth you can do. No, nothing! But catch at whatever comes near you with both your hands, until your fingers are broken!"  

Although the townspeople quibble over whether Sandra drove her car over the bridge intentionally or accidentally, Williams makes it quite obvious that Sandra was tired of fighting the battle of living. She preferred to leave it rather than to continue battling for no gains.

Another person who is too rational to escape into illusion is Alma in "The Yellow Bird." She is the shy and sheltered daughter of Increase Tutwiler, the minister. Alma has been dominated and stifled. When she radically breaks from Tutwiler's rigidities, his predictions prove true. Once a person smokes a cigarette, bleached hair follows; these lead to the goodtime house. Instead of feeling guilt when she becomes a prostitute, Alma finds happiness in her flitting lovers. Moreover, she becomes rich. At her death, she leaves her wealth to the Home for Reckless Spenders. She regrets none of her decisions to become a prostitute and dies happily with a three-figured monument on her grave. The crucifix, cornucopia, and Grecian lyre stride an arrogant dolphin on which is inscribed the name of Bobo, the bird that has been passed through the family. He is a symbol of the secret desires of rebellion. Unlike Sandra, Alma finds happiness. Her actions are the same as those of Sandra; but Sandra cannot accept them, and Alma can.

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1 Ibid., p. 216.
2 One Arna and Other Stories, pp. 199-211.
living in extremes, until Nellie Ewell presents John with a happy normal combination of physical and spiritual love. John marries her with the realization that he might have had a richer and deeper love with Alma. And Alma realizes too late that there must be a combination of both flesh and mind:

... You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you, John, in spite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse. Yes, that's it! You tried to avoid it, but you've told me plainly. The tables have turned, yes, the tables have turned with a vengeance! You've come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each one finding the other one gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell! ... I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn't seem so important to me any more, but you're telling me I've got to remain a lady. ... The tables have turned with a vengeance. ¹

Alma submits to her physical drives after she loses John. She becomes a frequent visitor to the railroad depot where she picks up various traveling salesmen. She tries to escape from her loneliness by temporary measures. She knows what she is doing and takes what little pleasures she can find. Her doppelganger has been allowed to escape from its imprisonment in her mind. Alma Winsmiller's father is too involved with his prematurely senile wife and his rigid congregation to see that his daughter is obsessed by her inhibitions. He is similar to Alma Tutwiler's father in "The Yellow Bird," who is deeply concerned by the misconception that any laxity of strict standards will cause an avalanche of rebellion. Both Almas are daughters of strict ministers who do not see the problems of their own children when they are busily involved in their congregations.

¹Ibid., p. 121.
Although Alma Tutwiler finds her own conception of happiness, Alma Winemiller can achieve only a temporary staving off of her tortuous loneliness. Neither answer was satisfactory to Sandra.

Another form of escape from obsessive loneliness is seen in A Streetcar Named Desire. Here, insanity takes the place of death. Blanche becomes insane only after repeated attempts to bridge the gap between reality and her illusions. She has lost her southern mansion, Belle Reve, and also her sensitive, moth-like husband. Her home was lost because she could not manage financial affairs. Her husband committed suicide because she told him she was revolted by his homosexuality. Just as the colonial mansion changes from white to grey paint and decaying columns, Blanche loses her youth and vitality. She becomes the talk of the town. After a tryst with one of her young students, she is forced to leave. And with no place to go and no one to manage her affairs, she turns for support to her sister, Stella, who has rejected long ago the illusion of southern gentility. Stella knows that she is no longer a part of the decaying society. Instead, she completely accepts her marriage to a coarse salesman who lives in the filthy tenements of New Orleans. Along with his crudeness, Stella accepts the noisy bowling alleys, the dirty unkempt house, the hearty sexual pleasures of Stanley, and the rowdy poker parties. Stanley is reality in all its vulgarity. He cannot understand or accept Blanche’s sensitivity. He learns that she has been fired from her teaching job because of her love-making with young boys. He reports this information to Mitch, the one possible person who could prolong Blanche’s hold on reality. Mitch is too much
involved in his own problems to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Blanche. He refuses to see her. With nothing to hold her to reality, Blanche seeks satisfaction in her illusions. While still groping for life and love, she sings, "It is Only a Paper Moon"; but when the truth of her lurid past is exposed, she cannot face it. She becomes completely psychotic. Stella has her committed to an institution. With kind attendance, Blanche can continue to have her delusions about gentlemen callers. With complete withdrawal from reality, Blanche ceases to be responsible for her actions. She gains a simulated happiness.

Various solutions are made by the inhibited spinsterish lady. Sandra, Williams' archetype character, prefers the extreme escape from her loneliness and frustration. She kills herself. Blanche follows another extreme; she succumbs to insanity. In between the happiness of complete illusion and the end in death are the various substitutes which can be made. Edith Jelkes completely restrains herself from her desires and remains a de-vitalized virgin. Sleeping pills become her antidote for loneliness. Alma Tutwiler finds complete satisfaction in promiscuity which she knows is socially unacceptable. Alma Winekeller seeks temporary gratification in fleeting moments with traveling salesmen. Each woman is deluded into a substitute gratification, because her real needs and desires cannot be met. Each wants to escape the aching loneliness that her inhibited personality has produced. Intemperate answers are all that they are capable of finding.
The Insensitive Character

The insensitive man never dominates any of the works of Tennessee Williams, but he is important in that he shows contrast with the sensitive individuals and emphasizes the problems of the sensitive. However, there are different insensitivities. Just as the sensitive archetypes reach refinement in later works, so do their counterparts. And in Williams' last three plays—Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth—there is a subtle development towards the combination of the sensitive and the insensitive.

Although no one character in Battle of Angels fully provides the archetype of the insensitive person, the two aspects of indifference and destructiveness are clearly shown. Both of these elements are unsatisfactory deterrents for the growth of individuals and environment. They negate change in their unthinking acceptance of the status quo. Therefore, sensitive and searching persons who find the world too difficult to cope with are judged as anomalies. And they are either ignored or tortured by those who cannot understand their needs. Dolly, Beulah, Eva, and Blanche are examples of the insensitive persons who express no need for change. They close their minds to anything but idleness and gossip. Jabe and the Sheriff present the destructive elements. They are aware of sensitivities and enjoy torturing or killing anyone who questions or rejects their grim world.

Stanley Kowalski in A Streetcar Named Desire is the epitome of insensitivity. He is crude, coarse, vulgar, and unfeeling in his motivations and behavior. To an extremely sensitive person such as
Blanche, his behavior is utterly revolting. She pleads with her sister to leave him:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something--subhuman--something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him, like one of those 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! Baring the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you--you here--waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night!--you call it--this party of apes! Somebody grows--some creature snatches at something--the fliht is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is, we're approaching. . . . Don't--don't hang back with the brutes!1

Stanley's torn undershirts, coarse language, rowdy poker parties, dirty jokes, drunkenness, and sensuality are overt symbols of his violence, animal force, and brutal desire.

At the expense of wrecking the hopes of a frail and sensitive person, Stanley exposes Blanche's sordid past. Even his best friend, Mitch, is affected by Stanley's coldness. Mitch can find happiness away from his mother, if he marries Blanche. Blanche can be satisfied in forgetting her past. Stanley insists that truth be told. As a result the hopes of Mitch and Blanche are dashed. But Stanley, the baying hound, remains content in his savage world. After raping her and thus causing her final loss of sanity, Stanley

1 A Streetcar Named Desire, p. 83.
calmly plays poker with his friends as the attendants from the mental institution come to take Blanche away.

Gutman, in _Camino Real_, presents another aspect of insensitivity. While Stanley has shown the unthinking part of man who is merciless, Gutman shows the thinking man who rejects any form of pity.

Each of the protagonists in this play is seen in contrast with the callous and merciless Gutman. In his insensitivity to the frustrated individuals with whom he comes in contact on the Camino Real, Gutman well understands the unfolding conflicts exposed around him. And he uses his understanding for the further exploitation of the lost souls on the square. His only motivation is that of procuring money. At no point does he allow pity to obscure his lucid point of view. Because one man has no money, Gutman refuses to allow him to enter the Siete Mares and watches him die of thirst outside the hotel. He makes Kilroy act as a patsy in order to earn room and board. Gutman tries to reduce Jacques Cassanova to a tenant of the Ritz _Men Only_. At no point does Gutman relent in his steeled obduracy. He watches the debased persons groping for happiness and closes his mind from any efforts towards helping them.

In his recent plays, Williams adds new scope to the insensitive man. He no longer presents his characters as wholly insensitive or wholly sensitive. In _Cat on a Hot Tin Roof_, Big Daddy presents a coarse, seemingly insensitive exterior. He tells boorish dirty jokes, curses, and wallows in his wealth. Underneath this, however, he is a kind and loving father who wants to see his son happy. He understands Brick's problems and wants to help him solve them, but...
he cannot explain this. He lets Maggie keep her lie about her pregnancy, hoping that the lie can be converted to truth.

In Suddenly Last Summer, the capable doctor comprehends Catharine's sensitivity. As a result, he is torn between furthering his own advance in medical research and marriage or submitting to the cruelties suggested by Mrs. Venable. He does not close his mind to the problem.

As in Battle of Angels, there is no one person in Sweet Bird of Youth who represents the insensitive man. All the townsfolk as well as Heavenly's father are frustrated in searching for reinforcements which they have never attained. Yet they play upon the weaknesses of the sensitive persons and try to gain some sort of success in their own tired lives. None of the characters is wholly in the right, and none is wholly wrong. There is a feeling of resignation implied in each of the persons.

Williams suggests that a combination of both characteristics exists in most men. But the tendencies in each are weighted towards one view or the other.

Works with Combined Archetypes

For the most part, in Williams' early works there is a sharp division between the insensitive and the sensitive persons and between each sensitive type and another sensitive type. As Williams' viewpoint reaches greater dimension, the traits of several archetypes are combined within one personality. Thus, as with the refinement of the insensitive man, there is a deepening of the sensitive characterization. Archetypes from the Battle of Angels become less explicit
in The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Suddenly Last Summer, and Sweet Bird of Youth.

Williams' short novel, The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone, is superficially a clinical study of a woman trying to transgress time and loneliness. Mrs. Stone is a composite of Sandra's and Myra's frustrations. Told in a series of flashbacks, Karen's agonies of childhood, youth, and middle age are presented sympathetically. Her infatuation with young Paolo, an aristocratic gigolo, does not mark the first time she has accepted the company of youth by paying handsomely for it. Before Paolo, she has been able to maintain her dignity. Like Myra, Karen plans in rational terms the procedure which will lead to her success. She analyzes the idiosyncrasies and needs of her associates and plans her behavior in accordance with them. Just as she knows--through careful planning--she can be King of the Mountain at the girls' school, she knows it is also necessary to pretend tomboyishness, in order to be accepted by the group. Even roughing her hair and participating in the sports fails to hide her extreme beauty. By sheer contrivance, she manages to see the weaknesses of the other children. With composure, she manipulates them. With her head, not her heart, she continues with adult civilized tactics to arrive at the height of her career.

In her youth, she avoided studiously the machinations of her self-concerned life. She was a popular actress. Her wealthy, adoring husband protected her from self-recognition; he was her child, and she was his mother--there was no need for other children, nor did they want them. With the death of her husband, the
finale of her career, and the relief of menopause, her life was
strangely diverted. She left New York to search for her "spring"
years of unperiled sex. She resided in the ageless beauty of ancient
Rome.

The red tides had been full of danger because they had a purpose
not part of her plan to hold an exalted position. What she felt
now, was desire without the old, implicit distraction of danger.
Nothing could happen, now, but the desire and its possible
gratification. Knowing this, she knew for the first time why
she had married . . . to avoid copulation. It had been the
secret dread in her, the unconscious will not to bear. That
dread was not withdrawn. It had gone with the withdrawing tide of
fertility, and now there was only the motionless lake and the
untroubled moon resting on it, passionless as the acceptance of a
shred proposition on terms that suited both parties.¹

The drift of her years, beauty, and attractiveness are sym-
bolized in her longings, lack of gratification, and her wish to be a
Rondini. She hopes that the legend about these legless birds is true.
They never have to light on the ground or mix with the tourists of
Europe. They stay above the ground, beyond reality, among the
beauties of the heavens. She, too, wishes to remain the intransigent
woman of beauty and youth. But, just as she knows she can no longer
play young Juliet on the stage, she knows the legend is untrue. There
is an exhibitionist who watches Karen as she moves through Rome. He
proceeds to perform obscene acts which give her spurts of great
repugnance towards his actions as well as her own. He becomes a sym-
bol of deterioration which Mrs. Stone must eventually face. She does
not want to involve herself in a degenerate affair with such a base
person. Yet, she finally succumbs. Each step leads Karen to further

¹The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone (New York: New Directions
debasement of her person. When she accepts the exhibitionist, she accepts her own degeneration.

Like Sandra, Karen Stone recognizes the baseness of her promiscuous behavior; but she is willing to avoid loneliness, so she indulges her sexual proclivities. Just as there is no bird that does not have to face reality, so she is a woman who must face getting old and unattractive. The exhibitionist is a frequent reminder to her of reality. He forms a leitmotif of negation, drifting through her life in Rome, where she is trying to re-capture spring, her youth. He is a source of revulsion, because she does not want to admit her degeneration. She wants to ignore the advances of the pervert; but, in the end, she is submissive to him and to her life as an escapist. She continues trying to "step the drift." For her, "Nothingness would be interrupted, the awful vacancy would be entered by something." He will fill her gap of loneliness, until the next lover is to be encountered through the Contesse or another sophisticated pimp.

Like Sandra, Karen is left with fruitless longings. Although she is disgusted with her behavior, she has no inclination to change it. Sandra prefers suicide to continuance. Karen Stone accepts what she is and plans, eventually, to prolong her promiscuity by having plastic surgery when aged features necessitate defying nature. There is no actual happiness for Karen. There is only sexual gratification.

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1Ibid., p. 148.
2Ibid., p. 148.
Karen resembles Myra in her objective understanding of her position. However, while Myra’s desires are simple and her attempts to achieve them not unusual, Karen tries many ways to gain gratification. She has had physical contact with her best friend, Meg Bishop, a Lesbian. Her reactions were ambivalent towards Meg. Karen has seduced young men, but only so that she can make demands upon them. She loves her husband, but wants to mother him and to be mothered. Their relationship is good, because neither of them wants sexual love from each other. The marchata, Paolo, to whom she loses her dignity, is actually a homosexual; he is attracted to the barber who loves hearing about Paolo’s sexual excursions with wealthy women. Karen’s approaching affair with the exhibitionist shows the path which she will be taking—she will take what she can get, from whomever she can get it. And the fields of choice are becoming narrowed.

Karen’s excursions into labyrinths of sex reach a nadir of distress, because she has made no intellectual provisions for her later life. She prefers to stop the drift, rather than to accept the middle years. She wants a spring forever. A new time has been found. She is no longer fertile, and she wants the youth that has sex. She knows, intellectually, that this cannot be attained, but she refuses to acknowledge it. Each affair will stop the nothingness, temporarily. This unheroic and insipid woman neither thinks nor rationalizes. She only exists in a quagmire of neuroticism and escape.
Less sympathy is felt for Karen than for Myra, because one feels that Karen has the capability to change but is too lazy. But Myra tries to change her circumstances and is thwarted.

There is a combination of archetypes in each of the central characters in Suddenly Last Summer. This play also presents a singular departure from Williams' use of his archetypes. The play revolves around the death of Sebastian, a character whose personality combines the traits of Vee and Sandra. Mrs. Venable, Sebastian's mother, is a composite of Val and Myra. Catharine Holly is a fusion of Myra and Sandra.

Although Sebastian has been murdered and eaten before the play opens, his personality is clarified through the dialogue of the principal characters, Mrs. Venable and Catharine Holly. As had Vee, Sebastian had been a fanatic advocate of what he considered a good principle. He had lived for more than forty years searching for material to include in his annual poems for his Blue Jay notebook. His "solitary safari" to find God had been satisfied on the Galapagos Islands, of the Encantadas. There he had watched the giant turtles crawl out of the sea to deposit their eggs in the sand-pits. Watching the birds swooping to attack the turtles as they rush back to the sea, Sebastian discerned that life devours life in God's universe. All of God's creatures appear to be rapacious vultures, existing at the expense of other lives. Since man is a part of this chain reaction, Sebastian chose to throw off his yoke of chastity and appropriate

what prey he could find. He resolved to form liaisons with young men.
All his trips had been taken with his mother who held on tena-
ciously to Sebastian's chastity. He finally rebelled against her
when she had a heart attack. Henceforth, he took his attractive
cousin, Catherine, with him on his vacations. She could procure the
young men for him. Thus, like Sandra, he resorted to promiscuity,
which had been previously both enticing to him and equally repugnant.
He was a weaker person than Sandra; he did not have the courage of
his convictions. While Sandra was able to commit suicide and escape,
Sebastian had to implement the situation so that others could perform
the act for him. Young, hungry boys who had accepted Sebastian's
bribes at the beach murdered him with opened tinctans and then devoured
parts of his body. With his death, he enjoyed the greatest act of a
martyr. He had found God; he had debased his chastity and had met
absolution through the same young men whom he had seduced.

Mrs. Venable is much like Val in her complete inability to
comprehend what is happening about her. Her lack of comprehension
arises from her refusal to accept reality. She has been satisfied to
attach herself to her son, relaxing in the disbelief that he could
desire any company other than hers. She is proud of his chastity
which, unknown to her, has troubled him. She refuses to admit her
encroaching old age. She attends all of the fashionable resorts
with her middle-aged son. She thinks of him as a young and dashing
companion. Just as Val could have remained with Myra, Mrs. Venable
could have remained with her husband. Instead, she prefers to wan-
der with Sebastian. Also like Val, she shuts her mind to other
possibilities. She refuses to admit that her son craves attention from anyone other than herself. When she hears from Catharine the truth concerning his erotic behavior and his sensational murder, she immediately puts the girl into a mental institution. Mrs. Venable shuts her mind to truth.

Catharine, like Myra, has been defeated in her many attempts to find happiness. It is through other persons' interference and misunderstanding that she has been reduced to an inhibited, lonely, and isolated spinster. When she has the opportunity to travel with Sebastian, she eagerly accepts on his terms—that she wear revealing clothes and behave exhibitionistically in order to lure young men for him. At least, he gives her some form of companionship. She reasons, like Sandra, that she must take any pleasure she can find. She, too, does not find lasting satisfaction in this way. Yet she continues, because it makes her feel wanted. But jealousy on the part of Sebastian's mother and the violence of his death shake the little security Catharine had possessed. Even though she knows that she saw the cannibalistic murder, she questions her own sanity when everyone else doubts her tale. Williams leaves the reader in no doubt as to the veracity of her tale. But he does not conclude Catharine's future. Whether she has the lobotomy or not remains undisclosed. However, her defeat in human relationships remains obvious. She doubts her own judgment and her own perspective. With lobotomy she could only become devoid of memory. With no surgery, she remains horrified by a brutal act she saw performed on a man she loved.
The play's ending remains purposely ambiguous. No declaration is made as to what decision the doctor will make. He is supposed to be the objective analyst for the conflicting views of Mrs. Venable and Catharine Holly. However, he has selfish ends to gain. Thus, he is tempted to perform the unneeded surgery at the risk of Catharine's permanent loss of memory and for the profit of acquiring a fund for research in brain surgery.

If one can presume that the doctor represents Williams' view of the insensitive society, then it can be concluded that the surgery will be done. But Williams seems to waver in declaring the doctor to be quite so selfish. The doctor intimates that he believes Catharine's story. Thus, at least in one play Williams chooses to let the reader decide whether the rational observer is as coarse and insensitive as he is in earlier plays. But the actions of the sensitive persons--Sebastian, Catharine, and Mrs. Venable--continue to be futile and sad.

Reality appears, in this play, to be less ugly or petty. But reality seems ambiguous. One realizes that Mrs. Venable can never change. She cannot believe Catharine's story, because she does not want to believe it. Catharine shuts out any possibility of illusion from her view. She sees the perversity of Sebastian's actions and the brutality of the young cannibals. The doctor tries to discern both views in correct proportion. Thus, there is a meekness in Williams' attitude towards the insensitive person.

Although there is no ambiguity present in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, conflict regarding reality remains the central issue. Maggie the Cat
presents a combination of the sensitive and insensitive character. Like Myra, she has the capacity for great tenderness. She has been rejected by her husband, Brick, who cannot bear the sight of her after she tries to open his wound regarding Skipper. She finds that "Living with someone you love can be lonelier—that living entirely alone!—if the one that you love doesn't love you. . . ."

But she is determined to make Brick return to her. She has the determination of a cat on a tin roof, but "one thing I don't have," she insists, "is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I'm determined to win!" She begs Brick to accept the reality that he hides even from himself—that he loved Skipper homosexually. She wants him to admit it to himself so that he can understand her relationship with him, as well:

When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don't work, it's just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hope of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn't put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant . . . .

Maggie knows that Brick is incapable of helping himself. But she has the ability to help him, because she has the strength to accept truth. Weakness in Brick does not make her dislike him. She loves him and wants to encourage him in any way that she can to make a man of him. She believes that he must accept reality and not escape into drinking.

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1 *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, p. 12.


By forcing Brick to live as her husband again, Maggie knows that she gains from it also. Before her marriage, she was reared in a poor family. She wanted pretty and expensive things. If her marriage were dissolved, she would lose Big Daddy's inheritance. Thus, Maggie is looking out for herself as well as for Brick. She lies to Big Daddy about her pregnancy, which could not possibly exist. She knows that the lie will give him pleasure before he dies. She also knows that it secures her inheritance. Big Daddy knows that this is a lie. But he has lived with mendacity all his life. He hopes that his accepting of this lie can convert it to truth. Then his son can become a man, and Big Daddy will have an heir by his favorite son.

Maggie knows that Brick cannot, by drinking, erase his love for Skipper. Moreover, she does not want him to try. She only wants him to acknowledge his love for Skipper as beautiful, not revolting. Brick, unfortunately, can only consider the ugliness of homosexuality. Maggie understands Brick. She knows how she can help him and remains determined to do so. Thus, she has a semblance of love. This is as much as she can expect. "Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace," she concludes. "What you need is someone to take hold of you—gently, with love, and hand life back to you, like something gold you let go of—and I can! I'm determined to do it—and nothing's more determined than a cat on a tin roof—is there...?"

Williams believes that Maggie has gained a victory. It is not complete. But, then, Williams says that no one's can be.

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1Ibid., p. 197.
None of the protagonists of this play can be marked as either sensitive or insensitive. Brick, Maggie, Big Daddy, and Big Mama are all composites. Big Daddy and Big Mama present departures from the usual insensitive roles created by Williams. Both are coarse and vulgar, but both of them also hide sincere tenderness and insecurity. Each has his problems and moments of reality. Only Brick has a sense of defeat which he feels he must escape. Even then, his wife has determination enough for him as well as for herself. She will help him through.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams' viewpoint has reached its culmination concerning the conflict of reality and illusion. He asserts that sensitive man can be led to a successful life, if there are understanding persons such as Maggie who will make the effort to help them. Also, Williams shows that the insensitive man can be helped to view life less harshly and, consequently, less severely for the sensitive. And together, the combination in reciprocal love and pity can produce a more pleasant world for everyone. As a playwright, Williams asserts that

... The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent--fiercely charged--interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis. Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself. This does not absolve the playwright of his duty to observe and probe as clearly and deeply as he legitimately can: but it should steer him away from "pat" conclusions, facile definitions which make a play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience.

1Ibid., p. 98.
It is necessary to note that Williams' latest major play, **Sweet Bird of Youth**, presents Williams' concern with sensitive and insensitive persons. But there is a modification in view of the conflict of illusion and reality. The Val-like character has undergone a slight change. The former persons have been unable to understand their actions. They either have been unable to distinguish reality from illusion or have hated what they consider reality. However, in this recent play, Chance presents a new departure from Val. After a series of incidents in which Chance does not learn from experiences, he resigns himself to the truth of his experiences. He is a failure, always has been a failure, and can be nothing but a failure in theatre and love-making. He understands reality and accepts it. His last mistress, Princess Pamuzoglu, also has found reality. Her escape into hashish is no longer needed when she accepts the reality that she has the possibility of returning to a successful career if she will make the effort. She knows the way is difficult and anticipates her struggle, but she is willing to face the struggle in order to reach success. She would like to travel back to reality and success with Chance. Since he has accepted reality, he knows that he cannot do so. There is no possibility of success for him in that profession. He has cut himself off from this pursuit. With resignation, he awaits the castration that he deserves.

Williams' modification of the struggle between illusion and reality reaches a new dimension in **Sweet Bird of Youth**. As in **Suddenly Last Summer**, reality appears to be less cruel. Sensitive
persons are presented with more capabilities and less insurmountable frustrations. The probability of success for more sensitive persons is felt to be stronger than in any other play.
CONCLUSION

Tennessee Williams has spent twenty years concentrating upon the clarification of one central theme which has carried throughout his works. He has caught the "true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent, fiercely charged! interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis."¹ He has laid bare various motivations for and manifestations of neurotic behavior and found that basic conflict revolves around one's view of illusion and reality. In his speculations he determines that what may be reality for one may not be actuality for another. Those who have more rationality and objectivity should use their attributes to help those who cannot solve their problems.

Problems for men arise from many conflicts. Romance of the past conflicts with the equalor of the present; animality with spirituality, body with soul, masculinity with femininity, destructiveness with fragility, practical values with spiritual values, regimentation with anarchy, physical life with physical death, and spiritual life with spiritual death. Each person must find his own answer, because sensitive individuals are too involved with their own problems to see the frustrations of others, and because insensitive persons, not wanting to be involved, try to close their eyes to the problems of others. Williams sadly concludes that few people can break the bonds of their problems, but love and pity could

¹Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 98.
appease the loneliness and incommunicability of sensitive individuals who are torn in the conflict of illusion and reality.

Through continual probing for answers to man's conflicts, Williams seems to be mellowing his idea of the world as a cruel, ugly, and insensitive place. Indeed, he judges, there is a bit of bizarre nature in everyone. But most people are not aware of this because they have repressed anything but "normal" behavior. He feels that if he can exaggerate behavior common to everyone, perhaps he can show his audience their weaknesses. At least they can understand and help those who are unable to see their own problems and solve them.

Williams' plays are sensational in subject matter only to a certain extent. Actually, there is a more implied vulgarity than in the spoken word. He does not condone perversities. He shows that those who resort to homosexuality, nymphomania, masochism, alcoholism, dope addiction, and other forms of degeneracy have done so only because they are seeking satisfactions basic to everyone--love and understanding, security and happiness. They are misguided human beings who have been crippled by an unfeeling environment. They have been unable to make effective adjustment. And phobias, compulsions, and obsessions are manifestations of their anxieties.

Williams is not altogether pessimistic in his view of the world. Jacques Casanova insists that "The violets in the moutains can break the rocks if you believe in them and allow them to grow."\(^1\)

\(^1\) *Camino Real*, p. 97.
And Maggie, a determined member of the rational society, insists that weakness and sensitivity will be helped by those who see it. "And I'm determined to do it--and there's nothing's more determined than a cat on a tin roof. Is there?"¹

The contribution of Tennessee Williams lies in his power to open the hearts of his audience to the sensitivities of his group of sad, romantic misfits, brooding in their dreams of love, loneliness and defeat. He is not bitter or sardonic. Nor is he defeated. He asks his audience to have understanding and tenderness. Successful adjustment for the misguided persons will follow.

¹Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 197.
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