CHAPTER TWO

FLIGHT FROM FAMILY

"The signs are interior" (Tom Wingfield, *The Glass Menagerie*)

In this chapter I will be examining Williams' early works that deal with the theme of flight from the family and linking this to a study of the playwright's first commercially successful play, *The Glass Menagerie* (*Menagerie*), which also focuses on this theme. The theme of flight recurs in much of Williams' short fiction but is particularly prominent in the playwright's early works and relates to the need to escape the confines of the home. The home is perceived as a trap, impeding the self-development of individuals and there is a real struggle to escape from it. As critics have observed, the flight pattern of these fugitives mirrors Williams' own flight from the confines of his dysfunctional home. Signi L. Falk, for example, says that the theme of flight from the family is modelled on "autobiographical details [that]...reflect not only the personality of the writer but the ideas and images that fired his imagination" (1962, 29). This is undoubtedly true, for most of the fugitives in Williams' early works are either struggling artists or tubercular poets. However there are other types of fugitives who are not only concerned with the notions of art but who are also struggling to discover their sexual identities. These men and women usually lurk in dark corners or live in a world of illusion. This chapter explores the predicament of fugitives who are driven to flee from the family matrix and reveals their flight is inextricably bound up with the issue of homosexuality.

The short stories selected for scrutiny were written before the staging of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1945. "The Vengeance of Nitocris" (1928), Williams' first published work, deals with the brother-sister relationship that critics have claimed is vital to an understanding of the playwright's later works. Apart from the brother-sister relationship, "Nitocris" is also about the sense of alienation that both brother and sister feel in a hostile society, a theme that dominates his early works. Two other short stories on the theme of alienation are "The Accent of a Coming Foot" (1935) and "The Angel in the Alcove" (1943). "Accent", one of the playwright's earliest autobiographical short stories, chronicles the relationship between Bud and Catherine. It is about the alienation of a writer in the family matrix. "The Angel in the Alcove" (1943), is one of Williams' earliest works that deals with the alienation of the homosexual. But, as in "Accent", the playwright distances himself from homosexuality by creating a "doppelganger" or second self. In "Angel" the homosexual is a tubercular artist who is turned out of the boarding house because he is accused of "spreading disease". In "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" (1943), Williams was able to fuse the alienation he felt as an artist and as a gay man. "Portrait" is based on a nameless narrator's recollection. The narrator's reminiscence, I believe, is not merely that of a young man about his sister. It also registers the experience of a young homosexual man and the sense of alienation he shared with his sister at home. Together, the early works (written between 1928 and 1943) reflect Williams' development as an artist. More importantly, because the short story is a more private medium, the playwright was able to treat more intimate issues like the madness of his sister and the estrangement from society that he felt because of his sexual orientation.

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Tennessee Williams considered the early fiction of his career as "veiled attempts at autobiography...created on a single burst of personal lyricism" (Hayman 133-34). Because autobiographical aspects figure prominently in them, it is important to highlight the biographical influence through a brief summary of Williams' early experiences. In *Memoirs*, published in 1977, Williams provides important information about his family members. Central to the Williams family matrix is the mother, Edwina Dakin. The daughter of an Episcopalian preacher, she was, according to Williams, popular in her social circle. Edwina married Cornelius Coffin Williams, a travelling salesman, and started a family in her father's home. They had a daughter, Rose, followed by a son, Tom, about two years later. This period of early childhood was idyllic for the siblings. Tom and Rose were cared for by Ossie, their African American maid. Williams recalls the creative impetus derived from his grandfather's extensive library. It was in this library that he discovered Herodotus' history of Egypt, material for his first short story. He describes himself as a robust young child until he was taken ill. During this period of illness, Edwina, in Williams' eyes, became the over-protective mother "who made me a sissy" (*Memoirs* 11-12). It was during this formative period in his life that Williams developed a love for reading and an affinity with the world of the imagination.

However when Cornelius, who was working in the International Shoe Company, was promoted, the family had to move to St. Louis. Williams says that this was a "tragic" step taken by his parents. It became obvious that Edwina and her children could not adapt to the impersonal landscape of urban America. The apartment was small and the children

found this confining because they were used to the open spaces of their childhood home. In school, Williams recalls being taunted for his Southern drawl and being persecuted for his lack of physical prowess. St. Louis influenced much of Williams' conception of society. He writes in his *Memoirs* that the city made him aware "that we were poor". The home of the Wingfields in *Menagerie* which "functions as one interfused mass of automatism" was inspired by the first apartment that he lived in. The Williams family moved a total of 16 times while in St. Louis. In 1928, this negative image of society found expression in "Nitocris".

At home, Williams began to be estranged from his father. His father appeared as an enemy who relentlessly taunted him because "he thought I was a sissy". Lyle Leverich, Williams' biographer, comments that Cornelius' drinking habit coupled with his "womanising" made the home a "war-zone". Edwina, who was used to a more protected life in her father's home, was shocked at her husband's drinking and gambling. Fights between the parents, that at times turned violent, were not uncommon in the Williams household. Both Rose and Tom were kept in a state of constant fear of their father. The only respite the children had was when their maternal grandmother, Rose Dakin, visited the family. In "Grand" (1964), a short story dedicated to his grandmother, Williams depicts the importance of these moments of tranquillity in his childhood:

> Her coming meant nickles for ice cream, quarters for movies, picnics in Forest Park. It meant the soft and gay laughter like the laughter of girls between our mother and her mother, voices that ran up and down like finger exercises on the piano. It meant a return of grace from exile in the South and it meant the propitiation of my desperate father's wrath at life and the world which he,

> unhappy man, could never help taking out upon his children – except when the presence, like music, of my grandmother in the furiously close little city apartment cast a curious unworldly spell of peace over all there confined. (*Collected Works*, 401-02)

Both Tom and his sister Rose relied on each other when their grandmother was not around. While Tom had his writing, which he believes saved him from madness, Rose had no creative outlet. Leverich says that Edwina and Cornelius were aware that madness was hereditary in both their families but because of the social stigma associated with mental illness, they refused to acknowledge it in their daughter (Leverich 180). Rose eventually lost the ability to function as a normal person. She could not secure jobs and failed miserably in the typing school that Edwina enrolled her in. To aggravate matters, Cornelius continually threatened to turn Rose out of the house if she could not earn a living. Edwina then decided to introduce her to "gentleman callers", hoping to marry her off. Clarke Mills, one of Tom's fellow-writers and one of Rose's gentleman callers, describes her as beautiful, but was shocked to see her in clothes more suited to the fashion of the last century (Leverich 181). While Rose began slowly loosing her mind, Tom became convinced that his vocation in life was to write. Like Bud in "Accent", he had by 1935, "little bits of poetry [and a few stories] published" in magazines. He attended University College and ventured out into society while his sister remained at home. The guilt of "abandoning" his sister would haunt him all his life. This relationship would figure prominently not only in "Accent" but also in "Portrait" and *Menagerie*.

The biggest influence in Williams' life at home was his mother Edwina. Her graceful and gentle ways, reminiscent of the last century, greatly inspired Williams in his

writing. Edwina was also a strong and resourceful woman who held the family together despite her husband's obvious lack of interest. She treated her St. Louis home as though it was an antebellum mansion. Clarke Mills found her "endless chatter" unbearable (181). Lyle Leverich, while admitting that it was facile to blame Edwina for Cornelius' drinking habits, flatly wrote "he was married to her [Edwina]". Williams in a more compassionate manner describes her as being "overprotective". Williams however could not forgive her for having Rose lobotomised and in an interview with Dotson Rader of the *Paris Review*, Williams explains why: "Rose was merely an oversexed girl and Miss Edwina's monolithic Puritanism [drove her insane]" (Devlin 331). Williams too was affected by his religious upbringing and was never able to face his sexuality without guilt (*Memoirs* 119). Edwina's "monolithic Puritanism" further alienated her gay son who already felt estranged from his father. It is not surprising that the maternal figure in the early works is treated ambivalently. The home, with a domineering mother and with a sister who was ill coupled with a violent alcoholic father, was indeed a "trap" for a young sexually confused man.

Williams did not escape the home completely even when he attended the University of Missouri. He was living away from home but still in the same city. When he failed ROTC, Cornelius took his failure in military training as a personal insult and removed him from university (Leverich 128). In the summer of 1932, he started working in "The Biggest Shoe Company in the World". The disgruntled complaints of the narrator in "Portrait" and Tom Wingfield in *Menagerie* can be traced to this period of time, which Williams spent in "the celotex interior" of the International Shoe Company. Williams did

not give up his writing career and like Bud in "Accent", he worked relentlessly in the attic of his home. Eventually he fell ill and thus escaped from the Shoe Company. He was diagnosed to be suffering from exhaustion but the playwright believed that he had suffered a heart attack. On that same night, Rose finally lost her mind and began ranting that "you are going to be murdered" (Leverich 148). While Williams was sent away to rest in his grandparent's home in Memphis, Rose was sent away to a mental asylum.

In 1937 Williams continued his education at the University of Iowa, financed by his grandparents. He was also a student of drama, studying under Edward Charles Mabie. His career as a writer also seemed more assured when several of his plays were staged by *The Murmurs*, a St. Louis theatre group. One of these was a one-act play entitled *The Fugitive Kind*. Although these attempts to leave home were only partially successful, it had become apparent to the playwright that flight was necessary. However as Leverich explains, the playwright felt like a fugitive:

> Leaving his home in St. Louis at this time of his life was not the rite of passage Tom had hoped for. In becoming Tennessee Williams, he would never become so much the free spirit he wanted to be, but, rather, always an exile in flight doomed to come full circle. His were more explorations into outer space, for there would be numerous occasions that lay ahead when he would be forced back into the dreaded confinement of his home, back into the family – no lasting escape, particularly from the hold of his mother and sister had upon it. (Leverich 233)

It was in the winter of 1938 that Williams finally decided to leave St. Louis for New Orleans. Leaving behind the confines of the home meant an escape from the restrictions imposed upon him by his mother. Ronald Hayman, in *Everyone is an Audience*, a

biography of Williams, wrote that it was probably in New Orleans that he had his first homosexual experience (Hayman 57). New Orleans, to Williams was "a place in love with life" (Leverich 278) and one that he would return to, to heal a "psychic wound or a loss or failure" ("Angel" 128). In "Angel", a nameless narrator describes the bohemian lifestyle of writers in the French Quarter that Williams experienced. New Orleans, the city with "the lunar atmosphere" ("Angel" 128), allowed Williams the freedom he was looking for. It was in "Angel" that he decided to write about homosexual desire and describe a homosexual act. Although he labelled it as "the perversion of human longing" (129), it is clear that Williams was indeed thinking seriously about being homosexual. More importantly he began to identify his loneliness with not only his vocation as writer but also with his sexual orientation.

In March of 1939 while in Southern California, Williams was informed that he had won a special prize of $100.00 from the *Group Theatre*. He was also assigned an agent, Audrey Wood, who later became the prime mover of his early career. The playwright left California that same year for St. Louis. He visited Taos, New Mexico on the way back to St. Louis and there met Frieda Lawrence. Williams was very much influenced by D.H. Lawrence's works and, as Leverich explains, he found an affinity with the writer's concept of Self, especially with Lawrence's interests in bisexuality (Leverich 322). He was in New York later that year and there found himself in the fraternity of gay men. Just before the failure of his first professional production *Battle of Angels*, he had had his first serious relationship with Kip Kiernan. The failure of his relationship with Kip, followed by the early closure of *Battle* in Boston, threw Williams

into a state of depression. What he did next would become characteristic of almost all his protagonists, he ran away.

By the time he wrote "Portrait" and adapted it into a one-act play, *The Gentleman Caller*, Williams was working as a screenwriter for Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer (MGM). He had been rescued by Audrey Wood from destitution in Mexico with this high paying job as a screenwriter. It was in California that Williams contemplated his homosexuality. He befriended gay writers like Christopher Isherwood and began to believe that his sexual orientation, more than his occupation, was a "natural chasm" that estranged him from society. The playwright began to realise that being gay meant being a fugitive. But as Lyle Leverich observed, being gay also provided Williams with a distance from which to observe life:

> Mainly what Tom and Isherwood shared during this time was an acute self-consciousness, a penetrating self-examination that far exceeded egotism - "an instrument of sensibility" - through which to observe their fellow beings...[O]ver the years Christopher [like Tom] wrote and spoke with increasing honesty about homosexuality. (501-02)

It must have become apparent to the playwright, living in the land of the celluloid closet, that homosexuality would be tolerated only if it was kept hidden from public gaze. The self-censorship that permeates *Menagerie* in contrast with the more honest depiction of life as a gay man in the short stories, is, I believe, evidence of the mask that Williams wore in order to survive in Hollywood and Broadway. The play's closet-like atmosphere

is the beginning of Williams' "veiled attempt" to give homosexuality a voice and more importantly an audience.

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Gore Vidal, the editor of Williams' *Collected Stories*, explains that the playwright's fiction has a strong affinity with autobiography:

> Like most natural writers, Tennessee could not possess his own life until he had written about it. This is common. But what is not common was the way that he went about not only recapturing lost time but then regaining it in a way that far surpassed the original experience. In the beginning, there would be, let us say, a sexual desire for someone. Consumated or not, the desire...would produce reveries. In turn, the reveries would be written down as a story. (Vidal, 1985, xxiii)

Williams was a disciplined worker. He would spend whole mornings working on a story over and over until he was satisfied with what he had produced. The short stories dealt with in this chapter all share a familiar theme because of the playwright's relentless effort reworking autobiographical material, turning them into works of art. When the short stories were published together in *One Arm and Other Stories* (1948), critics measured them against Williams' plays. Both *Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* had already been staged in London when the short stories first appeared collectively in *One Arm*. The short stories, although works of art in their own right, seem destined to be compared to the plays. James Kelly's review in the *New York Times* demonstrates this point:

> Are these stories the recorded fantasies of a cynical young man with an overpowering urge to shock? Are they the preserved insights and memories of the author's squalid growing-up years which, on the other side of the coin, bring us the gentle beauty of the girl in "The Glass Menagerie"? Or can they be regarded as quick notes about the defeated, defenseless, mutilated, bereft, diseased people living in cribs and seedy boarding houses who are to figure in later mature work? Opinions will vary. (Rpt. in Vannatta 114)

It became evident to scholars of the playwright's work that the short stories provided insight into the plays because of their autobiographical nature. Even Dennis Vannatta, while extolling the virtues of examining the short stories in their own right, admits that this practice is difficult to maintain:

> Especially since several of Williams' stories served as prototypes for some of his greatest plays, the temptation is great to focus disproportionate attention on the relationship between the two genres. (Vannatta xi)

Apart from the interesting insight into the playwright's creative process, the short stories, being a more private medium, allowed the playwright the freedom to deal with more personal issues. Vannatta agrees with this estimation and explains that "if we wish...to see how a great writer dealt artistically with this very personal, often painful, part of his life (referring to his homosexuality), we must turn to his short fiction" (xi). Thus to gain an insight into the mind of a character like Tom Wingfield, the prototype fugitive from home, we must examine the short stories.

"The Vengence of Nitocris", Williams' first published short story is based on Herodotus' *The Persian Wars*. He based the plot of the story on the latter's account of the sacrilege committed by a Pharaoh who refused to worship the God Osiris because a bridge he was building was swept away by flood waters. This act of rebellion elicited the anger of the people and led to the murder of the pharaoh. The focus of Williams' story is on Queen Nitocris' revenge against the people responsible for the murder of her brother. The brother-sister relationship unmistakably resembles the writer's relationship with Rose. Williams himself considers it "the keynote to most of my works" (Vannatta 6). Apart from the brother-sister relationship, the other obvious theme that will recur in Williams' later works is the individual's war against a hostile, brutish and irrational society. The people in "Nitocris" are repeatedly described as a mob and likened to vermin. Another important insight that "Nitocris" reveals about Williams' works lies in the homoerotic description of the pharaoh:

> The figure of the pharaoh stood inflexible as rock. Superbly tall and muscular, his bare arms and limbs glittering like burnished copper in the light of the brilliant sun, his body erect and tense in his attitude of defiance, he looked indeed a mortal fit almost to challenge gods. (3)

Williams' attraction for the male body is obvious as Dennis Vannatta explains:

> At sixteen, his age when the story was published, Williams probably had the barest, if any, inklings of his incipient homosexuality, yet already in the story we find that the most sensuous description is reserved for the brother. (Vannatta 6)

While the fascination with the brother as an object of desire reverses the traditionally heterosexual male gaze, the fascination with Nitocris is equally important. Though vaguely described, Queen Nitocris' feline agility makes her a commanding figure. She is the tragic-heroine fighting against a hostile society, the prototype of a character that will be reworked throughout the playwright's career. The theme of the story, revenge, will also figure prominently in Williams' works. "Vengeance [is the] strongest of passions" (6), the playwright wrote. This clearly refers to many of his characters' rebellion against the hand that fate had dealt them. The young Tennessee Williams, unhappy at home, found in his sister a soul mate. She would forever be the central character in most of her brother's works because they shared a personal vendetta against the hostile world of their family. In this short story, both brother and sister are fugitives from the outside world.

In "Accent of a Coming Foot", Williams was clearly a more mature writer. By 1935, some of his short stories exemplified a sense of social awareness akin to social-protest writing common during the Great Depression. This concern for the socially disenfranchised would become a part of Williams' mature works. In "Accent", this is apparent in the snide remarks that Bud's family members level against him for not "working". Cecilia, Bud's sister, cannot understand why Bud continues writing poetry especially when "they never pay him a cent for it" ("Accent" 39). Only Catherine, Bud's childhood friend, who had just returned from her city job with a newspaper, seems to understand "that poetry wasn't a commodity" (39). The criticism that Bud received from his family is not unlike what Williams must have endured at home. The brother-sister relationship in this short story is however slightly different from the one in "Nitocris".

The persona who is the writer's soul mate is not his sister but his childhood friend, Catherine. However it is Catherine who most resembles the shy but "highly sexed" Rose. Vannatta shares the same view and adds:

> Two tendencies converge in "The Accent of a Coming Foot": [Williams'] tendency to divide himself, so to speak, between two or more characters (i.e. both Catherine and Bud partake of their creator's characteristics) and his tendency to blur, commingle the identities of himself and Rose. (12)

There is a third tendency that I believe is also common to Williams' creative process: his tendency to veil his homosexuality in his characters. This explains what Vanatta meant by "[Williams'] tendency to blur, commingle the identities of himself and Rose." This also explains why the personalities of the characters in "Accent" seem fragmented. Take for example Catherine's urgency to see Bud. Critics have considered Williams' description of her imagination as sensual. This becomes apparent when Williams writes that "[she hoped to] see Bud's face peeking faun-like between the quivering shafts of green vine" (36). But when Bud finally appears, she panics and runs away. Her "highly sexed and shy nature", Vannatta agrees, doubles for Williams' own attraction for his sister's gentleman callers. This makes the description of Catherine and her actions less ambiguous. Like Catherine, her creator's attraction for the male body already established in "Nitocris", both fascinated and terrified him. "Accent", seen in this light, is a projection of Williams' budding homosexuality.

Another example supporting this hypothesis is Bud's ambiguity. We are only informed that he is a writer. His exile in the attic "pounding away at the typewriter" is

reminiscent of Williams. Like Bud, the narrator-writer feels himself invisible. While Catherine's struggle for Bud's love, almost to the extent of paranoia, is a projection of the writer's struggle against his homosexual tendencies, the ambiguity of Bud's sexual orientation reminds us of the futility of that struggle. The reason, I believe, lies in Williams' attempt to convey to the reader that young gay men, like Bud, are fugitives at home:

> And all that Catherine could see of him plainly was his eyes: arrow-bright: unable to move from her own till some sign set it free, eyes like a possum's glaring at night from a torch-lit tree with the hounds and the men forming their fatal circle around it. (43)

The queer subtext of the story is centred on the subject of homosexual awakening. Like Catherine, the homosexual sees his/her own sexuality as problematic and begins to associate sexual orientation with alienation at home. Like Bud, he/she practises self-exile.

This is consistent with the theme of sexual inadequacy in "Accent", or more accurately, the inability of Bud and Catherine to commit themselves to a heterosexual relationship. When Bud finally comes into the house, something Catherine has been waiting for, she starts:

> flying up the ... stairs, her heart beating like a captured bird...[she] flung herself down on the bed, crying terribly, aching, knowing that she could never find him again. (44)

Fresh into their adulthood, both Catherine and Bud begin to realise that they have somehow changed and that their childhood relationship can never be recovered. This again is reminiscent of the writer's relationship with Hazel Kramer, who, at the time of

the composition of this short story, ended their relationship by marrying an Irishman from Wisconsin (Leverich 148). The story's queer subtext emerges in the narrator's concluding statements:

> And now the rain washed softly against the yellow walls of the house, rather apologetically explaining to all who might listen within that there was no deliberate malice in life: that there was in life only a vast obliviousness, a tranquil self-absorption which boded neither evil nor good for those who lived. You could almost hear it saying: "Observe our hands, and their gestures, limitless, yes, they are that, timeless, yes, they are that, but whatever they do, it is without thinking or knowing, and so what help can they give you?" (44)

The narrator begins to intrude into the plot of the story almost chorus-like announcing that "Accent" is a story about himself, particularly about his homosexual nature. As a young writer at home, the playwright, like Bud, is a fugitive who clings to his writing. As a young gay man, the narrator, like Catherine, has to face up to the fact that his dream of forming a heterosexual relationship is impossible. The writer, like Bud and Catherine, share a common dilemma, the inability to function "normally" at home. The fragmented personalities of these characters are "veiled attempts" by the writer to come to terms with his sexuality. Thus at the end of the story, he pleads with his readers for understanding. The "lines of the hands" that foretell fate are symbolic of the narrator's helplessness in the matter of his sexual orientation. There is no "deliberate malice" just as there is no choice in the matter when it comes to one's sexual orientation.

What is clear from "Accent", is that the narrator himself is a fugitive at home not only because he chooses to be a writer but because he cannot choose not to be

homosexual. The criticism of his family is conveniently levelled against his choice of occupation but he has come to realise that "whatever [happened], without thinking or knowing", he is different. This unexplained difference is a trope for homosexuality. Upon completing "Accent" and thus recognising his sexual orientation, Williams had his first "heart attack" (Leverich 147).

If in "Accent" it becomes clear why the home is such a hostile environment, it is in "Angel in the Alcove" that the writer discovers why he cannot afford to be confined anymore. Although the story is set in New Orleans, I will attempt to prove that its surroundings are more reminiscent of the "home" than the city. Apart from descriptions of New Orleans and its resemblance to the moon, the action of the story takes place entirely in the confines of a boarding "house". The narrator begins his narration with a statement of guilt:

> Suspicion is the occupational disease of landladies and long association with them has left me with an obscure sense of guilt which I probably will never be free of. ("Angel" 125)

Leaving the "house" like a fugitive, a natural progression from the condition of the home in "Accent", fills the narrator with guilt. In fact, the landlady in "Angel" with her "paranoid suspicion" is not unlike the mother in "Portrait" and later Amanda Wingfield in *Menagerie*. What is more interesting is the resemblance between the conditions in the boarding house and Bud's home in "Accent":

> The downstairs hall of this rooming house on Bourbon Street was totally lightless. You had to grope your way...until you arrived at the door or the foot of the stairs. You never reached either without the old woman's challenge. Her ghostly figure would bolt upright on the rattling cot. She would utter one syllable – who? If she were not satisfied with the identification given, or suspected that you were taking your luggage out in a stealthy departure or bringing somebody in for carnal enjoyment, a match would be struck on the floor and held toward your face for several moments. (125)

Like Bud, the narrator lives under constant surveillance. This same predicament will haunt Tom Wingfield in *Menagerie*. In "Angel", the only respite for the narrator comes in the form of "the transparent figure [who...begins] the patient watching which put me to sleep" (128). The apparition reminds the narrator of "my grandmother during her sieges of illness" (128). We can safely conclude that, for Williams, the grandmother is still a source of calmness in an otherwise inharmonious home. From this point onwards, Williams begins to portray the maternal figure ambivalently.

Opposite to the "grandmother" is the landlady. Her paranoid behaviour makes her mean and unforgiving. Yet the narrator does not blame her entirely for "it is the occupational hazard of landladies" to become like her. She is a victim of the faithlessness of her boarders. Like Amanda Wingfield in *Menagerie*, the landlady's nature has been shaped by abandonment. Her constant surveillance however makes the "house" almost uninhabitable. Its boarders, consisting of a tubercular artist, a starving widow (Mrs. Wayne) and the writer-narrator, are prisoners of the landlady's paranoia. Like the mother in the Wingfield home, she forbids her boarders to leave and does not allow them any carnal enjoyment. Once again, Williams seem to say, the only way to escape this fate is through artistic expression or flight.

In the case of the narrator, he is a struggling artist "who had already accepted anonymity and failure" (128) but pushes on because his salvation lies in his writing. Mrs. Wayne, one of those "characters...[which in time] the earth swallows up" (127), also survives because of her story telling abilities. She creates fantastic tales that in turn create "a faraway mesmerised look" even in the eyes of the landlady. While her 'victims' are beguiled, she "had scarped her saucepan clean with wolfish relish" (127). Mrs. Wayne in many ways resembles the now lobotomised Rose.

The method of the landlady's control is to expose these fugitives to the reality of their conditions. One of the casualties of her cruelty is the tubercular artist. As in "Accent", Williams creates two characters when dealing with the problematic subject of homosexuality. In "Angel", the homosexual is a gay artist, suffering from tuberculosis and who earns a living by peddling his art on canvas. The narrator remembers him because he is "the more substantial visitor [who] came to my room" (129). Unlike the "angel" however, the narrator's encounter with the tubercular artist is not only more tangible, it has served to provide him the physical contact he so yearned for:

> I was jolted out of sleep by a warmth that was not my own, and I awoke to find that someone had entered my room and was crouching over the bed. I jumped up and nearly cried out, but the arms of the visitor passionately restrained me. He whispered his name which was that of a tubercular artist who slept in the room adjoining. I want to, I want to, he whispered. So I lay back and let him do what he wanted to until he finished. (129)

Williams claimed that "Angel" is autobiographical. It is, he says, based on his experiences in New Orleans in 1938-39, during which time he claimed to have had his first homosexual experience with a paratrooper (Hayman 56). Whether or not the incident quoted above is truly representational of what happened remains speculative. The writer's treatment of homosexuality is however consistent. Homosexuality remains the source of his estrangement from society. Ronald Hayman agrees and adds that Williams always felt intensely lonely after each casual encounter with strangers (Hayman 88). In his fiction, guilt feelings are often associated with homosexual acts. The narrator in "Angel" immediately qualifies his description of the incident by suggesting that it happened as a result of "perversions of longings" (129). The incident, the narrator adds, created "turbulent feelings...on both sides of the wall" (129). However what he is more concerned with is the "angel's" opinion on the matter:

> But at last I was drowsy again. I cocked my eye toward the alcove. Yes, she was there. I wondered if she had witnessed the strange goings on and what her attitude was toward perversions of longing. But nothing gave any sign...I felt that she had permitted the act to occur and had neither blamed nor approved, and so I went off to sleep. (129)

If the "angel" is not judgmental over homosexual acts, the landlady not only does not approve, she aims to end such "goings on." Shortly after the incident, the tubercular artist complains about the unhealthy environment of the house. The landlady takes this as an opportunity to throw him out but not before exposing him as a degenerate:

> It's you, not bugs, that makes such a filthy mess at the Court of Two Parrots it's got to be scoured with lye when you leave every

> night...And if you don't leave on your own accord pretty quick you'll be given y'ur notice. And I'm not keepin' yuh neither...I'll gather it [his belongings] up on the end of a ten-foot pole and dump it into the fire, cause nothing you touch is safe for human contact... (131-132).

Indeed, later, while burning the artist's mattress, she yells aloud: "A TB case has been on it, a filthy degenerate and a liar" (132). "Angel" like "Accent" informs us that the "house" or "home" is hostile to writers and homosexuals. Being a homosexual artist, Williams seem to say, is a terrible fate. All three stories discussed so far centre on the alienation of the individual whether at home or in society. As the writer matures, it becomes clear that the alienation he felt at home not merely stems from his unconventional ambition to be a writer but also because of his struggle for sexual identity. It is in "Portrait", a story based on recollection, that the playwright offers a possible explanation for the recurrence of the flight motif in his works.

"Portrait" is directly linked to its more famous counterpart – *Menagerie*. Its transposition to the stage is a good example of the creative process of the playwright. The story, like the play, begins with the narrator's recollection. The short story is centred on the relationship between the narrator and his sister. Unlike the earlier short stories examined, however, the sister has grown completely helpless:

> She made no positive motion toward the world but stood at the edge of the water with feet that anticipated too much cold to move. She'd never have budged an inch, I'm pretty sure if my mother, who was a relatively aggressive sort of woman had not shoved her roughly forward. (115)

Another new development is the introduction of the mother into the scheme of things. It is undeniable that she resembles the writer's mother, Edwina. The father, as in all the short stories examined in this chapter, is absent. He, like the faithless boarders in "Angel", had abandoned the family many years ago. The narrator is a factory worker with an ambition to be a writer. Thus far everything seems rather ordinary but there is one subtle difference, the narrator has escaped the family matrix. Since the story is based on Tom's recollection, it is safe to say that the narrator has successfully escaped from the onerous environment of his family.

Flight from the "home" happens only in "Portrait". Even though "Angel" is set in New Orleans, the story is a description of the oppressive home environment given a new setting. Only at the end of the story, in order to survive, the narrator in "Angel" climbs out of the window of his room and escapes the house. The flight motif in all these stories revolves around the image of staircases or steps. If the downfall of the pharaoh in "Nitocris" happens because the steps of the temple collapse and Catherine's entrapment is symbolised in her running-up a staircase that only leads her further into the house, in "Angel" and "Portrait", all the stairs now lead out of the home. There is a need to escape because the "home" or "house" it is a trap. As Tom Wingfield says: "It is a two by four situation". In his narration, the narrator in "Portrait" comes closest to acknowledging his homosexuality. The playwright does not divide himself into two or more characters in this story unlike "Accent" or "Angel". Williams' presence in "Portrait" is embedded in the story's prominent queer subtext.

The queer subtext begins to emerge with the introduction of the attractive male figure. The male figure this time is Laura's gentleman caller, an Irishman and former high-school hero. Lester Beaurline in "*The Glass Menagerie*: From Story to Play" concurs with this view:

> At the start Jim had a warm masculine nature, he was a potential lover and Lawrentian hero. "Jim was a big red-haired Irishman who had the scrubbed and polished look of well-kept chinaware. His big square hands seemed to have a direct and very innocent hunger for touching friends. He was always clapping them on your arms or shoulders and they burned through the cloth of your shirt like plates taken out of the oven." In the one-act version, Jim becomes slightly hollow when he tries to persuade Tom to study public speaking. Then, in the reading version, Jim assimilates some of the play's nostalgic tone when he becomes an ex-high-school hero. The distracting homosexual suggestions disappear, and now Tom was "valuable to him as someone who could remember his former glory, who had seen him win basketball games and the silver cup in debating." (147-48)

In this short story, Williams projects the narrator's desire through the sister. This is achieved via the former's narration. Both brother and sister seem to have shared a secret dream that has to do with "the warm masculine nature of Jim". Both become self-conscious the moment Jim arrives in the house. As they begin to have dinner with Jim, the narrator keeps "nervously" clearing his throat "in a kind of self-consciousness that gets to be suffocating" (122). When Jim saunters into the front room and begins sorting through the collection of worn-out records, brother and sister again begin to feel nervous. When Jim reads the record titles aloud, "in a voice so hearty that it shot like beams of sunlight through the vapors of self-consciousness engulfing my sister and me", brother and sister must have both been attracted to him. Both siblings are Jim's secret admirers.

In "Portrait", Tom's attraction for Jim is described. In *Menagerie*, however, Tom's desire is closeted in the body of a muted Laura while Jim's attractiveness is toned down. Beaurline accurately observes that the narrator's physical desire for Jim's athletic attractiveness is transformed into Tom Wingfield's admiration of Jim's extra-curricular achievements in school. Jim, in "Portrait" is a potential lover but the Jim of *Menagerie* is safely beyond Tom's desire, out of reach on a pedestal as high school hero.

Downplaying the homoerotic content in "Portrait" also applies to the description of the narrator himself. In *Menagerie*, Tom is known to Jim as Shakespeare' but in "Portrait", Jim calls him "slim" ("Portrait" 120). Jim of "Portrait" also thinks that Tom looks like Laura except that the latter is "pretty", giving the impression that Tom is prissy. In the play, the effeminacy of Tom is somewhat reduced although its overtones can still be heard in Amanda's complaint that Tom is hopeless at the stereotypically "masculine" occupation of mechanics and handiwork (*Menagerie* 289). The mother's role is expanded in the play but in "Portrait", she serves as an excuse for the narrator's flight.

Together, these short stories prepare the stage for *Menagerie*. As Williams' biographer, Lyle Leverich, explains: "For the first thirty years of his life, Williams was living *The Glass Menagerie*" (Leverich xxiii). The short stories, firmly rooted in autobiography, not only allow us to understand the home environment but also convey a possible reason why flight had become necessary. Through them, Williams attempted to

make homosexuality a subject for discourse. It will be in autobiographically inspired plays like *Menagerie*, that the subject will gain an audience.

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The Chicago production of *The Glass Menagerie*, to Williams, was "that something that we all waited for". Although the playwright considered the success of *Menagerie* too sudden, he welcomed it because, as he explains, he had "reached the very bottom" of his life as a vagabond (Devlin 330). Lyle Leverich, Williams' biographer, adds that the success of *Menagerie* ushered in the professional identity of Williams stating that "from now on he would be known as Tennessee" (Leverich xxii). Chicago critics Claudia Cassidy and Ashton Steven's favourable reviews, according to the playwright himself, made much of the play's success possible (Devlin 329). When the play had its first New York production, both Stevens and Cassidy were proven correct. *Menagerie* as Williams himself said, is a precursor to "a new kind of theatre" in America (Devlin 329). The *New York Times* praised the playwright for having "a real ear for faintly sardonic dialogue, unexpected phrases and affection for his characters." The same critic later added to his commentary: "*The Glass Menagerie*, like spring, is a pleasure to have in the neighbourhood" (quoted in Arnott 22). The play was in the neighbourhood of Broadway for 561 productions, running from the 31st of March till the 3rd of August 1946 (Gunn 46). *Menagerie* had its first London production in the Royal Haymarket Theatre (28 July 1948), directed by Sir John Gielgud (quoted in Arnott 21). Peter Fleming of *The Spectator* succinctly pointed out that the pathos surrounding the

Wingfield family, a family so essentially flawed that their personal handicaps render them helpless against their fate, allowed audiences to identify with the play. Fleming observed, "...we leave the family very much where they were to start with" (quoted in Arnott 22).

The Glass Menagerie is perhaps the most autobiographical of the writer's works examined in this study. The play was written out of "intense emotions [the playwright felt] seeing [his] sister's mind begin to go" (Rader quoted in Devlin 331). When interviewed by Dotson Rader of the *Paris Review* in 1981, Williams frankly admitted that he found expressing the central concerns of *The Glass Menagerie* not only difficult but also painful:

> The idea for *The Glass Menagerie* came very slowly, much more slowly than *Streetcar* for example. I think I worked on *Menagerie* longer than any other play. I didn't think it'd ever be produced. I wasn't writing it for that purpose. (Devlin 331)

The heart of *The Glass Menagerie*, as most of the play's reviewers recognised, has to do with the complex relationships between the members of this dysfunctional family particularly the enigmatic ties between the mother and her "unusual children". *The Glass Menagerie* was never meant for the stage because its creative genesis represents the extremely private process of writing out the Williams "family romance".

To achieve this, Williams left careful instructions in the "Production Notes" accompanying the published script of the play. They are an attempt at recreating the

womb-like atmosphere of the home. The play, explains the playwright, is based on memory and "because of its considerably delicate and tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play a particularly important part" in assuring its success (Williams, 1962, 229). Although *Menagerie* was not his first professional production, Williams was very worried that the play would not be understood because of its delicate nature. He created a device with "the use of a screen on which [he] projected magic-lantern slides bearing images or titles", and hoped that his audience would understand his "new plastic theatre" which seeks to replace "the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions" (229-30).

Williams insisted that the air of delicacy be maintained through theatrical devices like music and lighting. This also served to reinforce the delicate "semiotic" atmosphere that encapsulates the characters in the play. Williams instructed that there should be an "extra-literary accent" in the play provided by a recurring tune, "The Glass Menagerie" to give "emotional emphasis to suitable passages" (230). The tune, Williams recommends, should be like circus music and it should "weave in and out of [the audience's] preoccupied consciousness" (231). The musical structure reflects the fragile world of glass that surrounds the Wingfield household and, appropriately, it should sound like "the most beautiful music in the world and perhaps the saddest" (231). The lighting, Williams explains, should not be realistic. The stage should remain dim in keeping with the quality of memory that forms the play's womb-like ambience. Light on Laura should create "a peculiar pristine clarity as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas" (231).

The "Production Notes" also describe the characters on stage. Amanda is "not paranoiac but her life is paranoia". Tom's "nature is not remorseless, but to escape a trap he has to act without pity." Laura like a "piece of her glass collection [is] too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf" (228). The character sketches also reinforce the idea that the Wingfield children are struggling to escape the paranoiac womb-like enclosure of their "home" - Laura by withdrawing into herself and Tom through physical distance.

The play opens with the narrator, Tom Wingfield, recounting the events that led to his flight from the family. The play thus revolves around the memory of a fugitive. Upon closer examination we begin to realise that what resonates in Tom's narration is the familiar process of self-disclosure. Viewed in this light, the main plot of the play will correspond with a parallel autobiographical sub-text. Tom Wingfield, like the other fugitives from home in the Williams' works, believes that self-realisation is related to poetry or artistic expression. Gay audiences will also not fail to identify with Tom because we all share the common memory of "coming-out", a process that begins with self-disclosure:

> TOM: Yes, I have tricks in my pockets, 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...since I have a poet's weakness for symbols, *this will be symbolic of my coming out.*" (Italics mine, *Menagerie*, 234-35)

Tom cannot tell the truth without illusion as any attempt to unveil the "truth" will be an acknowledgment of the existence of homosexuality, a love so misunderstood, according to Oscar Wilde, that "it dare not mention its name."

The scene continues with the introduction of Tom's mother and sister. The mother is a domineering figure in the family matrix. Both Tom and Laura's eating habits are constantly scrutinised by her: "if you have to push with something, the thing to push with is a crust of bread. And chew...human beings are supposed to chew their food [to taste]...the delicate flavours [of a well-cooked meal]" (236). She is dictatorial with her invalid daughter and irrationally expects gentleman callers to come calling: "resume your seat little sister – I want you to stay fresh and pretty – for gentleman callers" (237). The mother reinforces her children's self-consciousness by pointing out their inadequacies or by offering herself up for comparison:

> AMANDA: One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain – your mother received – seventeen! – gentleman callers! Why sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all...Girls those days knew how to talk, I can tell you. (237)

The daughter, Laura, is pathologically shy. When faced with her mother's garrulous nature, she shrinks further into herself: "Mother, I'm just not as popular as you were in Blue Mountain" (237-8). By the time the scene dims out, the audience gets the impression that the narrator is right in stating that only the gentleman caller is "from the world of reality" (235). The Wingfields are all fugitives from reality. The son is a fugitive

from the home because he ran away. The mother is a fugitive who lives in the past while Laura shrinks further and further into herself as though afraid of life.

In scene two this idea is reinforced as Laura takes centre stage. In this scene Amanda discovers that her daughter has been lying to her about attending typing classes. The mother is obviously hurt by Laura's dishonesty but cannot bring herself to scold her because she recognises Laura's fragility of mind. We learn that Laura has been visiting parks, museums and glass-houses instead of going to Rubicam's Business College. Living in a world of glass and being as fragile as glass, Laura's condition is identifiably peculiar. This peculiarity is the next sign of the play's queer subtext. Williams' treatment of Laura, I believe, is symbolic of his treatment of homosexuality. Laura's crippledness, a slight defect according to Williams, "[that] need not be more than suggested on stage" (228) is a case in point. It causes her to develop a shy and debilitating personality. It is a trope for homosexuality. Mark Lily concurs and writes in his article on Williams featured in *Gay Men's Literature of the Twentieth Century*:

> In *The Glass Menagerie* Laura's lameness is, on several levels, a metaphor for Williams' view of homosexuality...First it is seen as a disability which actually restricts sexual fulfilment...Secondly, the restricting nature of the disability, real as that is, is massively increased by the sufferer's obsession with it...Thirdly, the consequence of her disability and the accompanying desire to retire from the world...is her absorption in the world of the glass menagerie. (Lily 106)

To a certain extent I believe Lily is right to suggest that gay audiences may identify with Laura's condition but it is Tom whom we recognise as gay. Tom's frustration at home is

not dissimilar to a gay person's feeling of disappointment. It is a frustration that stems from a lack of the sense of self. We identify with Tom because of the character's peculiarity and self-consciousness. It is a peculiarity that the gay person feels growing up a fugitive at home. Like the Wingfield children, we have been made to always feel self-conscious because of our perceived "difference". We cannot find our reflection in the glass articles of our home. Everything in the home suggests to us that we do not exist or more accurately that we must not exist. This explains why there are no gay characters in the play. The signs of gay existence, as Tom will tell Jim in scene six, are interior.

Among these very unmistakable signs, and one of the strongest, is the mother. By the third and fourth scenes, it is obvious that Amanda is assuming centre-stage. The success of almost every production of the play depends on the actress playing the role of Amanda, indicating her central position. Williams attributes most of the success of the 1945 Broadway production to the powerful and impressive acting of Laurette Taylor. Even as early as the second scene, Amanda begins to overshadow both her children. Harold Bloom considers Amanda the "dramatic centre" of the play and Edmund Napieralski in "The Dramatic Metaphor of *The Glass Menagerie*" sees her as the dominant force of the world of the play:

> In *The Glass Menagerie* not language alone but stage positions, gesture, activity, and movement define Amanda as the centre of a metaphor that is the drama itself. Amanda not only dramatizes her own behavior and image of herself but also attempts to create roles for, to direct, prompt, and even costume the other characters in a drama of which she is author, producer, director and leading lady. (97)

The centrality of Amanda serves to reinforce the queer subtext of the play. Eric P. Levy in "Through Soundproof Glass: The Prison of Self-Consciousness in *The Glass Menagerie*" partly agrees: "Once we analyse how Amanda manipulates maternity, a factor in the play more fundamental than nostalgia will begin to emerge" (1).

Amanda's aggressive, chatty and exaggerated behaviour makes her a crucial stereotype that reinforces a queer reading of the play. She is the typical Freudian model of the domineering mother who is over-protective (she does not allow Laura to be called a cripple) and denies her children independence from her "womb". In the essay "Leonardo da Vinci and a Story of Childhood", Freud argues that most male homosexuals have domineering mothers and Amanda, we can argue, is a part of this stereotype that Freud, in conclusion, blames for "making the son" homosexual (Freud, 1957, 98-99). Williams was informed about Freudian psychoanalysis having written about it to Donald Windham (Windham 147). Furthermore, in 1939, while Williams was in Taos, Leverich claims that the playwright found the maternal image in D.H. Lawrence's works intriguing (322-23). The playwright then claimed Lawrence a major influence in his life and works. The similarity between the maternal figure in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Amanda Wingfield is quite unmistakable. Both sons have to "kill" the mother in order to achieve self-realisation. Perhaps it is not an accident that Amanda Wingfield forbids her son to read "that hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence" (250). Undoubtedly Amanda Wingfield is a powerful figure and it is her domineering nature that fuels the construction of a queer sub-text.

The first instance of this is in scene three. Amanda's suspicions that her son's nightly activities are not normal and that Tom has done things that he is ashamed of serve to suggest Tom is homosexual:

> AMANDA: I think you've done things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right minds goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two a.m. (251)

In angry response to Amanda, Tom confesses that he is leading a "double-life" and that he frequents "opium dens" and other places of vice. The frustration of Tom makes him call Amanda a witch. This is the play's second queer moment of identification, the first being the narrator's self-disclosing soliloquy.

Secondly, what also serves to make Amanda an effective "stereotype" is her tragic fate. The mother's suffering is what the son identifies with and what draws him to her womb-like embrace. She is the parent who did not abandon her children, who stayed back trying to make ends meet by selling magazine subscriptions to disinterested women. For all her romantic ideals, Amanda has always been motivated by the need to "protect her unusual children". She forces Laura to learn typing because she does not want her daughter to end up helpless "stuck away in some mousetrap" (245). Her maternal instincts "have made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children!" (257), she laments. Her stifling devotion is fuelled by an insecurity inflicted upon her by her husband's abandonment of the family. "I worry so much, don't sleep, it makes me

nervous" (257), she tells her son in scene four. However her puritanical beliefs make it impossible to communicate with her, especially if the subject is her son's sexual orientation. Amanda, as the playwright explains, "understands the art of conversation" but not the art of communication. Thus peace between mother and son in scene four is temporary. Her controlling nature returns with the resumption of "the familiar inquisition" (260) she practises over her children. Peace between them is fragile and breaks down when he "becomes impatient again" (260). The vicious cycle continues:

AMANDA: But why – why, Tom – are you so restless? Where do you go to, nights?
TOM: I – go to the movies.
AMANDA: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?
TOM: I go to the movies because I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much at work, so I go to the movies.
AMANDA: But, Tom, you go to the movies entirely too much!
TOM: I like a lot of adventure.

[Amanda looks baffled, then hurt] (259-260).

Tom tries in vain to make Amanda understand his need for adventure but it is futile to come out to people like Amanda. The resolution to this struggle is an acceptance of things as they are and thus Tom tells Amanda: "There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to you! So let's respect each other -" (259). This process is not entirely one sided and the mother comes to accept her son's need for adventure although, at the same time, hoping to save her other child from destitution:

AMANDA: Oh, I can see the handwriting on the wall as plain as I see the nose in front of my face!...More and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours

> without explanation! – Then left! Good-bye! And me with the bag to hold. I saw that letter you got from the Merchant Marine. I know what you're dreaming of...as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent – why, then, you'll be free to go wherever you please. (261)

The mother, treated ambivalently in this play, is the site for blame but also the person who confers acceptance upon her "gay" son. Her acceptance of his need to be "free" from the home is the extent of her ability to accept his homosexuality. As long as she does not see it, Williams seems to say, it is tolerated.

In scene five, the invisible character in the play begins to exact his influence. The faithless wanderer father, Mr. Wingfield, who has a disarming smile, will figure prominently in this scene through his son. The scene begins with Tom telling Amanda that he has found a gentleman caller for Laura. While he tells his mother about the friend that will be coming over, carefully mentioning qualities which his mother will approve of, Amanda begins to comb his hair. She tells him that the one thing that his father "always took care of was his appearance" (264). She tells her son while brushing that cow lick down: "You are the only young man I know who ignores the fact that the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns to everlasting regret" (269). The father's absence, I believe, is as crucial as the mother's dominance, in constructing the stereotypical Freudian family structure. As Tom struggles to be different from his father, he begins to understand his father's actions. In fact after scene five he imitates his father by abandoning the family. The alienation he feels in the family because of his ambition to be a writer and also because he wants to join the exclusively male world of

the Merchant Seamen has made him as faithless as his father. As though to concretise this point, the father's picture is perpetually grinning above the heads of the characters on stage. The "unusualness" of the Wingfields, reinforced by the father's absence, is sharply brought into view by the intrusion of the gentleman caller in scenes six and seven. As Tom tells Amanda: "...in the eyes of strangers [we] are terribly shy and live in a world of [our own]" (271).

In scene six, the subtext and the main plot merge. This happens the moment Tom decides to buy his merchant seaman's ticket with the money meant for the electric bill. It is also at this point that the outside world, personified by the gentleman caller, intrudes into the "home". Jim's presence in *Menagerie*, in contrast to his presence in "Portrait", lies in him not being an erotic subject. As Beaurline explains in his examination of the transposition of short story to play, Jim is no longer the Lawrentian hero but is the epitome of the crass materialism of post-war America (Beaurline 148). He is an alien intruder in the abnormal world of the Wingfields.

Amanda's preoccupation with marrying off Laura coupled with Jim's presence represents the mother's "heterosexualization agenda" (Amanda had 17 gentleman callers). In the effort of breaking Laura out of her world of glass, represented by the breaking of the horn of the unicorn, Jim unintentionally breaks her heart as well. The "home" is thus a frustrating place where poetry cannot blossom and homosexuality cannot exist. One has to lose one's horn (thus losing one's individuality) to join the other horses in a game of conformity. The mother is the greatest threat to her "unusual

children" because she fears that they will be "lonesome" like the unicorn. Thus she tries to train them to conform to what society thinks is best for "Christian adults". Her presence is symbolic of the aggressive voice of post-war America urging her children to find jobs and to better themselves by attending business school. Amanda's advice that "Christian adults" should abstain from vices, stop smoking and save money, are echoes of Edwina's philosophy. Ultimately, the mother wants her children to be married and "normal":

> AMANDA: I'm sick, too – of your nonsense! Why can't you and your brother be normal people? Fantastic whims and behaviour! Preposterous goings on! Can you give me one reason ... why you should be afraid to open a door? (279)

The door that Amanda demands that Laura open will ultimately expose her daughter to rejection. Though at first Jim and Laura got along fine and even began dancing, the materialistic gentleman caller eventually confesses that he is already engaged to another woman. Amanda blames Tom for not knowing that Jim was "unavailable". In a sense Tom like his sister must have felt equally disappointed because a married Jim is also a heterosexual Jim. Being taboo, Tom's feelings for Jim, are suppressed and do not appear on stage.

It is in these two scenes that Tom is identifiably the homosexual son. The narration of self-disclosure is almost complete. Harold Bloom is of the same opinion and succinctly explains:

> ...Williams' true subject, like [Hart] Crane's, is the absolute identity between his artistic vocation and his homosexuality. What is lacking in *The Glass Menagerie*, is what Williams could not have said of Amanda, what Flaubert-like, he did say of the heroine of *Streetcar*: "I am Blanche DuBois." (Bloom 5)

Tom's image in his play like his sister's is distorted. It is fragmented because self-image for Tom, as reflected in *Menagerie*'s family orientated mirror, is the shattered image of a gay person. In the 50th-anniversary revival of *The Glass Menagerie*, in less homophobic times, a Broadway production highlighting the fact that Tom Wingfield is actually Tennessee Williams, and that both are gay, was finally staged on Broadway. William Tynan noticed this in his review for *Time Magazine*:

> a large photograph of the playwright looms over the set that confronts the arriving audience...the projection changes to a blank piece of paper. The young man lights a cigarette, then addresses the audience, his wry drawl and courtliness gently recalling Williams himself. (Tynan 1)

Clive Barnes, reviewing the Circle-in the-Square production of *Menagerie* in 1975, was right in stating that the play is about leaving and survival. *The Glass Menagerie* can be read, from this angle, as a veiled or closeted autobiography of a homosexual artist's flight into being.

As the play dissolves, the narrator recalls the last moments before he leaves the home. It is a home that resembles a glass closet. The mother knows that her children are not "normal" yet refuses to see it. She knows that her son does things that he would be probably ashamed of. She understands that there is some explanation for his complacency

but refuses to see the obvious. Instead she tries to advise him to "rise and shine" everyday, hoping he would wake up "straight". She sees in gentleman callers not only the possibility of marrying off her abnormal daughter but also of curing her "unusual" son of his lack of interest in marriage. In Jim, she sees an enterprising young man whom Tom should resemble. Jim's interest in public speaking and his initiative in taking up an engineering course, should be emulated by her son who, instead, is only interested in poetry. When her whole plan fails she blames her son, accusing him of not "knowing things anywhere!" She tells him that he lives in a "dream [and] manufacture[s] illusions" (311). In her disappointment, she tells him that she knows: "Both my children – they're unusual children! Don't you think I know it?" (258). Tom therefore lives in a closet of glass not unlike the glass house that Laura visits. In this glass closet, one tends to believe that one does not display outward signs that betray one's sexuality. This is not true, Williams seems to say, because there are outward signs but one does not think one has them because they are being deliberately ignored. This refusal to "see" and to acknowledge the "abnormality" of her son, reinforces the fact that an integral part of her son's identity is taboo. Tom, like his sister, must have felt the "thunderous clamping" of his abnormality in Amanda's insinuations, "advice" and nagging.

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The critical analysis of these works reveals the existence of a queer subtext, which emerges via the narrator's description of the homosexual's flight from the family. Both the short stories and *Menagerie* reveal that sexual identity and self-realisation for the gay

person lie outside the maternal womb. Even though Tom finds it difficult to sever ties with his sister and also his mother, he realises that he has no choice. In time the narrator tells us: "I didn't go the moon, I went further than that – for time is the longest distance between two places" (313). The oppressiveness of the home has shaped the fugitive's personality. Having inscribed itself like Cain's mark of fugitiveness, the family trails Tom like his own shadow. Although he tries to evade this shadow through intimacies with companions, he is unsuccessful because it is a part of him. In a desperate attempt to evade "guilt feelings", he embarks on a deep self-examination. In this narration about himself, he discovers loneliness and despair. Tom's internal flight anticipates Alma's dividedness in *Summer and Smoke* and lays the foundation for Blanche's exploration of "Moon Country" or New Orleans in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.