

## CHAPTER THREE

### FLIGHT FROM SELF

I'm thinking it all over. About why I might be counterfeiting this spiritual love of mine, I have learned towards believing that spirit itself is counterfeit. Even now it's always on my mind. Why am I not like everybody else? Why do none of my friends separate the flesh and the spirit the way I do...I'm the only one who's different. (Yukio Mishima, *Forbidden Colours*)

The extract above is a depiction of flight from the self that an individual feels because of alienation. The social ostracism of an individual often results in, as the homosexual in Mishima's novel describes, a divided sense of self. Like Mishima's protagonist, most of us are conditioned, through cultural and religious systems, to believe that to be gay is to be perverse and evil. The gay person is not exempt from this rule. At first, he feels "different" but cannot explain the reasons for the disengagement he feels at home or in school. Later, as he becomes aware that his sexual desires are directed to members of his own sex, he begins to believe that he truly is a "freak". Like all marginalised individuals, the gay person begins to associate being different with being inferior. Resisting his sexuality makes life unbearable but accepting it and embracing a gay sexual identity usually involves losing loved ones. Adjusting to a gay lifestyle exposes him to prejudice, homophobia and violence. It is not surprising that few people make the transition

without trauma. Many prefer to live in “closets” of their own design and become “secret sexual deviants”. For the “secret sexual deviant”, homosexual desire is a source of guilt even disgust. He begins to disassociate himself from it. This contributes to a sense of dividedness that is inherent in people who are labelled by society as ‘deviants’. Compounded by society’s intolerance for difference, be it racial, religious or sexual, the “deviant” individual is further ostracised. Williams’ works and characters examined in this chapter all suffer from their creator’s divided opinion about homosexuality and homosexual desire. The predicament of these characters, reflective of the homosexual’s, is a struggle to reconcile their “deviant” sexual nature with their sense of self. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to examine the psyche of the individual who has been made a fugitive from himself because of his sexual orientation.

The works examined in this chapter were written or published before the staging, in 1947, of two of Williams’ important plays, *Summer and Smoke* (*Summer*) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (*Streetcar*). They also overlap in conceptual terms with the works examined in the second chapter of this study and form a middle ground preparing the stage for *Streetcar*. The short stories selected for scrutiny in this chapter present a pause in the fugitive’s flight and signify Williams’ personal contemplation about gayness. However like *Summer*, they were categorised as “failures” by the playwright’s critics though it is their “imperfections” that make them interesting. This pause in flight, representing an

examination of selfhood, not only binds them together, it anticipates *Summer's* explication of the theme of flight from the self.

The first of the short stories that lays the foundation for the development of this theme is "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio" (1941). In "Mysteries", Williams deals directly with homosexuality for the first time in his works. As in "Angel", examined in the previous chapter, homosexual acts are coloured by a strong sense of guilt. Pablo Gonzales, a watchmaker, is an individual divorced from his surroundings. Ever since the death of his benefactor and lover, Emile Kroger, he has taken to lurking in dark corners of a theatre named Joy Rio, looking for that one moment of "togetherness" that he has since lost but now hopes to regain with strangers. His loneliness, according to the story, is linked to his homosexuality. In "Oriflamme" (1944), another isolated individual is the focus of the playwright. Anna Kimball is a "secret sexual deviant" who has come to terms with the social mask that she wears. It is a mask that she uses to resist the reality that she has "unnatural" feelings. This confrontation comes about because the protagonist realises that she is somehow incomplete as a part of her is being denied expression. In "Desire and the Black Masseuse" (1946), Williams problematises homosexual desire once again. But this time the consequence of homosexual desire is not only loneliness as it was in "Mystery" but self-annihilation. Anthony Burns, unable to accept his homosexuality, punishes himself through masochistic rituals. He, Williams says, "was born to be eaten up" and upon discovering his sexuality, he goes to a masseur to be beaten. This act of self-immolation eventually kills him. Burns' death, parallel

with the ~~l~~enten season, highlights Williams' indictment of society's cruelty towards the homosexual. By juxtaposing Burns' final hours with the celebration of suffering in the church across the street, Burns' death, Williams seem to say, is the atonement demanded by a society unable to forgive itself. In "The Yellow Bird" (1946), a precursor to *Summer*, the dividedness between the soul and the body plagues Alma Tutweiler. Like all the protagonists in the short stories examined in this chapter, Alma's realisation of her sexual nature comes late in life. She, unlike the other characters, is fiercely rebellious and grows more self-assured once she breaks out of her Episcopalian mould as preacher's daughter. This however makes her a fugitive and, like all of Williams' fugitives, she runs away to New Orleans. In the infamous French Quarter, Alma becomes a prostitute and bears a son. In *Summer*, the same transition that Alma makes, from being the "preacher's daughter" to being the "merry widow of Glorious Hill", is harder and more painful. In fact, Alma is a fugitive not only from her society but also from herself. Williams' self-examination culminates in *Summer*. The predicament of being gay is not only sensitively examined in these short stories, it finds expression in a play that borders on the surreal.

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The effect of social ostracism in a writer often results in a less than affirming view of life. In Williams' works, as exemplified in chapters one and two, there exists an affinity between the playwright, and the alienated and the "peculiar". This,



critics have suggested, is a result of Williams' personal experience of familial and societal ostracism because of his occupation as a writer and also because of his homosexuality. Being conditioned to believe that one's sexuality is sinful even monstrous results in a kind of internalised homophobia. Since the works examined in this chapter involve a study of the social ostracism faced by sexual deviants, a brief account of the playwright's attitude towards the subject will strengthen this argument.

Till 1945, the playwright lived the life of a vagabond. At times he would be waiting in restaurants and ushering customers in theatres. His attitude towards homosexuality and experience of homosexual relationships was neither positive nor self-affirming. Although he had met other gay men and was actively involved in the gay subculture of New York, his view of his sexuality was still coloured by his strong Episcopalian upbringing.

This ambivalence towards gayness is partly revealed in his letters to Donald Windham. Homosexual desire, he writes to Windham, is "for people like us, who have gone beyond shame" (Windham 10). Being aware of the humiliation that accompanies a gay identity, the playwright felt that it was imperative to keep his sexual identity a secret. He advised Windham to be careful with their letters as his family had a "marvellous espionage system" to check his mail (Windham 17). Away from the home, in New York, the playwright "cruised" Times Square, waiting for sailors or hunting for male hustlers. This is portrayed in his works,

where the home is always restrictive while the city represents freedom. In reality however, Williams discovered that gay sex was anonymous and at times mercenary. This, he must have realised, was the price of freedom. In his works, hungry and poor male hustlers are often forced into prostituting themselves to satisfy the desires of older, sometimes physically grotesque, "benefactors".

More importantly, the playwright would eventually come to the conclusion that no gay relationship can last. When he broke up with Kip Kiernan, a Canadian dancer dodging the military draft, Williams' romantic illusions died with that relationship. Just before the production of *Battle of Angels* (1939), while in Provincetown, the playwright writes to Windham telling the latter that he had fallen in love (Windham 9). The playwright says that the relationship was intense and at times painful. Kip was essentially straight but had submitted because he needed protection. The playwright's last play, *Something Cloudy Something Clear* (1981), was based on this failed relationship. In *Memoirs*, Williams confessed that Kip left him for a woman. Love, between men, after this incident, would never be the same again, as suggested by Williams' letter to Windham:

Breaking up with Kip...[resulted] in a sort of temporary obliteration of everything solid in me...all I thought of was my own immediate preservation through change, escape, travel, new scenes, new people...(13)

Guilt played a crucial role in this ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality. Ronald Hayman describes Williams as a person who could not

resist physical temptation but would feel guilty after gratifying his sexual appetites (Hayman 88). The playwright, according to some of his biographers, felt guilty because of his religious upbringing. Nancy Tischler, in her book *The Rebellious Puritan*, describes the playwright as a “rebellious Puritan”. Affected by his mother’s “monolithic Puritanism”, Williams began to divorce the private from the public to blot out his gay self, his biographers claim. Both Lyle Leverich and Ronald Hayman assert that one of the reasons why the playwright insisted on creating a professional persona and assume the name “Tennessee” is partly because of his need to keep his sexual identity private (Leverich xxii, Hayman 58). Many of his biographers have noted that Williams, the playwright, was at times serious even an introvert, but Tom, the man, could be garrulous and jovial (Hayman 58). Evidence of this divided personality in the playwright is most visible in his attitude towards work. Williams would work half the day, preoccupied only with artistic concerns, but at night, he would allow his gay self to emerge and to “cruise” the streets. Many of Williams’ characters, like their creator, suffer from “two different strains of blood” (“The Yellow Bird”), making them divided individuals.

By 1945, this split had become permanent as Williams became “Tennessee” because of *Menagerie*’s success. He, however, could not accept success, often blaming it for ruining his life. The playwright suddenly developed a series of illnesses. In fact as early as 1935, when he completed “Accent”, there were signs that the playwright was a hypochondriac (Leverich 148). Despite reassurances by various doctors to the contrary, Williams became convinced that he was suffering

from a weak heart. In the period between 1944-1947, Williams was not only worried about producing another successful play but had also become obsessed with death. When Laurette Taylor, the lead actress in *Menagerie* passed away, Williams became convinced that he was dying from cancer (Hayman 109). Gore Vidal sees these bouts of “imaginary” illnesses as a manifestation of self-punishment, inflicted by a person who felt he did not deserve success (Vidal, 1985, xxiv). The hypochondriac is not an uncommon character in the works of Williams and figures prominently in *Summer*.

Like many who have been conditioned to believe that they are inferior because they are different, Williams was self-destructive. He suffered from bouts of depression which he called “blue devils” and claimed this to be a hereditary problem. In one letter to Windham written from MGM studios, the playwright said that “the blue devils...turned my father into a drunkard and made my sister lose her mind” (Windham 91). Like his father, he took to drinking and eventually to drug abuse. Self-abuse eventually led to self-isolation. Williams became paranoid about the motives of the people around him. This aggravated the alienation he was already suffering from. Loneliness, the playwright has said, “assailed me like a wolf pack with rabies” (*Memoirs* 231). In most of the works examined in this chapter, loneliness is an underlying theme.

These experiences contributed towards the playwright’s ambivalent treatment of homosexuality in his works. Homosexuality is a source of shame. It disengages the

playwright from family members and society. Other homosexuals are seen as lonely and “sick” individuals. However, there is also a sensitive understanding of the “delicate beauty” in the life of the homosexual - a life shaped by the desire to be loved and the need to feel human. In the short stories examined in this chapter, the homosexual is portrayed as a fugitive from a cruel society. They describe the homosexual’s closet, a personal space inspired by their creator’s “acute self-examination”. In this dark and lonely situation, Williams explores his homosexuality and comes to the nightmarish conclusion that the disengagement between body and soul that he felt as a secret sexual deviant cannot be bridged. This growing dividedness makes the characters, examined in this chapter, fugitives from their creator or more accurately from themselves.

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Williams, Dennis Vannatta claims, began working on “Mysteries” as early as 1939. By 1941, it was completed (Vannatta 83). Its significance, Vannatta says, lies in its content. It is the first short story by the playwright that deals directly with the subject of homosexuality. The homosexual, Pablo Gonzales, is a watchmaker who occasionally hopes to meet a stranger to alleviate his loneliness in the Joy Rio, an old opera house converted into a cinema. Gonzales’ existence, Williams explicitly makes clear, lies outside the realm of time:

A single watch or clock can be a powerful influence on a man, but when a man lives among as many watches and

clocks as crowded the tiny, dim shop of Mr. Gonzales, some lagging behind, some skipping ahead, but all ticking monotonously in their witless fashion, the multitude of them may be likely to deprive them of importance... (103)

This disengagement happens to individuals who believe that because they are “deviant” they are no longer a part of society. It is the same kind of self-exile that Gonzales’ benefactor, Emile Kroger, imposed upon himself. With Kroger’s wealth, Gonzales has the means to do the same. Inheritance from Kroger is however insidious. Gonzales not only inherits wealth, he eventually becomes like Kroger and inherits the latter’s habits in the Joy Rio:

I have already suggested that there was something a bit special and obscure about Mr. Gonzales’ habitual attendance at the Joy Rio, and that was my intention. For Mr. Gonzales had inherited more than the material possessions of his dead benefactor, he had also come into custody of his old protector’s fleeting and furtive practices in dark places...the old man had left Mr. Gonzales, the full gift of his shame... (106)

Gonzales, after the death of Kroger, becomes a fugitive like his benefactor. They are essentially identical because of their homosexuality. Gonzales, like Kroger before him, inherits the guilt of being gay. To exorcise this guilt, the “penitent sinner” must confess his sins. “Mysteries” in many ways resembles a confession. The narrator explains: “It was...the theory of most immoralists, that the soul becomes intolerably burdened with lies that have to be told to the world, in order to be permitted to live in the world...” (106).

Homosexuals like Gonzales are forced to lurk in dark theatres to express themselves. The writer's empathy for the alienation that the homosexual suffers in a homophobic environment is apparent throughout this short story. Dennis Vannatta shares similar ideas and goes on to say that:

homosexuality is but one very real manifestation of a broader phenomenon in Williams' work: the need for love and companionship and the difficulties of finding them in a world that grinds up the sensitive, the wounded and the fugitive. (24)

However Williams' treatment of homosexuality in the second half of the story is clearly influenced by his own homophobia. William Paden, in "Mad Pilgrimage: The Short Stories of Tennessee Williams", among other critics, considers "Mysteries" to be "a memorable ... presentation of decay and disintegration" and is alive with that "sense of the awful" (Rpt. in Vannatta 121). In the second half of the story, centred on the unmasking of Gonzales, the playwright aptly captures the fugitive condition of the homosexual by suggesting that once the sexual deviant is exposed, he can no longer "exist". Even before he is unmasked, Gonzales is afflicted with cancer, a disease that killed Kroger. Williams, however, does not allow readers to think that Gonzales dies because of cancer. It is unmistakable that the playwright wanted to emphasise the homophobic panic on the part of George, the theatre attendant, in his description of Gonzales' death:

Mr. Gonzales was actually waiting at the top of the stairs to recover his breath from the climb, but George, who could see him, now, through the door kept slightly ajar, suspected

that he was waiting to catch him coming out of his secret place. A fury burst in the boy. He thrust Gladys violently back against the washbasin and charged out of the room without even bothering to button his fly. He rushed up to the slight figure...and began to shout a dreadful word at Mr. Gonzales, the word "morphodite". (112)

In fear of being exposed further, Gonzales runs up the steps leading into the off-limits section of the theatre. There, in his final moments, he meets the ghost of Emile Kroger. Having regained his "graceful" looks because of cancer, the renewed Gonzales spends his last moments as a penitent sinner:

But the ancient voice and fingers, as if they had never left him, kept unbuttoning, touching, soothing, repeating the ancient lesson, saying it over and over like a penitent counting prayer beats, sometimes you will have: it and sometimes you won't have it, so don't be anxious about it. You must be able to go home without it. Those are the times you have to remember that other times you will have it and it doesn't matter sometimes you don't...go home alone without it, go home alone without it. (114)

Evidence of this is even stronger in "Hard Candy" (1953), a reworked version of "Mysteries":

When around midnight the lights of the Joy Rio were brought up for the last time that evening, the body of Mr. Krupper was discovered in his remote box...with his knee on the floor and his ponderous torso wedged between two wobbly gilt chairs as if he expired in an attitude of prayer. ("Hard Candy" 364)

The furtive moments of familiarity shared between Gonzales and the strangers replicate the intimacy he once shared with Kroger. In the story, this



familiarity is symbolised by the ghost of Kroger cradling the dying Gonzales. However because this relationship is considered deviant by society, the homosexual has to learn to “go home alone” and has to accept the emptiness of “not having it”.

“Mystery” reveals Williams’ divided attitude towards homosexuality and suggests that for the homosexual, the body and the soul are irreconcilable. In “Oriflamme” (1944), Williams personifies this condition by presenting a truly divided individual. The story is centred on Anna Kimball who, like Pablo Gonzales, is a secret sexual deviant. Anna, however, does not have a Joy Rio to go to and she is not financially independent like Gonzales. This serves to aggravate her predicament and the story chronicles her rebellion against her restrictive society.

Vannatta considers this story “a magnificent failure” (37) because of the playwright’s attempt “to give free rein to his creative and poetic powers” (38). Vannatta adds that the expressionistic style of writing employed by Williams is “an extension of Anna’s psychosis” (38). This, the critic claims, makes the story vague. However a queer reading of the story, I believe, will provide a different interpretation of “Oriflamme”. Though Vannatta is right in suggesting that in some parts of the story the style is expressionistic and this, mingled with poetic energy, results in burlesque, a different reading emerges if we trace the narrator’s comments carefully. Consider the following passage that describes Anna’s rebellion:

The blowing street took part in her celebration. She moved,  
she moved, in a glorious banner wrapped, the red part of a

flag! It flashed, it flashed. It billowed against her fingers. Her body surged forward. A capital ship with cannon. Boom. On the far horizon. Boom. White smoke is holy. Nobody understands it. It goes on, on, without the world's understanding. Red is holy. Nobody understands it. It goes on, on, without the world's understanding. Blue is holy. Blue goes on without the world's understanding...(137)

This, Vannatta claims, is evidence of why "Oriflamme" is a "magnificent failure". However if the story was about a closeted homosexual on the verge of coming-out, the vagueness of this passage can refer to the expression of a self in flux. The "It" or "the red part of a flag" in the passage refers to homosexuality, something nobody understands. Anna Kimball, like the homosexual, is misunderstood. But unlike Pablo Gonzales, we are introduced to her when she is on the verge of rebelling against her own conformist behaviour:

She went to her **closet**. It was full of discreetly coloured and fashioned garments, which all appeared the same style and shade and appeared to be **designed for camouflage**, for **protective concealment**, of that anarchy of the heart. She had lived up till now a **subterranean existence**...because she had not trusted the whisper in her that said, The truth has not yet been spoken! (emphasis mine) (134)

Anna Kimball not only comes to terms with herself, she defies her society and attempts to break out of her closet. She realises that it is her closetedness that is making her ill:

Until this moment she had not understood the meaning of her illness. It was all the same thing, sickness and fatigue

and all attrition of the body and spirit, it all came from the natural anarchy of a heart compelled to wear uniform. (134)

This is what endears her to *Summer's* Alma Winemiller. Both are repressed sexually and share the frustrating experience of "[running] out of talk and [having] a self-conscious coldness develop" (137) between her gentleman caller and herself. Other than being alienated, she, more importantly, shares with Alma a "doppelganger" or a second self that wants "to shout [and] have it all broken and violated" (137). Like Alma, Anna Kimball has reached a point in her life where she can no longer pretend.

Anna's rebellion is triggered off by her reminiscence of a young boy who once kissed her roughly in a high school dance party. The shock of that embrace awakened her second self. The red-faced boy had disappeared from Grenada and had met with an accident on a freight train. Having lost both his legs, he had become a vagrant and had died out West. This makes Anna re-evaluate her closetedness. She also does not want to end up like Mr. Mason, who came to town "moving like spring" (137) but now cannot "keep up with his paunchy satyr pursuit" (137). Anna's rebellion is overwhelming. She does not know where to begin, and I believe, neither does the writer. In moments of indecision like this, Williams usually follows his instincts. Motivated by impulse, Anna rushes out of her house following a cloud that resembles a "nude young bather" (135). She buys a red dress and impulsively wears it despite the protests of the proprietor. She runs around town following the "bonny mass of clouds" until she reaches the statue of

St. Louis. The story becomes ambiguous here as it ends with a sudden explosion of colours. Like Alma Winemiller, Anna Kimball searches for a water fountain but discovers instead: "a shallow cement bowl for sparrows...[and] the bowl is dry" (138). At this moment she vomits blood and all the colours mingle to make a flag that nobody understands.

This grotesque flag, made from Anna's blood, as suggested earlier, is not only evidence of the influence of expressionism, as Vannatta claims, but is also a trope for homosexuality. It is a flag that symbolises the coming-out of a secret sexual deviant, perhaps at the cost of her life. The closet that Anna Kimball considers a camouflage is representative of the homosexual's closet of deception. Her rebellion however disorients her. Anna Kimball may have unmasked herself and may have acknowledged the existence of her secret nature but it does not lead to happiness. Like Pablo Gonzales, she will probably end up dying misunderstood.

In "Oriflamme", the need to rebel against the claustrophobic conditions of the closet is sparked by the presence of a second self. In the second chapter I have already shown how Williams divides himself into two characters when narrating about homosexuality. Both "Oriflamme" and later "Desire and the Black Masseur", as though explaining Williams' need to dichotomise his vision, are based on the dangers of being too near this second self.

In "Oriflamme", Williams describes Anna Kimball's rebellion. The playwright ends the story abruptly without explaining what happens to Anna after she breaks free from the "uniform" that she is forced to wear. As though taking off from that point, "Desire and the Black Masseur" (1946), traces what happens when one gives in to the second self. Anthony Burns, an insignificant clerk in a big company, is allowed to fulfil his desires but at the expense of his soul. Through what happens to Burns, Williams insinuates that homosexual desire is a sickness of the soul. It is an overwhelming desire that alienates the homosexual from society. Once awakened resistance is futile:

So by surprise is a man's desire discovered, and once discovered, the only need is surrender, to take what comes and ask no questions about it: and this was something that Burns was expressly made for. (220)

There is therefore a real need not to associate oneself with it. To emphasise this point, Williams not only describes Burns' discovery of pleasure with a man, he shocks his readers with Burns' masochistic desire to be tortured. If Pablo Gonzales dies a penitent sinner, Burns is in purgatory for his homosexuality.

Edward Sklepowich explains that Burns' masochism, is "compensation for his innate insecurity" (Rpt. in Vannatta 126). If one sees Burns as a gay man, his masochism is, I believe, atonement for fulfilling the demands of the flesh. Society has conditioned the homosexual to believe that he needs to be punished because homosexuality is sinful. Here Williams deviates from describing Burns' sexual activities and begins to highlight society's cruelty towards homosexuals. Williams,

probably rebelling against his own Episcopalian upbringing, lashed out against the religious establishment in this story by juxtaposing his description of Burns' torture with a narration of the celebration of lent in a nearby church. Like Burns and Gonzales, Williams could not reconcile his homosexuality with his spirituality. Upon discovering his desire, Burns immediately searches for atonement. Williams is being satirical in making this point, exposing society's mindless persecution of the homosexual. "Mystery" is thus a "fiery poem of death on the cross" (222) and, as though to reinforce this idea, the playwright ends the story with an ironic statement: "...the answer, perfection, was slowly evolved through torture" (223).

Because of religious condemnation, homosexuality for Burns is incompatible with spiritual well being and giving in to homosexual desire proves detrimental to the body. This is why Williams distanced himself from homosexuality in his early short stories. He feared that like Gonzales, Burns and his "Giant", he too would eventually be found out and labelled "pervert" (221).

In "Desire", the perverts complete their mission privately. In a nightmarish turn of events, the masseur kills and eats Burns. He throws the latter's bones into the river and moves on to his next mission. When he had completed his task, "the sky was serenely blue, the passionate services at the church were finished, the ashes had settled...and the reek of honey was blown from the atmosphere" (222-23), indicating that Burns has atoned for his sins. In this story Williams depicts homosexuality as literally consuming an individual. By ending the story with irony,

he brings to light the effects of social and religious ostracism on a homosexual man. However the serenely blue sky, like the conspiratorial silence that cradles Tom Wingfield in the glass closet he occupies, is false calmness. The madness of the Lenten season may have subsided but the story of Anthony Burns opens our eyes to the frighteningly homophobic society around us.

In the "The Yellow Bird" (1947), though the incompatibility of body and soul is the central focus of the story, the plot develops differently. In this story, giving in to the second self rewards the transgressor instead of punishing him. It is thus more optimistic. Vannatta sees it as a reversal of "Williams' pattern of punishment for pleasure...where those who give themselves up to desire get their just desserts" (Vannatta 50). However other critics have complained that the protagonist is a mouthpiece for an angry writer. Some comment that the symbolism that concludes the story makes it vague, almost incomprehensible. This is true to a certain extent. Alma Tutweiler's rebellion is unbounded and at times distasteful. Her transformation is too sudden and extreme. However other than being a precursor to *Summer*, this story is more positive because it depicts Alma Tutweiler's victory over the divided condition:

Her face had a bright and innocent look in the mornings, and even when she was alone in the room it sometimes seemed as if she weren't alone - as if someone was with her, a disembodied someone, perhaps a remote ancestor of liberal tendencies who had been displeased at the channel his blood had taken till Alma kicked over the traces and jumped right back to the plume hat cavaliers. (237)

Brought up as a preacher's daughter, Alma is forced to wear "uniform" to camouflage her true nature. However, she, unlike the other protagonists examined in this chapter, does not suffer from a guilty conscience nor does she become ill or die upon accepting her second self. Her rebellion is, for the first time in Williams' fiction, successful because she is able to escape her oppressive environment and establish a different life for herself in New Orleans. The "The Yellow Bird" is also more autobiographical than "Desire". Williams admitted that Alma is one of his favourite characters because "she simply seems to exist in my being" (*Memoirs* 109). Although Burns' masochism may be a part of Williams' "internalised homophobia" manifesting itself in fiction, Alma Tutweiler's successful rebellion is more self-representational as it is based on Williams' own successful coming-out in New Orleans.

"The Yellow Bird" is a pause in a progressively self-condemnatory path that the playwright had adopted after experiencing the alienation and dividedness that came with his gay experience. Considered in this light, the story's symbolic ending is less vague:

When Alma's time came to die, she lay on the bed and wished her son would come home...in due time the son, the sailor, came home, and a monument was put up...It showed three figures of indeterminate gender astride a leaping dolphin. One bore a crucifix, one a cornucopia, and one a Grecian lyre. (239)



The monument consisting of three androgynous figures is a tribute to the successful coming out of a secret sexual deviant. Alma Tutweiler's monument bears the name Bobo, which in this story is synonymous with illicit desire. Bobo is after all the name of the yellow bird that, at the opening of the story, is accused of being a go-between<sup>for</sup> Goody Tutweiler and the devil. It completes Alma's rebellion that began with smoking, bleaching her hair and defying her father. Alma eventually leaves her small town community. In New Orleans, she becomes a prostitute and bears a son. The mysterious child goes out each morning and returns with fists full of treasure. The storyteller, almost forcing success and a happy conclusion, ends the story with a description of Alma's death, one that is almost the opposite of Anthony Burns' in "Desire". Unlike Burns who dies grotesquely, Alma dies in the arms of a handsome Adonis from the sea, the ideal homoerotic ending.

Compared with "Desire", the optimism of "The Yellow Bird" seems forced even trite but in its transposition to the stage, Williams tried, though not very successfully, to strike a balance between the two points of view. *Summer*, in terms of characterisation, plot and subject matter, seems to have been influenced not only by "The Yellow Bird" but by both "Oriflamme" and "Desire". The play, bordering on the surreal, like the earlier two short stories, is at moments nightmarish. The second self that haunts all three characters is developed into a Promethean figure. On stage, he is the male lead, John Buchanon, a young doctor who is as self-destructive as Gonzales. His drinking, gambling and fighting habits are almost pathological, an interesting parallel to Burns' masochism. However Williams

disassociated the play from the short stories homosexual content by making John a heterosexual stud. In the case of Alma of the play, she like Anna Kimball, suffers from incompleteness. In the play Alma is identifiably a gay character, the first character trait being her strict Episcopalian upbringing. Like Williams' background, it has conditioned her to believe that (homo)sexual desire is unclean. This leads to a second character trait – dividedness. Comparable to the protagonists in the stories examined thus far, Alma is a "weak, divided individual". The third character trait again draws from the playwright's own experience. Like Williams, Alma's rebellion arises because of "incompleteness" and occurs just as "the sweet bird of youth" was leaving her. She, like her creator, takes flight from her oppressive home in order to achieve self-realisation.

The plot of the play also differs slightly from the plot of the short stories. Alma Winemiller's rebellion does not begin until she like Anna Kimball realises that her life has been a camouflage. She realises this when John confronts her violently about her denial of having sexual desires. While Alma Tutweiler successfully starts a new life in New Orleans, Alma Winemiller never leaves Glorious Hill. Neither is her rebellion as fierce as the latter's, who without a "blink of an eye...drew back her right arm and returned [her father's] slap with good measure" (235). While the short story is more interested in "slapping" the obstructers of desire, at times almost resembling a lashing out against conservatism, the play is more balanced.

The treatment of the secret sexual deviant in the short stories reveals that the playwright himself suffers from a kind of dividedness, an aspect that anticipates the main subject matter of *Summer*. This dividedness (which some critics name internalised homophobia), impedes any affirming view of the subject. Though in "The Yellow Bird" Williams tried to be positive, this sense of optimism was lost in the story's transposition to the stage. However like the play, these stories served to break the silence surrounding the subject. Edward Sklepowich, among other critics, shares this view:

In the early period, Williams' treatment of homosexuality has undergone significant changes, moving from a mystical to a more social perspective, a personal, if fictional microcosm of the wider demystification of homosexuality. (Vannatta 124)

Sklepowich is right in pointing out a shift towards a more "social perspective" in Williams' treatment of homosexuality in the short stories. They have been a *tour de force* of the homosexual's closet. But more importantly, Williams has made readers aware that society is largely to blame for the nightmarish condition of the homosexual's life. *Summer and Smoke*, I believe, is Williams' personal microcosm. This play is a projection of a self-deprecating condition all gay people are familiar with. A condition based on the feeling that we are the only ones who separate the body and the soul, and are the only ones who are "different" therefore freakish. This painful self-division eventually leads to self-rejection. In the personal world of Tennessee Williams, the lonely figures of Alma Winemiller and John Buchanon personify this flight from the self.

This very personal matter transposed into a very public medium did not receive very positive reviews. In fact the reviews of the New York production of *Summer* were dismal. The play, staged just after *Streetcar*, was mercilessly compared to Williams' masterpiece. Critics found *Summer* very disappointing. One of the playwright's earliest biographers, Benjamin Nelson calls it "a bad play" (Nelson 117). Most of the critics of this premiere production found *Summer*'s characters too flat, lifeless and too allegorical. Nelson highlighted how Williams' "obsession with the sexual" had rendered the play abstracted (116). Richard Watts of the *New York Post*, like Nelson, could not bond with the characters, complaining that "...while the hero and the heroine think and talk a lot about sex and passion, there is an almost academic quality about their preoccupations" (117). Harold Clurman of the *New Republic* agrees with this assessment, saying that in *Summer* "so much time is given to a conscious exposition of theme that Williams loses the specific sense of his people" (117). The production's weaknesses seem to be ingrained in Williams' preoccupation with sexuality, which is plausible in the medium of the short story but fails once it is staged. Alma and John come across in the New York production as stilted one-sided characters. One critic claimed that they are so preoccupied with debating about sex that they forget how to live. This dehumanises them and converts them, to use Nelson's description, into "abstractions" on stage.

There were a few critics who reacted differently to the 1948 Music Box production and who were generally more receptive to the play's surreal quality

though many complained about the production's total effect. Ward Morehouse of the *New York Sun* commented that "*Summer and Smoke*, in which Tennessee Williams combines metaphysics with realism and symbolism, is a rueful and disturbing play" (Morehouse 28). The critic went on to commend the "beautiful performance" of Margaret Phillips and Tod Andrews and added that *Summer* is "an ironic play, one with some scenes of tenderness and beauty, but also one that never takes on dramatic progression" (28). Robert Garland of the *New York Journal – American*, in response to the same production, says that *Summer* is an excellent forward to *Streetcar* (Garland 21). On the whole, critics found the New York production of *Summer* disappointing for its failure to address the symbolic structure underlying the play.

The earlier Dallas production of 1947 was different. Held before the New York production and directed by Margo Jones, this earlier production proves that the play's failure in New York lay in its staging. *Summer* requires the intimacy that a small theatre provides. Margo Jones' Gulf Oil Playhouse provided the informality required for the play to appeal to the audience. However reviews of this production were limited although Brookes Atkinson, being suitably impressed, wrote favourable comments which succeeded in bringing the play, ironically, to New York's Music Box Theatre in 1948. To prove that the play requires the intimacy of a small theatre, I would like to draw attention to Jose Quintero's Circle-In-The-Square production in 1952. This Off-Broadway production was wildly successful. Benjamin Nelson pointed this out and comments:

The rectangular stage, surrounded by the audience on three sides, was admirably suited to the setting, and the size of the playhouse itself - it had only a little more than two hundred seats - was a prime factor in achieving the tone and atmosphere Mr. Quintero sought...[B]y compressing the action in a kind of dark and shifting limbo, Quintero gave the play the expressionism it required and enabled the actors to heighten every word and gesture. (119)

Upon closer examination of the text, it becomes clear that the play sets out to express, on stage, the mood, emotion and frustration of its characters. Evidence supporting this interpretation can be found in the production notes accompanying the play. The sky, for example, is the focal point of the play's expressionistic quality. Williams wants the sky to be blue and wants it to appear overhanging slightly above the heads of the characters:

There must be a great expanse of sky so that the entire action of the play takes place against it. This is true of interior as well as exterior scenes...During the day scenes the sky should be a pure and intense blue (like the sky of Italy as it is so faithfully represented in the religious paintings of the Renaissance) and costumes should be selected to form a dramatic colour contrast to this intense blue which the figures stand against. (Colour harmonies and other visual effects are tremendously important).  
(*Summer* 99)

The basic aim of this instruction is, I believe, to give external expression to inner feelings and ideas. The queer subtext of the play depends on this technique to work. In the New York production, though Joe Mielziner's set design was innovative, it could not sustain the play's need for expressionism. Williams' notes on set design

again reinforce the idea that the play is centred on the expression of a self in conflict. The framework of the set resembles the private and public spaces carefully crafted to personify a divided personality:

Now we descend to the so-called interior sets of the play. There are two of these 'interior' sets, one being the parlour of an episcopal rectory and the other the home of a doctor next door to the rectory. The architecture of these houses is barely suggested but is of an American Gothic design of the Victorian era. There are no actual doors or windows or walls. Doors and windows are represented by a delicate framework of Gothic design...sections of the wall are used only where they are functionally required...In the doctor's house should be a section of a wall to support the chart of anatomy. Chirico has used fragmentary walls and interiors in a very evocative way in his painting called *Conversation Among the Ruins*. (100)

If the sky represents the moods of the self, the set seems intended to accommodate the violent tussle between Alma and her "doppelganger". If the "interior" set symbolises the secret world of the individual, the "exterior" set is the public space where disguise becomes necessary. Symbolism is also given importance and a stone angel dominates the centre of the stage. In the prologue, Alma and John, who are children, ponder the meaning of the word "Eternity" (the angel's name). This moment is frozen in time, broken only when John roughly kisses Alma, awakening her "doppelganger". *Summer* chronicles a battle between John and Alma who represent two components that are constantly in battle in the life of a homosexual: the body and the soul. The "sky", the "interior" set and the "exterior" set, will be their battleground as the play progresses.

Part one of the play, entitled "Summer", is divided into six scenes and charts the flux in Alma's life since her reunion with the boy of the prologue. Lighting for the first scene, according to the production notes, should grow dim indicating the faded sunlight of dusk. Alma is singing a patriotic song, "La Golondrina", and the father is visibly uncomfortable with his daughter's stage performance, complaining that "this is going to provoke a lot of criticism" (105). The Reverend Winemiller's concerns sums up Alma's restricted life as the preacher's daughter. John, as he moves onto the stage, is a "promethean figure, brilliant and restlessly alive in a stagnant society"(105). This is in sharp contrast to Alma, whose presence is only heard through "a voice not particularly strong, but [that] has great purity and emotion" (105). When she comes into the audience's gaze, there is "something prematurely spinsterish about her" (107). Due to "...excessive propriety and self-consciousness", Alma appears queer on stage. She resembles an eighteenth century lady displaced in the modern era. This queerness "is apparent in her nervous laughter" but it is a "nature [that] is still hidden from her" (107). When they meet, as though to push the point home, there are fireworks exploding in the sky. While Alma has grown up shouldering the responsibilities of her mother who has lost her mind, John evades his responsibility as a doctor because of his deep seated fear of death experienced as a child when his mother passed away. While things spiritual easily impress Alma, John's training in the science of medicine, makes him cynical about religion and spirituality. This is made clear in their differing attitudes towards John's career as a doctor:



ALMA: I have looked through a telescope, but never a microscope. What...what do you...see?

JOHN: A - universe, Miss Alma.

ALMA: What kind of a universe?

JOHN: Pretty much the same kind that you saw through the lens of telescope - a mysterious one...

ALMA: Oh, yes...

JOHN: Part anarchy - and part order!

ALMA: The footprints of God!

JOHN: But not God.

ALMA[ecstatically]: To be a doctor! And deal with these mysteries under the microscope lens...I think it is more religious than being a priest...(111)

But John has not forgotten their encounter at the fountain as children. He knows that Alma is a hypochondriac because she is denying a part of her self that demands expression. He casually tells her that she is suffering from a "doppelganger [that] is badly irritated" (113). Later, after Alma accuses him of deliberately hurting her feelings, he reveals to her that he likes her but more importantly, that he knows she likes him:

JOHN: You're attracting attention! Don't you know that I really like you, Miss Alma.

ALMA: No, you don't.

JOHN: Sure I do. A lot. Sometimes when I come home late at night I look over at the rectory.

I see something white at the window. Could that be you, Miss Alma? Or, is it your doppelganger, looking out of the window that faces my way? (118)

In scene two, which is in the rectory, Alma is scolding her mother for stealing a plumed hat from the grocery store. Alma in this scene is clearly a different person.

The encounter with John has somehow intensified the demands of her “irritated doppelganger” and she calls John over the telephone. Sheepishly, she castigates him for not fulfilling his promise to take her out and seizes the opportunity to invite him to a social meeting where “we talk about the new books and read things aloud to each other” (122). She is however constantly interrupted by her mother who, later in the scene, will play an integral role in bringing about a queer moment of identification. At one point Nellie, Alma’s music class student, draws Alma’s attention to the attractiveness of John’s body:

ALMA: What are you doing at the window Nellie?

NELLIE: Watching someone I have a terrible crush on!

ALMA: Someone - next door?

NELLIE: You know who - Dr. Johnny Junior. You know, I thought I’d always hate men. Loathe and despise them. But now, oh, I think he’s the wonderfulest person in all the world. Don’t you think so?

ALMA: In appearance perhaps, but his character is weak. Where do you see him? [She catches Mrs. Winemiller’s eye.]

NELLIE: He isn’t dressed, so I think it must be his

bedroom.

ALMA: Please come away from the window.

NELLIE: He's brushing his hair.

ALMA: Nellie, come away from the window...

NELLIE: They're calling him again. He is getting into his shirt.

ALMA: Nellie, don't look out the window and have us caught spying.

Mrs. WINEMILLER [suddenly]: Show Nellie how you spy on him! Oh, she's a good one at spying. She stands behind the curtain and peeks around it, and...

ALMA [frantically]: Mother! (124)

By problematising Alma's sexual attraction towards the naked body of John, Williams is able to create a queer moment of identification for his gay audience. Although Alma is a woman, she is not able to feel her sexual desires are legitimate. The homosexual like Alma is a voyeur who is constantly aware that his desire for men is "deviant".

It is in scene three - the social meeting scene - that the queer subtext of the play becomes prominent. Williams does not rely solely on the reversal of gender roles in this play to create queer moments of identification. Through a play of words, actions and innuendo, Williams creates a queer gathering of "queens". The men are clearly effeminate; Mr. Doremus is a mama's boy while Vernon is a "willowy young man with an open collar and Byronic locks" (125). The widow Bassett is a

town-gossip who wields a vicious tongue. Rosemary is “a wistful older girl with a long neck and thick-lensed glasses” (125) and Alma, needs no explanation. Alma’s friends, like homosexuals, gravitate towards each other because of similar literary aspirations. Gay men will identify with the air of “exclusivity” that these characters surround themselves with.

To further embolden the effect he wants, Williams not only relies on stereotypes, but also makes references to homosexual poets allowing his characters to re-write their works from a queer perspective. Mrs. Basset for example confuses William Blake with the French poets Verlaine and Rimbaud. She objects to Rosemary’s reading of Blake thinking that the latter “travelled around with a Frenchman who took a shot at him and landed them both in jail! Brussels, Brussels!” (128). John Clum succinctly adds that Alma’s reading of Blake’s poem is a “conflation of two poems, one of which has been shortened, revised and gender-bent” (Clum, 1996, 34). “By changing the gender of the pronouns and reworking the poem to give it a more personal meaning”, Clum says that Alma has made “the kind of revision that many gay men have privately given to heterosexual literature” (Clum, 1996, 34).

But the most effective tool to bring home the queer atmosphere of the bookish meeting is undoubtedly the appearance of John. “He is a startling contrast to the other male company, who seem to be outcasts of a state in which he is a prominent citizen” (*Summer* 126). Williams, measuring with a merciless physical

yardstick, elevates John to the status of a demigod. Mrs. Basset congratulates Alma who “laughs breathlessly” (127). Vernon’s verse play, “eight inches thick”, is sidelined. After Mrs. Basset’s outburst and Alma’s revisionist reading of Blake, John leaves the meeting abruptly. When Mrs. Basset suggests the obvious, that John left to go to Moon Lake Casino for a more “physical” time, Alma castigates her and a catfight ensues:

ALMA:           Why Mrs. Basset, what gave you that idea? I don’t think that John even knows that Gonzales girl [referring to Rosa Gonzales].

Mrs. BASSET: He knows her all right. In the biblical sense of the word, if you’ll excuse me.

ALMA:           No, I will not excuse you! A thing like that is inexcusable!

Mrs. BASSET: Have you fallen for him, Miss Alma? Miss Alma has fallen for the young doctor! They tell me he has lots of new lady patients!

ALMA:           Stop it! [She stamps her foot furiously and crushes the palm leaf fan between her clenched hands.] I won’t have malicious talk here! You drove him away from the meeting after I’d bragged so much about how bright and interesting you all were! You put your worst foot forward and simpered and chattered and carried on like idiots, idiots! (130)

Alma’s outburst breaks up the meeting but it indicates that she has “fallen for the doctor”. This meeting, gay audiences will appreciate, is more than a mere gossip session, it provides a space for the marginalised to come together. In *Summer*, the

misfits of Glorious Hill find themselves in the rectory of the queer Alma Winemiller.

In scenes four to six, Alma's desire for John, personified in scenes two and three, begins to take control of her. Late at night after the incident, Alma begins to suffer from heart palpitations and visits the clinic. There she discovers an injured John being attended to by the buxomy Rosa Gonzales. She confesses that she "seems to be all to pieces" (132) and finds great difficulty breathing. With a stethoscope, John discovers the problem that has been haunting Alma and when asked, he tells her the reason: "Miss Alma is lonesome" (134). John explains to Alma that she is a person who is worth a lot of consideration "because you have a lot of feeling in your heart and that is a rare thing. It makes you too easily hurt" (135). The divided personality in Alma will, from this moment onwards, begin to emerge in her actions. The first being Alma's rebellion against her father's prohibition of her meeting John in scene five and the second, being her confrontation with the reality that John is not a "gentleman" in scene six. Alma realises that John does not share the religious values that she abides by. She is hurt when she realises that the gossip surrounding John is true. She contradicts her philosophy: "I don't judge people by the tongues of gossip" (137), because she is now as judgmental as the town gossips. More importantly, her discovery of John's sexual promiscuity mirrors her own discovery of her "doppelganger". She cannot accept the fact that John indulges in the activities of Moon Lake Casino where

“anything goes” (139), just as she cannot accept her sexual desires for John. Desire, to Alma and the homosexual, is “sinful”:

ALMA: Those Latins all dream in the sun - and  
indulge their senses.

JOHN: Well, it's yet to be proven that anyone on  
this earth is crowned with so much glory as  
the one that uses his sense to get all he can  
in the way of - satisfaction.

ALMA: Self-satisfaction.

JOHN: What other kind is there?

ALMA: I will answer that question by asking you  
one. Have you ever seen, or looked at a  
picture of, a Gothic cathedral?

JOHN: Gothic cathedrals? What about them?

ALMA: How everything reaches up, how everything  
seems to be straining for something out of  
reach of stone - or human - fingers?...The  
immense stained windows, the great arched  
doors...all reaching to something beyond  
attainment! To me - well, that is the secret  
principle back of existence - the everlasting  
struggle and aspiration for more than  
our human limits have placed in our reach -  
who was that who said... 'All of us are in the  
gutter, but some of us are looking at the  
stars!'

JOHN: Mr. Oscar Wilde (139)

Like the homosexual, Alma Winemiller is a secret sexual deviant because the only person who knows about her attraction for John (men) and who censors her for it, is herself. Williams, by invoking the name of Oscar Wilde in this “ostensibly

heterosexual exchange”, John Clum argues, “signals the gay interpretive community that there is a gay code operative in the play” (Clum, 1996, 33). Like Alma, most homosexuals feel that they “are in the gutter looking at the stars!” When John kisses Alma and suggests to her that “there’s other things between a man and a woman besides respect” (*Summer* 143), Alma furiously ignores the sexual innuendo:

JOHN:           The cock-fight has started!

ALMA:           Since you have spoken so plainly, I’ll speak plainly, too. There are some **women** who turn a possibly beautiful thing into something no better than the coupling of beasts! - but love is what you bring to it...Some people just bring their bodies. But there are some people, there are some **women**, John – who can bring their hearts to it, also - who can bring their souls to it! (emphasis mine) (144)

But as part one of the play dissolves and re-emerges into part two, entitled “Winter”, Alma like the novice in the gay world will realise that relationships have to be fleeting and purely physical because the “love that you bring to it” is never allowed expression.

At the beginning of scene seven (the first scene of part two), Alma is surrounded by her “queer” friends. Meanwhile John is having an “orgy” in the clinic. Alma, probably feeling jealous, calls Dr. Buchanon and tells him about the party at the clinic. A fight ensues between Dr. Buchanon and Rosa’s father and the



former is fatally shot. At this point in the play, both Alma and John are forced to face the consequences of their actions. The debate between the body and the soul reaches a climax in scene eight:

JOHN:        Hold still! Now listen to the anatomy lecture. You see this chart? It's a picture of a -... tree with three birds on it. This top bird is the brain. The bird is hungry. He's hungry for something called truth. He doesn't get much, he's never satisfied with it, he keeps on shaking his cold and weak wings...And down there is the lowest bird - or maybe the highest, who knows? - yes take a look at him, too, he's hungry as both the others and twice as lonesome - what's he hungry for? Love!...

ALMA:        So that is your high conception of human desires. What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I - I reject your opinion of where love is, and the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking! - There is something not shown in the chart.

JOHN:        You mean the part that Alma is Spanish for, do you?

ALMA:        Yes, that's not shown on the anatomy chart! But its there...And it's that, that I loved you with - that! Not what you mentioned!..Yes, did love you with, John, did nearly die of when you hurt me. (155)

Both Alma and John are fugitives from the qualities they represent. Alma is a fugitive from the fact that the physical expression of love is as legitimate as the spiritual aspect of that union. John is never satisfied with any one person because he is unable to make an emotional commitment with his partners. He has been denied

love since his mother's death. His brutal and self-destructive habits, reflects his fear of an intimate relationship with another individual. He is a fugitive from the "spiritual". After this confrontation, John does not turn to Alma as he realises that his attraction to Alma is based on his love for what she represents and not for who she is:

JOHN: I wouldn't have made love to you.

ALMA [uncomprehendingly]: What?

JOHN: That night at the casino - I wouldn't have made love to you. Even if you had consented to go upstairs. I couldn't have made love to you. [Alma stares at John as if anticipating some unbearable hurt.] Yes, yes! Isn't it funny? I'm more afraid of your soul than you're of my body. You'd have been as safe as the angel of the fountain - because I wouldn't feel decent enough to touch you. (155)

As summer progresses into autumn, Alma is so badly burned by the heat of passion that only smoke remains of her "soul". The spiritual has escaped the body. In scene nine, Mr. Winemiller confronts Alma about her neglecting of responsibilities but she simply ignores him. Throughout the autumn months, Alma hibernates, ignoring the gossip of Mrs. Basset and avoiding her queer community. She emerges in scene ten, in the dead of winter, near the stone angel. Nellie announces that she and John are to be married. This propels Alma to confront the latter in scene eleven. She meets a different John, one who has turned himself into a successful doctor. Having discovered the cure his father was looking for, John returns to Glorious Hill as a responsible young hero. In fact he is about to commit himself to heterosexuality by

shadow of her former self. She, like them, seeks intimacy with strangers, hoping to feel the love that was never reciprocated:

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

THE YOUNG MAN: What was its character?

ALMA:           Gay, very gay... (174)

\*

The play ends with Alma Winemiller rejecting her old self. Earlier in the play however she, like the homosexual, leads a double life - one that involves careful balancing between "interior" and "exterior" worlds. In Williams' personal microcosm, the homosexual like Alma, is at heart a "weak and divided individual". He has been conditioned to regard his sexuality as "deviant", making the physical expression of it impossible. Yet he cannot deny having such desires although admitting having them creates a gulf within the self. He mocks his physical self, renouncing it and suppressing it. However, like Anna Kimball, denying it creates a feeling of incompleteness, a feeling that impedes self-realisation. Indulging in physical pleasure, even if it is merely looking through the window like Alma, is accompanied by a great sense of panic and guilt. Atonement for indulging in "deviant" physical delights, as Anthony Burns learns, is to suffer. Alma's hypochondria and, to a certain extent, John's self-destructiveness is a form of

masochism. It is self-punishment for crimes only the secret “deviant” is aware of. Atonement is necessary, otherwise like Alma, the soul evaporates into smoke taking away with it self-respect. In the public sphere, the secret sexual deviant is queer. He finds an affinity with people who suffer from the same kind of social ostracism. Like Alma, the homosexual is likely to befriend a willowy verse writer or an insecure spinster because of the shared experience of marginalisation. The homosexual is also gifted with sensitivity appropriate for the appreciation of literature, art and music. His self-division has enabled him to appreciate the products of other similarly troubled and sensitive minds. However, this does not raise him in the estimation of society. He will forever be marked as queer, ridiculed for being different and conditioned to believe that being different means being inferior.

In this play, Williams does not rely solely on gender-transvestism. He enlarges the “gay code” to include gestures, interests and revisionist readings of heterosexual literature to create a probable queer subtext. This explains why the play fails. Benjamin Nelson is partly right, Williams was so preoccupied with developing the queer subtext through the mastering of queer codes that his characters became as stereotypical as their speeches. One thing is however clear. Through the effective moments of queer identification, gay audiences see themselves as Alma Winemiller, an individual so divided that she is “all to pieces”. She is a mirror that every gay man tries to avoid, for if gazed upon, the image of Alma Winemiller reminds us all, of the incomprehensible gulf between the body

and the soul. Furthermore this momentary pause in the fugitive's physical flight from the family has resulted in a second more intense flight pattern - the homosexual's flight from the self. Emerging from this "personal microcosm" and resuming Tom/Williams' physical flight, is an insecure fugitive trying desperately to find her way home. She has inherited a divided self from Alma and is resuming Tom Wingfield's lonely flight from the family matrix - she is Blanche Du Bois.