

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In light of Williams' development as a dramatist, this study has illustrated that the early works are inextricably bound up with the playwright's attempt to express himself as a gay man. To conclude that these works present unquestionable evidence that Williams is purely a gay dramatist is to limit the playwright in artistic terms. Williams insisted above all else that he never found it necessary to write a gay play. He is quoted by Donald Spoto as having said: "I'm not about to limit myself to writing [merely] about gay people" (Spoto 319). Evidence of a queer subtext underlying the early works seems to suggest that, despite this protest, there are aspects of the queer permeating his works. This dissertation has shown that this subtext is directly related to the figure of the fugitive. In this chapter, I will briefly reiterate the issues a queer literary inquiry affords us.

From the examination of the fugitive's flight from the family, it is clear that autobiographical aspects figure prominently in the early works. Williams' creative process, one that involves translating personal experiences into fiction, allows us to examine the "translation" of his alienation as a gay person within the family in his character's flight from home. The fugitive's flight from the family is however guilt-ridden because Williams saw it partly as an act of abandonment on his part of his sister Rose. As much as the mother is associated with blind faith in the Church or is

seen as a source of annoyance, she like Amanda was motivated by a need to protect her children. The fugitive's guilt is also partly centred on his strained relationship with the mother. Ultimately what motivates the gay person in these works to run away from home has not so much to do with a handicapped sister or an oppressive mother, it has to do with a need to come-out of the closet.

The homosexual's closet may be a personal world but unknown to him, it is made of glass. In *Menagerie* both Tom and Laura are victims of a conspiratorial silence. By not allowing her children to talk about their "unusualness", Amanda Wingfield hopes that they would outgrow their eccentric behaviour. This correlates with the "it is merely a phase they are going through" explanation when homosexuality is discovered. Within the closet however, the gay person like Tom is constantly aware that he needs to don a mask. He becomes self-conscious of his gestures, his actions and the words he selects to use in conversation. In other words, the gay person has to learn to act straight.

Because Tom narrates about the family as an outsider, we realise that for gay people the need to wear a mask is as crucial in society as it was in the home. The metaphor of the oppressive maternal womb in *Menagerie*, imprinted in the memory of the queer Tom Wingfield, implies that the gay person is still haunted by the memory and experience of his alienation and awkwardness. Later, outside the maternal womb, he discovers the secret world of the sexual deviant. It is a world dominated by queer codes, puns and gender inversion. He has emerged from the

confines of the glass closet only to be pushed into a ghetto that society has consigned for sexual degenerates. Ironically only when he is free of the confines of the home does he realise how much his survival is dependent on the mask he dons.

In *Menagerie*, we leave the homosexual on the verge of coming-out. On the other hand, the works selected for scrutiny in Chapter Three reflect Williams' "personal microcosm", a nightmarish world created to ponder the politics of this important process. Coming-out however is never easy. Some of us are never able to disclose our sexual orientation to another individual without feeling shame and fear. Living in a society that cannot tolerate difference, we begin to persecute ourselves for being gay. This, according to Kaufman and Raphael in *Coming Out of Shame*, "divides us from ourselves just as it divides us from others" (11). The culmination of this predicament, explored in the parlour of the Winemillers, is painful self-division.

The examination of the fugitive's flight from the self is a study of self-indictment in the playwright's works. Williams, through his characters, probes his own guilt-ridden and self-depreciating attitude towards gayness. He, as one critic points out, is his character's worst enemy. The playwright can be more unforgiving than the society he satirises. These works describe the interior space of the homosexual's closet. The nightmarish and grotesque descriptions mirror the inner turmoil the homosexual experiences in life. Alma Winemiller's internal battle between the body and the soul in *Summer* reflects society's influence over the secret sexual deviant. Conditioned to believe that her sexuality is dirty, Alma like the gay

person suffers from "incompletion" or an inability to realise her sexual identity. However coming-out is, to some like Alma, inevitable. Once the closet door is unlocked, the gay person is exposed to society's gossip, persecution and ostracism. Like Alma, the homosexual is a fugitive from himself as much as he is a fugitive from society.

Conversely *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a *tour-de-force* of the world without and its treatment of the homosexual. Blanche Du Bois, an individual desperately clinging to Mitch for normality, takes on where Alma left off. Self-division in this character is reflected in her lily-white exterior, a mask that harbours a deviant "doppelganger". Conscious of "that something about [her]", Stanley tells Blanche that "never did you once pull the wool over this boy's eye", indicating his knowledge of Blanche's secret sexual deviance. The play revolves around this masquerade, played by Blanche and perfected by Stanley. While Blanche continues to lie to herself, Stanley allows her to "pull the wool over [her own eyes]", all the while, preparing to "hurt her, like [she hurt Allen Grey]". Williams, by making Blanche a fugitive from her one act of cruelty towards her gay husband, ingeniously structured the play around an earlier drama, one that chronicles the exposure and ultimate suicide of a homosexual. Blanche's fear of disclosure mirrors Allen Grey's inability to accept his sexuality. This makes them both fugitives from reality. Once exposed, the gay person like Blanche or Allen Grey, is reduced to his sexuality. As a person, the queer no longer exists. He has been erased from the play's heterosexist stage.

Streetcar also explores the dynamics of homophobia. Mitch's attempt to rape Blanche is justified by the latter's lie about "being straight". Once exposed the homosexual like Blanche is no longer a person. Violating his body is thus not a crime, it is something "[he] has been waiting for all summer". Homophobic attacks by Blanche's nemesis Stanley Kowalski are also fuelled by a mixture of attraction and repulsion. Because Blanche is a degenerate, she "had this coming from the very beginning", Stanley says in an attempt to explain away the brutal act of rape. Gay audiences immediately recognise the parallelism between Stanley's assault on Blanche with the homophobe's assault of the drag queen. It is obvious that just as Blanche is a threat to Stanley, the gay person is a threat to his attacker's heterosexuality. The image of the transvestite in the rape scene links homophobia to society's sexist subordination of the feminine, here personified in its contempt for effeminacy in men. The gay male person is persecuted for his femininity.

Throughout this study the role of the fugitive in Williams' early works is bound up with the playwright's attempt to bring about queer moments of identification. While in *Menagerie*, Williams employed theatrical devices like the use of a scrim and lighting to create a semiotic atmosphere, in *Summer* the playwright structured the setting to highlight self-division. In *Streetcar*, the use of music is exploited to re-create a connection between Allen Grey's exposure as a homosexual with Blanche's unmasking. In terms of characterisation, from Tom Wingfield to Blanche Du Bois, the Williams character is an autobiographical figure representing the collective experience of many gay people. His preoccupation with sexual

orientation, the closet, self-division and the fear of exposure illustrate that in the early works the homosexual is a fugitive.