In the plays of Tennessee Williams, as in the works of other able and prolific American dramatists, a pattern emerges that continues to appear, with minor variations, over and over again. Williams is remarkably loyal to his favorite archetypal pattern, and, for that reason, it seems to provide an indispensable key to the nature and meaning of his plays. The typical event is the meeting of a healthy, handsome man and a nervous older woman who is losing her looks. I call this couple Adonis and the Gargoyle—Adonis after the classical ideal of male beauty and the Gargoyle after the grotesque by-products of medieval architecture. The contrast between them is alone enough to enforce one major point: it is better to be a carefree man than to be a worried, married woman. A second thought occurs: freedom is better than dependence, but, first, any examination of these plays must begin with close scrutiny of their protagonists.

Adonis is young and extraordinarily virile and muscular. His magnificent physical endowments make him unusually self-confident. He is cool and tough, so sufficient and so self-contained that he does not say much for himself. This is fortunate because he has no great skill in speech. No eloquence is needed: his physical beauty and his powerful spirit are more eloquent than any words. He can talk in Stanley Kowalski’s city slang or Val Xavier’s rustic language, but what he conveys is, most of all, coolness. He is sure of himself, basically unruffled on all occasions. Even his rages are strangely controlled; when Stanley Kowalski of A Streetcar Named Desire throws crockery on the floor, he makes a deliberate object-lesson out of what he does. Angry as he is, the sullen Brick, of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, is the coolest of all. He has “detachment”; in the sexual act, he is like a gentleman “opening a door for a lady.” His wife tells him: “You look so cool, so cool, so enviably cool.” Since she is the nervous cat of the title, she has good cause to envy him.

The mythical Adonis was an athlete; his prototypes are athletically inclined. They include a champion boxer, a football player, and a onetime dancer in Oklahoma! Kowalski keeps in trim by bowling. All the Adonis are dazzlingly handsome. One is “very goodlooking” and “has a massively sculptural torso.” Another is “very, very good-looking.” This especially well-endowed person, Dr. Cukrowicz of Suddenly Last Summer, is more than cool; he is “glacially brilliant” and possesses an “icy charm.” A third Adonis is “exceptionally good-looking.” The descriptions of these paragons tend to go beyond mere praise and to strike a rhapsodic note. Other Adonis are variously described as having “the fresh and shining look of an epic hero”—“a fresh and primitive quality, a virile grace and
freedom of body, and a strong physical appeal”—“a kind of wild beauty.” Still another resembles “a young animal of the woods.”

These magnificent, untamed creatures are threatened by corruption. Before our eyes, several of them give way to it. One of them, Brick, is driven to drink by the charge that he has been subject to another corrupting influence, homosexuality. Val Xavier proudly boasts that he has saved himself from corruption. All are threatened because their superb qualities attract the lightning, bringing love, envy, and the danger of contamination. On precisely this basis, Williams can justify his choice of Adonis for his hero. Adonis leads a more interesting life than the rest of us, and in this respect he is like the kings and demi-gods of the tragedies of old. We may say that Williams starts with his Adonis for the same reason that Sophocles begins with his king of Thebes. Each is great enough to attract the lightning—if one can find greatness in Williams’ heroes.

But no classical principle can explain the Gargoyle. She is the beautiful hero’s appalling destiny. A good, relatively simple example occurs in Williams’ first Broadway play, The Glass Menagerie. The four characters include two men and two women. The men, if not Adonises, are at least fairly normal members of the human race. Tom works his eccentricities off by writing poems and going to the movies; he is a free spirit who finally exercises his freedom by abandoning his mother and sister. Jim is a hearty, friendly go-getter. But the two women betray symptoms of psychosis. Amanda lives in the past and imposes unrealistic rules of conduct upon her children. Laura, terrified by human beings, flees to the company of her glass animals. Note also that while the two men are healthy and in the prime of life, Amanda is middle-aged and Laura is crippled. These contrasts may be unimpressive in themselves, but they are given significance by their recurrence in every one of Williams’ subsequent plays.

Adonis is exceptional, but the Gargoyle is not. She is not so well favored as he, and she is usually not so young. In three of the plays and perhaps in a fourth (The Rose Tattoo), the feminine lead is older than her male counterpart. (I exclude The Glass Menagerie and Suddenly Last Summer, which are dominated by even more matronly ladies.) The Gargoyle is losing whatever looks she may have had. She is often a bit stout and slovenly in dress. The plot is generally so woven that she wears a slip or wrapper in much of the play. Now, Adonis has many occasions to take off his shirt, and for him to do so is to expose his manly beauty. Even dressed, he is a temptation to every woman. The Adonis of Orpheus Descending is told: “Ev’rything you do is suggestive!” But when the Gargoyle takes off her dress, the result is a good deal less charming. Consider Serafina of The Rose Tattoo. She is the dressmaker who, on learning of her husband’s death, lets her appearance and especially her figure go to pieces. A rude customer remarks that her sedentary life “has naturally given her hips.” When she stops wearing dresses and is seen in her slip, she exposes no more than her girth. The two principal women of A Streetcar Named Desire wear slips and wrappers when the plot requires. One is pregnant till
the last scene of the play; we are frequently reminded that the other has
good reason to fear the loss of her beauty and to lie about her age. Neither
one is as striking physically as Stanley Kowalski, the Adonis of this piece.
Alexandra del Lago, the aging film star of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, wears her
night dress through her first act. Revolted by her image in the mirror, she
is stout enough to be called “plump lady” by her husky young lover, whose
effective costume in the first act is the trousers of his pajamas.

In two other plays, if the two feminine leads are not actually older than
the men, at least they seem to act older when they try to nag Adonis into
doing their bidding. Maggie the cat, who wears her slip because her dress
has been soiled, is “a pretty young woman,” but her beauty is not de-
scribed as rapturously as her husband’s; moreover, “her voice . . . some-
times drops as low as a boy’s and you have a sudden image of her playing
boy’s games as a child.” Some further light may be shed on Maggie’s char-
acter by her literary ancestry. She first appears in a short story, *Three
Players of a Summer Game*, as Margaret Pollitt, the possessive, domineer-
ing wife of Brick Pollitt, “a man who had been, and even at that time
still was, the handsomest you were likely to remember.” This shrewish
Margaret comes between Brick and the woman he loves; she finally leads
him around like a captive “in chains.” Certainly, Maggie was very little
of a shrew when Barbara Bel Geddes played her on Broadway, but I agree
with Eric Bentley’s observation that Miss Bel Geddes changed Maggie
from the script’s “rather ordinary girl” to “the very type of non-shabby,
upper-class gentility, wholesome as a soap ad.”

Even when Alma Winemiller of *Summer and Smoke* is a child, she has
“an adult quality”; as a young girl, she is “prematurely spinsterish.” Her
self-consciousness makes her elegant and affected in manner. She laughs
gaily but insincerely, makes too much small talk, swallows air, and some-
times gets off an unfelt “Ha-ha.” She shares a few of these traits with
Blanche DuBois of *Streetcar*, who also works too hard to achieve a light
manner. In her early youth Blanche was the purest and sweetest of girls,
and so is Alma. Repression and disappointment turn Blanche into a nym-
phomaniac; we cannot know if Alma faces a similar fate, but, in the
play’s last scene, having lost the man she loves, Alma consoles herself by
picking up a stranger in the park. The path from severe repression to in-
discriminate flirtation is walked by many of Williams’ feminine charac-
ters. The actress in Williams’ novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*,
had in her early years married a nonentity “to avoid copulation”; in her
fifties, she becomes the patroness of gigolos. Her last lover is an authentic
Adonis, who has “the sort of beauty that is celebrated by the heroic male
sculptures in the fountains of Rome.” A religious fanatic in *Orpheus
Descending* compensates her repressions by mothering stray vagabonds
and painting heroic portraits of the apostles. But Alma Winemiller most
resembles Alma Tutwiler of the story *The Yellow Bird*, which recasts
some of the materials of *Summer and Smoke* in the form of fantasy. Alma
Tutwiler is, like the other Alma, the repressed, spinsterish daughter of a
minister. After smoking a cigarette, she inevitably becomes a prostitute, enjoys her trade, and leaves a fortune "to The Home for Reckless Spenders."

Whether she is a spinster or a nymphomaniac or both, the Gargoyle is invariably as nervous as Adonis is cool. One Gargoyle is called "a cat on a hot tin roof," but the others might also be so designated. They fret, they worry, they nag, they make pointless small talk, they tell unfunny jokes, they finally get on the nerves even of the calm Adonis. Their nervousness reflects a terrible distress. They are prisoners of the past, and they have tragically found themselves in a nightmarelike present which they had never anticipated. Some may, like Alma Winemiller, long for a world governed by the starchy decorum which she learned as a girl. Amanda Wingfield, of The Glass Menagerie, nostalgically recalls an aristocratic Southern past. Another Gargoyle relives her career as a film actress. Still others are tormented by the memory of a particular past event—the death of a husband, the death of a father, the death of a son. Some have by their own cruelty helped to create the hells in which they live. Blanche DuBois and Maggie the Cat have cruelly, if perhaps justly, made the charge of homosexuality, and life has punished them by depriving them of love. Their tragic histories have marked these women, and, as a result, while Adonis usually lives in the present, the Gargoyle always lives in the past.

The meeting of these two archetypal figures dominates most of the plays. In A Streetcar Named Desire, the Gargoyle abruptly enters Adonis's rather happy animal existence. She puts on airs, annoys him, flirts with him, and tries to turn his wife against him; Adonis rapes her, and she is committed to an asylum. She is a pitiful figure, but, in a sense, she has been asking for what happened. Audience sympathy is more evenly divided than a summary would indicate. When Jessica Tandy and Marlon Brando played these roles, Stanley Kowalski won so many laughs that his wit seemed to compensate for his brutality; Anthony Quinn, on the other hand, played him as a sullen brute.

In The Rose Tattoo, the Gargoyle shuts out all natural activities—in particular, sex—from her life; she justifies herself with a mistaken conception (the need to be faithful to her dead husband) which is in turn based on a mistaken premise (his fidelity to her). A "very good-looking" Adonis comes along to save her from the prison she has made for herself. In You Touched Me!, an early play which Williams wrote in collaboration with Donald Windham, the Gargoyle is the prissy maiden aunt who tries to protect her niece from real life; Adonis, however, makes off with the girl. Lady Torrance, of Orpheus Descending, "verges on hysteria under strain," but she becomes easy-going and pleasant when Adonis makes love to her. The corrupt, aging film queen of Sweet Bird of Youth needs little help in restoring herself to life, but she does get some sexual excitement from a corrupt if "exceptionally good-looking" Adonis.

The archetypes undergo some alteration in Suddenly Last Summer. The Gargoyle is Mrs. Venable, a Southern lady who lives in the private
world of the decayed aristocracy. She has destroyed the life of one prospective Adonis, her handsome son Sebastian—smothering him with her attention, killing any hope he might have to become an individual. Now she tries to stifle the story of his death by arranging for an operation on the brain of the girl whom Sebastian might have loved. But first she must persuade a surgeon, the “very, very good-looking” Dr. Cuckrowicz, an educated Adonis. His foreign name—like Stanley Kowalski, he is of Polish descent—is here, as in other plays by Williams, a sure sign of vigor. He resists both bribes and persuasion; he refuses to be swallowed alive by this superannuated Gargoyle. The measure of his success is the coolness he maintains in the face of Mrs. Venable’s mounting fury.

The film Baby Doll is based on two one-act plays which are closer than the movie to the archetypal pattern. The pretty little heroine of the film has been substituted for the two fat ladies of the one-act plays. Flora, of 27 Wagon Full of Cotton, called “doll” by her husband, is “a woman not large but tremendous.” “Baby Doll” Bowman, of The Long Stay Cut Short, or, The Unsatisfactory Supper, is “a large, indolent woman.” Into Flora’s life comes an attractive, peppery Sicilian who seduces her in the course of establishing her husband’s guilt as an arsonist. The film censored the seduction and emphasized the arson. In the play the Sicilian forgets about the arson and concentrates on seduction, thereby providing another example of a cool but dynamic Adonis with a foreign name who brings new excitement into the sluggish life of a Gargoyle.

Although Adonis and the Gargoyle dominate the scene, certain recurrent figures are necessary companions and foils to them. For foils, we obviously need girls more attractive than the Gargoyle and men less attractive than Adonis. Several ingenues appear, pretty but not very distinctive in character. They are ripe for love and ready for the attentions of some Adonis. We never know much about their minds or their motives, but we may justly suspect that there is not much to know. Matilda in You Touched Me! is a nice girl, and so is Nellie of Summer and Smoke. What more can be said of them? Stella in A Streetcar Named Desire and Heavenly in Sweet Bird of Youth might be described as former ingenues, but much of the ingenue quality survives in them. Rosa, of The Rose Tattoo, is the most spirited of the ingenues. The real function of such characters as Stella, Nellie, and Matilda is to be the healthy young mate of Adonis, but none of these women has enough individuality to make us forget that Adonis is the real figure of interest, the real subject of admiration.

The less attractive men are either worn out older men, exasperated by the fading of their virility, or timid mama’s boys, incapable of independent action. Only one of the old men is a lively, distinctive creation—the loud, vigorous, pathetic Big Daddy of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, dying of cancer but desperately trying to assert his manhood. The older men of Orpheus Descending are vaguer characters, in fact virtually indistinguishable, for they are motivated only by their envy of Val Xavier. Boss Finley of Sweet Bird of Youth is a little more like Big Daddy, with the important
difference that he is totally vicious; in this characterization, political signi-
nificance takes the place of pathos. Boss Finley hates Negroes for the same
reason that the old men of another Southern town hate Val Xavier: sex-
envy. "Sex-envy is what that is, and the revenge for sex-envy which is a
widespread disease that I have run into personally too often for me to
doubt its existence or any manifestation." Since the speaker is the play's
Adonis, we can be sure that he really has run into it personally. He runs
into it again because, at the play's end he is about to be castrated on the
orders of Boss Finley. The mama's boys do not have enough pep to be
vicious—Mitch in A Streetcar Named Desire, the tepid minister in You
Touched Me!, the "good" suitor in Summer and Smoke—all rather pallid
alternatives to Adonis.

The categories of characters are related to certain categories of speech.
Williams' dialogue is distinctive and often quite striking, but certain
broad patterns of speech are repeated from one play to another and from
one character to another. The two main patterns might be called respect-
ful and disrespectful. Respectful speech in Williams is emphatically
Southern. Sometimes, when we hear it from Boss Finley or Big Daddy, it
reminds us of the worst traditions of Southern oratory. More often we
hear it from Southern ladies like Amanda or Blanche or Alma, and it is
affected, prissy, would-be literary, full of little jokes and self-conscious
ha-has. Blanche DuBois has the tune when she explains that she is an
English teacher and sounds like one:

I have the misfortune of being an English instructor. I attempt to instill
a bunch of bobby-soxers and drug-store Romeos with reverence for Haw-
thorne and Whitman and Poe! ... Their literary heritage is not what most
of them treasure above all else!

When the speaker has enough to conceal, such elevated speech can be
effectively ironic. Here is Amanda ensnaring the gentleman caller in a
web of Southern hospitality:

It's rare for a girl as sweet an' pretty as Laura to be domestic! But Laura
is, thank heavens, not only pretty but also very domestic. . . . Well, in the
South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious
living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought
me. All of my gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I
assumed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large
piece of land with plenty of servants. But man proposes—and woman ac-
cepts the proposal!—To vary that old, old saying a little bit—I married no
planter! I married a man who worked for the telephone company!

The sick, crippled Laura is not only domestic; she is afraid to leave the
house. Even the term "gentleman caller" is, like the past life which
Amanda describes, absurd and incongruous in the St. Louis slum in which
she now finds herself. And the little joke—"man proposes—and woman
accepts"—is very characteristic; it has the right literary ring to it, and, like
many of Blanche's little remarks, it is a joke at the speaker's expense.
The disrespectful style is blunt and direct. Stanley Kowalski, Mangiacavallo of *The Rose Tattoo*, Kilroy of *Camino Real*, and the Sicilian of *Baby Doll*—all city men—are its masters. Kowalski tells us how he deals with pretense: "I once went out with a doll who said to me, 'I am the glamorous type!' I said, 'So what?'" But these men do not speak run-of-the-mill slang. Their language has at times the quality of Damon Runyon's prose—a quality achieved by avoiding contractions and by using an occasional surprising word. Thus, Kowalski goes on at some length about the Napoleonic Code; he talks, not about a "friend" who is a lawyer, but an "acquaintance"; he says that the cheap hotel where Blanche lived did not interfere with the "personalities" who stayed there. Kowalski and the others, as played by Brando and Eli Wallach, are not at home with these expressions. Strangers to literacy or to the language, they finger these long words self-consciously, and that is how they get their laughs. Mangiacavallo "frequently seems surprised at his own speeches and actions," and so do the others.

The respectful style can become an index of the Gargoyle’s bondage to the past; the disrespectful style can be a reflection of Adonis’s freedom and his liveliness. But the encounter of these two archetypes involves more than words alone. It is the key to the world of Williams’ meanings. Its message is made clear by action and by the contrast of characters. To be Adonis is to be happy—that is, to be happy is to be free, strong, untamed, to act on instinct. This is the secret Carol Cutrere of *Orpheus Descending* hears in the graveyard to which she takes her lovers: "And we’ll hear the dead people talk... all they say is one word and that one word is ‘live,’ they say ‘Live, live, live, live!’ It’s all they’ve learned, it’s the only advice they can give.” He who hesitates or meditates is lost, lost if he leans on the past, lost if he lives in the shadow of some previous joy or sorrow, lost if he lives in his books or in his mother’s love. And freedom here means, most of all, sexual freedom. We have our horrible examples of those unhappy women who have banished sex from their lives—the crippled girl who is afraid of life, the widow who thinks love died with her husband, the woman who forgot an unhappy love affair by marrying a dying man. Into these lives sexual love must come—and Williams means sexual love, not just sexual activity, or at least he usually does. He is scornful of sexual athletes and others who hold love cheap, although, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he seems perilously close to making sexual activity the source of all value. The few great lovers are persecuted by the envious, by laws and conventions, by all of organized society. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Chance Wayne diagnoses “revenge for sex-envy” as “a widespread disease,” and the basis for this judgment was clear in earlier plays. Chance, Val Xavier, and Brick are the martyrs of love and so, too, in their ways, are Kilroy and Blanche DuBois. If they suffer, they suffer unjustly, and Williams elaborately establishes their fundamental innocence. They suffer for us in a sense, so that love may be free.¹

While Arthur Miller finds injustice to be superficial and the basic sub-
structure of society to be ethically sound, Williams returns a more sweeping indictment against the social order. He preaches the Bohemian, individualistic revolt against society. His criticism is seen in its purest form in *Camino Real*, in which the only brave spirits who can rise against oppression are such inveterate romanticists as Byron and Don Quixote. This Bohemian revolt has no purpose beyond its own existence. Byron is a typical adherent: he will never forget his “old devotion,” but he can not remember what he is devoted to. The true quality of the Bohemian gesture is perhaps best revealed in Don Quixote’s last line in the play: “The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!” That, in a nutshell, is what the Bohemian rebel must do.

The world in which these rebels live is violent and sensational but remarkably consistent. The geography does not vary: every one of Williams’ full-length plays, excepting the fantastic *Camino Real*, takes place in the American South, and all of these but *The Glass Menagerie* are set in the Deep South. Setting his scene in the Deep South reflects a deliberate choice on Williams’ part. Although he was born in Mississippi and later lived in New Orleans, he has spent many more years in other parts of the country. The Deep South, the chosen region of most of his plays, is highly appropriate to the Bohemian rebels whom Williams celebrates, even though its inhabitants may, individually, be the rebels’ worst enemies. The South is sufficiently set off by its proud traditions, by its poverty, by its prejudice, and even by the distinctive Southern accent to be the regional embodiment of nonconformity. Disappointment, repression, and poverty have encouraged eccentricity to flourish; no doubt the Southern climate has made a further contribution to the oddity of human behavior. Other writers testify to the presence of some such pattern in the South—in particular, William Faulkner and two novelists who are said, with Williams, to form a “Gothic School,” Carson McCullers and Truman Capote.

The spiritual geography remains similarly constant: the influences dominating this world are permanent—tradition, nostalgia, corruption, envy, and the frail ghost of integrity. In particular, the supreme value is always the same: love rules this world, and its happy consummation is what all men seek. The facts and impulses that work to confound love are in some respects comparable to the “hidden forces” of which Arthur Miller writes, but, in Williams’ plays, they are seldom hidden for very long. The plays abound in frank, open arguments, in which the most sensitive issues are pitilessly uncovered and debated. Although each play is, in the familiar phrase, the representation of an action, it invariably resembles something else as well—a group psychoanalysis, in which long-hidden dreams, recollections, disappointments, motivations all come tumbling to the light.

The best motivations of Williams’ blowzy matrons and footloose vagabonds may be expressed in honorific terms: in each play, some struggle to be free, to know the truth, and to know love. The failures are more striking and more numerous than the successes, but one theme is clear
enough: the effort to escape repressions and restrictions is well worth making, even though it may result in such defeats as the tragic destruction of Blanche DuBois, who is raped and sent off to an insane asylum in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and of Val Xavier, who is burned by blow-torches and torn by dogs in *Orpheus Descending*. Truth and love win a full victory in *The Rose Tattoo* and an ambiguous one in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The endings of *The Glass Menagerie* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* are mixed; the poet of the first play and the faded film actress of the second manage to escape their dismal environments, but they leave their fellow-sufferers behind them.

Truth, love, and the bold nonconformism of the poet and the Bohemian must actively oppose the destructive forces that threaten them: the dead hand of the past and its stultifying products: convention, repression, and illusion; time and what it inevitably brings—loss of strength, loss of beauty, and envy of youth; the new forces that time brings in the external world—industrialism and economic loss or gain. The dynamic human impulses are effectively summarized by Dr. John Buchanan in *Summer and Smoke*:

Now listen here to the anatomy lecture! The upper story's the brain which is hungry for something called truth and doesn't get much but keeps on feeling hungry! This middle's the belly which is hungry for food. This part down here is the sex which is hungry for love because it is sometimes lonesome.

Since Williams is not a social reformer in the ordinary sense, hunger for food becomes an issue in his plays only to motivate the cannibalism of *Suddenly Last Summer*. Hunger for truth figures especially in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* but in other plays as well. Hunger for love is, however, Williams' true subject, the central force in all of his plays.

The origins of each play are usually deeply involved with the past, with a lost tradition of former greatness and happiness. In the one-act *Moony's Kid Don't Cry*, the happy past is in the North Woods, of which Moony's precious axe reminds us. In another one-act play, *The Last of My Solid Gold Watches*, an old shoe-salesman, "the last of the Delta drummers," recalls the "great days of the road" and the quality products of the past. One unhappy heroine remembers the eternal springtime of her father's green open-air speakeasy; another looks back nostalgically to the freedom and acclaim she enjoyed as a movie star; still another is excessively devoted to the memory of her late unfaithful husband, who was a great lover and a Sicilian baron. Most of these people seek in vain the love and attention they once knew; Moony is trapped in the city, the drummer is ignored by a younger salesman, and the actress has to buy love.

The past to which nostalgia most persistently returns in Williams' plays is the romantic, aristocratic past of the Old South—the seventeen gentleman callers whom Amanda Wingfield remembers in *The Glass Menagerie*, the beautiful dream of the Belle Reve plantation which is
lost to the DuBois sisters of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and the Confederacy whose proud Daughter we observe in the one-act *Something Unspoken*. Unfortunately, things have changed in the South. The gentlemen callers have long ago forgotten the girl they courted, the husband who supplanted them has run off, and the charming Amanda is left with her two hopeless offspring, a shiftless poet and a lame ugly duckling of a daughter. The descendants of the Southern aristocracy do as poorly in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; one is married to a semi-savage, and the other is a nymphomaniac and an alcoholic—just like Carol Cutrere, bearer of "the oldest and most distinguished" name in *Orpheus Descending*. Blanche DuBois tries desperately to send out a message appealing for help from her old suitor Shep Huntleigh, but we know that she will fail; in the profoundest sense, Shep Huntleigh is no more real than the rest of the past. As we might expect, the Daughters of the Confederacy fail to elect their most aristocratic member to the office of Regent and choose instead a newcomer, "less than a year in the chapter." The memories of the past are beautiful and momentarily comforting, but they have to be beautiful if they are to compensate for the indignities of the present.

One hardly needs to add that, justified or not, a nostalgia for the ante-bellum greatness of the South still exists and that its presence in Southern writing is far from new. It has been given warmly sympathetic expression some decades ago in Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and other early work of the Southern agrarian group. William Faulkner has provided a more impersonal record of Southern nostalgia in "A Rose for Emily" and other stories. Williams' attitude is more like Faulkner's. He may indicate sympathy for those who cherish the Old South, but he does not endorse their attitudes or their values.

In their quest for love and security, Blanche and Amanda resemble those who cling to no more than the memory of a happy childhood and an indulgent mother. In these plays, the few young men with Oedipus complexes are the Amanda Wingfields of the private life. Just as Amanda cannot face the modern world from which the courtly South is gone, so they can not face life without mother. Mitch, the over-aged bachelor of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, thinks fondly of home during a poker game: "I gotta sick mother. She don't go to sleep until I go to sleep at night. . . . She says to go out, so I go, but I don't enjoy it. All the while I keep wondering how she is." (Elia Kazan, in his production notes, identifies his mask as that of a "he-man mama's boy.") Williams' Oedipal young men, like his over-protected women, have a way of coming to violent ends. One is eaten alive, and another, out of a zeal for purification, sets his house on fire. For them, as for the others who prefer the past, real life is disastrous.

"We are all haunted by a truly awful sense of impermanence," Williams wrote, in his preface to *The Rose Tattoo*. In his plays, too, time is the real villain. It has destroyed the Old South, turned the film star into
a character actress, changed a football hero into a television announcer of dubious merit, and made dependence on mother ridiculous. For the largest group of characters, it has dimmed sexual power and sexual appeal. Blanche DuBois is a typical victim of the advancing years. She permits herself to be seen only by shaded artificial light and thus hopes to impose on the innocent and not very desirable Mitch. The girls who are still “going out” at 30 know they have their choice between lonely spinsterhood and the garish indiscretions of Blanche DuBois, Carol Cutrere, and the faded actress Alexandra del Lago. Enduring rape or rejection, begging or buying love, most of the disappointed women are pitiable figures. But the men and a few of the women whom time has disappointed are inclined to turn vicious. Big Daddy takes his defeat with a wordless cry (in Williams’ original version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), but the envious old men of *Orpheus Descending* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* employ race prejudice, murder, and castration as their ways of taking revenge on the world.

Those whom time has ruined fear the freedom and strength of the young, but most of all they fear truth. This fear is a theme of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which Blanche conceals her racy past as well as her appearance. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda refuses to concede that her daughter is crippled. Fear of truth is also a theme of *Suddenly Last Summer*, in which a possessive mother strives to conceal the shocking death of her son by arranging to have brain surgery performed on the only witness. The main character of *The Rose Tattoo* must struggle through falsehood to truth, purging herself of elaborate self-deceptions concerning her dead husband. But truth is most emphatically present as a theme of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This time there is no escaping the subject, as Brick says in this play: “Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an’ death’s the other.” The truth about Brick’s father, revealed after long and artful concealment, is death or, to be exact, news of impending death. The truth about Brick himself has driven him to liquor; he has been unable to face his own responsibility for the death of his friend. In helping to cause his friend’s death, he, too, was fleeing truth. These two revelations come close together in a conversation between Brick and his father, at a moment of the play that is traditional for climatic disclosures—the end of the second act. Late discoveries of this sort are familiar enough to students of dramatic literature. They are frequent in Williams’ plays—the real nature of Blanche’s scarlet past, the infidelity of Serafina’s late husband, the burning of a speakeasy by the proprietor’s destined son-in-law, the intimate operation performed on a girl’s sexual organs. Williams brings these shockers down on his characters, hammering home both the ugliness and necessity of the truth. The motto, in fact, for nearly every one of these plays is truth at any price, and the playwright will go to any lengths to make the price sufficiently high.

When truth enters the scene, it generally takes the form of a violent
interruption of a hermetically sealed life of self-deception. Each play centers about an attack, a shock of some sort. After the breaking of the glass unicorn's horn in *The Glass Menagerie*, the shocks in William's plays became a good deal more disturbing—a rape, a shooting, the sight of a cripple going sprawling when his crutch is pulled out from under him, a blowtorch attack on a fugitive, cannibalism, and castration. But in many of the plays, the basic attack is much less appalling: a sheltered life is invaded by a disturbing new force—the rude vigor of modern life, reflected in foreign blood, industrialism, and commerce. The Southern aristocrats are challenged, sometimes by upstarts of Anglo-Saxon descent but more often by newcomers who bear Italian, Polish, or Jewish names. This challenge is present, explicitly or not, in almost every play, but the victims need not be authentically aristocratic and the challengers need not be deliberately hostile. In the one-act *Portrait of a Madonna*, an added Southern lady is tenderly cared for by two representatives of the new world that has driven her out of her reason—the Catholic porter and the Jewish manager of the hotel. Their kindness is a little like Lopakhin's concern for the aristocrats whom he supplants in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The victims are Anglo-Saxon but decidedly plebeian in *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. Dull-witted Jake Meighan is driven to arson when the Syndicate plantation applies modern methods in processing cotton. The Syndicate's superintendent, Sicilian Silva Vicarro, retaliates for the arson by seducing Jake's wife. Thus foreign blood and industrialism win both the long-range victory over the old-fashioned ginning of cotton and the immediate victory over the negligent husband. Williams' script for the film *Baby Doll* acknowledged the movies' Production Code by making the industrial victory more immediate and more certain than the sexual one. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Wingfield and her demoralized family are strikingly contrasted with the new blood in their society. Tom Wingfield works for a man named Mendoza. Amanda watches the moon rise over Garfinkel's Delicatessen, where she owes a substantial bill, and she awaits her dinner guest, the Irish Catholic Jim O'Connor, "the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from the world of reality that we were somehow set apart from." Jim works in the same factory with Amanda's son, but he eagerly subscribes to the dream of success and is preparing to rise in the competitive world that so baffles the Wingfields. Jim is another reminder of the friendly, well-intentioned Lopakhin, remarkably different from Williams' next embodiment of the foreign invader—Stanley Kowalski of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. His aristocratic sister-in-law thinks Kowalski is "sub-human," but his wife knows "Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere." Perhaps the two statements are not contradictory, for Kowalski is as vicious as he is effective in his impact upon the DuBois family. In *Summer and Smoke*, the pallid, decorous Alma Winemiller is eclipsed by the hot-blooded Rosa Gonzales.
A similar contrast occurs in The Rose Tattoo when the “spinsterish” high school teacher Miss Yorke calls on the manic Serafina to lecture her on her mistreatment of her daughter. This oddly matched pair had been anticipated in the one-act play The Dark Room, in which Miss Morgan, a “neat, fussy spinster engaged in social service,” questions Mrs. Pocciotti about her demented daughter. Those with foreign ties obviously have more heat, fury, and energy than their Anglo-Saxon neighbors. The proofs are less prominent in the later plays, but, in Orpheus Descending, Lady Torrance has a passionate nature that suits her Italian extraction, Dr. Cukrowicz brings a note of Polish sanity to the decadent aristocratic household of Suddenly Last Summer, and the sick-minded politician of Sweet Bird of Youth implicitly condones the castration of a Negro. At last, the foreign reference becomes no more than a symbolic reminder, a label that tells us where strength lies in our society.

The use of foreign names and foreign characters is part of Williams’ complex symbolic system. The foreign name means life; the Anglo-Saxon name may mean stagnation. Sometimes a symbol is in danger of becoming a substitute for characterization; however, generalizing about Williams’ use of symbols is hazardous, since Williams makes a bolder and more frequent use of symbols than any other American dramatist. Examining Williams’ novel, Hilton Kramer charges that a symbol has here “come to mean...some improbable character or action, preferably pressed to an extreme of violence, without motivation or credibility, and wholly exterior to whatever thin semblance of plot is holding the work together.” This observation may sometimes apply to the plays also, but more often Williams’ method is in the standard tradition of Ibsen and other moderns, his symbols may be visible and specific (like Nora’s Neapolitan costume in A Doll’s House), unseen but still specific (like the wild duck), or as general in application as the light-dark symbolism of Ghosts (in which we see the gloom of Norway but hear about the light of Paris). The symbol may be important in itself or not; it may be visible or not. It may be conveyed by the lighting or by the time of year. Whatever it is, Williams will probably push it as hard as he can. He needs to provide heavy underlining for the play’s meaning because it is not primarily a social meaning. To a Broadway audience, a play’s theme is its comment on the social or political order; to enforce another sort of meaning requires special effort, and so the symbols help out. Now, Arthur Miller has called Williams a “social” dramatist, and, in a certain sense, he is right, but it is interesting that he has to go out of his way to make this claim. On the other hand, no one needs to tell us that Miller himself or Lillian Hellman or Clifford Odets is a social dramatist. In Williams’ plays, social issues are masked by personal issues; the function of the symbols is to make it plain that issues of some sort are present. Also, the symbol is desirable in itself; it offers us a pictorial variation, a new way of looking at the problem of the play. This independent, decora-
tive use of symbols is very likely indebted to the influence of Garcia Lorca, an influence, which is particularly prominent in an early verse play, *The Purification.*

The principal symbol of Williams' first Broadway play is given prominence by the title, *The Glass Menagerie.* Laura, the shy, crippled daughter of the family, takes refuge in her collection of glass animals, like her prototype in the apparently earlier story "Portrait of a Girl in Glass." The attention she gives her glass animals testifies to her eccentricity; like these creatures, she is herself frail and delicate. She seems particularly identified with a unicorn, which is different like Laura, "extinct in the modern world." When the unicorn breaks its horn, we are told, "Now it is just like all the other horses." This statement seems to be a hint that Laura is overcoming her shyness and becoming like other girls. The action of the play does not support this hint, except by permitting Laura to lose a little of her awkwardness as she chats with Jim, the gentleman caller. Williams did, however, give some support to this interpretation by permitting Laura to greet a new gentleman caller at the end of the film version.

The symbolism of *You Touched Me!* is peripheral, but it bears out the obvious implications of the play's actions. Emmie, a narrow-minded spinster, hates men and tries to shut them out of her life and her niece Matilda's. For all Emmie's efforts, Matilda runs off with an interloper, the charity boy Hadrian. The crises are periodically and appropriately interrupted by the problems of the henyard, where a fox makes frequent forays. To Emmie, Hadrian is as much a hostile outsider as the fox; late in the play, her niece tells Hadrian: "Oh, you're such a fox!" One dark night Emmie fires at the fox and kills the rooster instead, thereby fulfilling one of her unacknowledged goals, "reducing the net amount of masculinity on the place." It is a night of mistakes, for, a moment later, Matilda mistakes the human fox-rooster, Hadrian, for her father. If this symbolism accomplishes anything, it points up Emmie's opposition to masculinity and animality, two qualities which are remarkably durable.

The symbolic accompaniments of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are directly keyed to the action. The streetcar itself plays a minor part; it is merely mentioned, and its distinctive name plainly refers to the salient motivations of the main characters, Blanche, Stella, and Stanley Kowalski. A more significant symbolism is present in Blanche's effort to preserve illusion; she tries desperately to keep her surroundings dark enough so that she will not look her age. One of her first acts is to turn off the "over-light." Later she buys a paper lantern to cover a naked bulb. When Mitch learns about her past, he tears off the lantern and examines her under the glaring light. At the end, when Blanche is being led away to a sanitarium, Kowalski offers one possession—her lantern, the magic that has failed. "She cries out as if the lantern was herself." Further symbolic effects are effected by accompanying music—jazz (highly appropriate to New Orleans) for Kowalski and a suitable old-fashioned
dance tune, the Varsouviana (the song they played when her young husband killed himself) for Blanche. The jazz rises to a crescendo in the scene in which Kowalski rapes Blanche. Also, Blanche has a special song that expresses her effort to create illusions about herself—

It's only a paper moon, Just as phony as it can be—
But it wouldn't be make-believe, If you believed in me!

She sings this song in the bathroom while Kowalski is destroying the illusions she has fostered, telling Stella the scandalous history of Blanche's life in Laurel.

The symbolism of Summer and Smoke is plain enough to need little comment. Alma's name is the Spanish word for soul. She is, as one might expect, too spiritual for her own good. John Buchanan, an exponent of the body, shows Alma on his medical chart that the human form has no place for the soul. He leaves Alma for a girl who is more body than soul, but he seems finally to become aware of the rival claims of body and soul and marries a girl who embodies both elements.

The Rose Tattoo fairly swims in symbols, which are once more attached to proper names. The dead truck driver, Rosario della Rosa, had a rose tattooed on his chest. On the night his wife conceived, she momentarily saw a rose tattoo on her breast; naturally, the child is named Rosa. To coax Rosario's widow back to life, a second truck driver has a tattoo put on his chest—another rose. When the second truck driver, Mangiacavallo, wins his objective, Serafina conceives again—or thinks she does—and sees a second rose on her breast. The rose signifies the flowering of love or, at least, of sexual activity. The sexual symbols come thick and fast in The Rose Tattoo. A goat, traditional embodiment of lust, twice runs wild, like the fox in You Touched Me!; the second time, it is Mangiacavallo who catches him. Both truck drivers carry the same load of phallic symbols—bananas; the late Rosario, a mightier man, carried more, ten tons to Mangiacavallo's eight.

The main pattern of Camino Real is more symbolic than realistic. The principal characters bear names inherited from tradition—Kilroy is the vagrant, virile American, Camille and Casanova are the cynical virtuosos of love whom time now mocks, and Lord Byron and Don Quixote (both played by the same actor) embody irrepressible hope. Bullied by an unidentified Latin American tyranny, depressed by the examples of Camille and Casanova, cheated by the Gypsy and her daughter, Kilroy still has a sufficiently romantic soul to join Don Quixote—the sceptical Sancho Panza has, perhaps significantly, disappeared—and go off on a dangerous journey across the desert. Most of the critics found the symbols of Camino Real to be puzzling, and it won less praise than any other of Williams' Broadway plays. Perhaps the cool reception it encountered induced him to follow it with a play which goes to the other extreme and is almost totally lacking in symbolic effects—Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

Orpheus Descending is built on a network of Christian references. In
its original version, *Battle of Angels*, the play's action ends on Good Friday, a fitting day for the crucifixion of Valentine Xavier, who bears the names of two Christian saints and seems to be identified with Christ. One of the townswomen makes this identification; seized by an erotic passion in Passion Week, she paints Christ in the image of Val Xavier. It is probably significant that the woman older than himself whom Val loves is named Myra—a variant of Mary. Another character has a name out of classical mythology—Cassandra, she explicitly identifies herself with her ancient namesake, prophesies doom, and, as tradition decrees, is ignored. “Her hair hangs loose and she wears a rain-spattered, grass-stained white satin evening gown.” She announces herself: “Behold Cassandra, shouting doom at the gates!” In the course of the play, the season changes from winter to spring, and this transition is accompanied by the stirring of love in Myra and Val. Here and in the title, *Battle of Angels*, we have some reflection of the myth that traditionally underlies the spring ritual—the conflict of darkness and light, winter and spring. Myra builds a bright addition to her “dusky” store—a green orchard that will serve as a “confectionery.” When her husband Jabe comes downstairs at the end of the play, bringing catastrophe to the two lovers, he is “like the very Prince of Darkness.” A spiritual resurrection follows the triumph of darkness and inspires a religion. The relics are preserved in a museum, and, as the curtain falls, the Negro conjure man makes an “obeisance” to Val’s snakeskin jacket (symbol of untamed virility), to the sound of a “religious chant.”

The religious symbolism is somewhat altered in *Orpheus Descending*. Val's name is unchanged, but Myra becomes “Lady.” Since she had been “Myra,” and since the crucifixion references are still prominent, we are encouraged to think of her as “Our Lady.” More is made of Lady's ambitious extension of her husband's store, a green world at the beginning of spring. The light plays effectively upon the sinister Jabe and his nurse when they come downstairs into the bright world that his wife is transforming: “At the same moment scudding clouds expose the sun. A narrow window on the landing admits a brilliant shaft of light upon the pair. They have a bizarre and awful appearance.” The last act is shifted from Good Friday to Holy Saturday, which, in the ancient tradition, commemorates Christ's harrowing of Hell. This old story recalls a similar classical legend of an effort to save a soul from the lower world—the descent of Orpheus, who is often identified with Christ, into Hades to save Eurydice. Val, like Orpheus, is a musician; he carries a guitar, which is close enough to Orpheus' classical lyre. (In *Battle of Angels*, instead of being a musician, Val is a poet.) Like Christ and Orpheus, he goes down to Hell, but, unlike them, he does not save even himself.

Apart from the Orpheus reference, the guitar has a phallic significance as well. When the jealous older men of the town descend on handsome, manly Val with knives drawn, as if to castrate him, what frightens him is
the threat to his guitar. At last, his chief tormentor relents: "I ain't gonna touch y'r guitar." Then he tells him what to do "if you value that instrument in your hands as much as you seem to."

*Sweet Bird of Youth* is also full of the Easter spirit and of symbolic names. Chance Wayne is a young man whose chances are waning. His girl, Heavenly, is still accurately described by her name. Alexandra was, in an early version, named Ariadne, and she is, like the classical Ariadne, a helpful but potentially dangerous guide out of the labyrinth. Chance, Heavenly, Alexandra, and Heavenly's father, Boss Finley, all hope for resurrection; all of the action takes place on the day of resurrection, Easter Sunday. Chance wants to be reborn as a young man of promise; after many disappointments in show business, he puts his hopes in the contract he has signed with Alexandra. His goal is to make off with Heavenly as if the years had not passed, as if they could resume exactly where they were when Chance left home years before. In a Catholic church Easter morning, Heavenly thinks a miracle has been performed: "She had a sensation, she said, like a miracle that had given her back the organs that Scudder had to cut out of her body." Alexandra's hopes to be reborn as a film star are threatened by her apparent failure in her latest picture; at one moment of her martyrdom, she "has assumed the heroically enduring attitude of Joan of Arc at the stake." The most direct identification with Christ is made by the least Christ-like of these characters. Boss Finley. He finds himself betrayed, "crucified, in this way, publicly, by his own offspring." On the platform, he tells how "the Voice of God called" him to his sacred political mission. On Good Friday, he was burned in effigy. But now, "Today is Easter! Today my sacred mission is burning brighter than the straw effigy." His hopes for political resurrection are related to a more private death he has suffered—the loss of his virility, a fact to which his mistress has called attention by scrawling it on the mirror of a powder room. Only one resurrection takes place on Easter Sunday—Alexandra's. Chance loses his girl, his career, and his only talent—the capacity for making love. He will be castrated, and no miracle will restore Heavenly's sexual organs or her father's. Also, some effective political injury seems to be done to the Boss when he is heckled at a public meeting. But Alexandra is a star once more, restored, however briefly, to the skies of Hollywood.

Williams' abundant Christian symbolism is not accompanied by any notable sympathy for religious institutions. He seems to regard Christianity as one of the outworn loyalties of the decaying aristocrats, who tend to be Episcopalians. In almost the same words, the mad ladies of "Portrait of a Madonna" and *Battle of Angels* claim "direct Apostolic succession through St. Paul" and reject the notion that their church was founded by the abominable Henry VIII. Those who endorse religion do not inspire confidence: the pious mother of *The Glass Menagerie* is eccentric, Reverend Winemiller of *Summer and Smoke* has a mad wife, the priest of *The Rose Tattoo* is utterly ineffectual; Reverend Tooker
of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has a bodily not a spiritual message when he interrupts the crucial conversation between Big Daddy and Brick to ask his way to “the gentleman’s lavatory, ha ha!” In this play about mendacity, Tooker is described as “the living embodiment of the pious, conventional lie.” For Williams, religion is a convenient source of symbolism, but it seems to be without real value in the world of his plays.

Williams has made a rather consistent use of symbolic, non-realistic settings. *Battle of Angels*, an early play which did not reach Broadway, has a conventional set with “a dramatic atmosphere,” but the set for its later form, *Orpheus Descending*, is “in nonrealistic fashion.” The set for his first Broadway play, *The Glass Menagerie*, is “nonrealistic”; it required a narrator, visible titles, and a portrait which lit up when necessary. The set of *You Touched Me!* was conventional but with “an atmospheric charm.” Since then, Williams has freely used his sets to support his symbolic intention.

In some of the plays, *Orpheus Descending* in particular, the symbols have a way of overpowering the action, or signifying more than the play itself does. This criticism is related to a fundamental problem in the evaluation of Williams’ plays. Certainly Williams has more technical virtuosity than any other American now writing for the theatre. Admittedly, the action may be arranged in an unconventional fashion; instead of a well-made play, we have a succession of episodes. *The Glass Menagerie*, for instance, has seven scenes but no acts; *A Streetcar Named Desire* has eleven scenes but no acts. Williams selects his episodes so that he can look in upon disconnected moments of the frankest self-revelation, the sorest anguish, the most disturbing violence. This sort of selection keeps the action going and maintains our interest in the most painful moments of the private life. *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are model plays of this kind, dramas that build carefully toward total catastrophe. But Williams seems to be beguiled by his own drama, to believe that his wildest of worlds, which he has industriously sown with ingenious disasters, is life itself. This tendency was already present in *Battle of Angels*, but it did not reach Broadway till *Camino Real*. It was first on Broadway in a readily intelligible play in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a strident preachment against the mendacity which sustains the world. *Orpheus Descending* continued this pattern, condemning a whole sex-hungry community, and it exposed two other matters that weakened Williams’ playwriting: the idealization of Adonis and the incredible cruelty of his disaster. Kowalski is an ambiguous Adonis in *Streetcar*; he is muscular, enterprising, and triumphant, but he is also vicious; the Adonis of *The Rose Tattoo* has certain comic weaknesses. Both are accompanied by Gargoyles who have a little individuality. But the Adonis of *Orpheus Descending* is a demi-god, and not only by virtue of being identified with Orpheus; he is compact of all virtues. His Gargoyle is relatively indistinct. Such characters are in-
sufficient to carry the weight of the play; throwing Adonis to the dogs and the blowtorches heightens only his anguish, not his importance. Williams continues his desperate measures in Suddenly Last Summer, in which a character claims universal significance for an instance of cannibalism: “I know it’s a hideous story but it’s a true story of our time and the world we live in.” Sweet Bird of Youth similarly overextends Williams’ mad universe by creating four characters who have bitter sexual complaints—increasingly the only complaints that are possible in the world of these plays. Individually, the characterizations work out, but, collectively, together with the play’s symbolic machinery and its heavy political portentousness, they constitute an overdone portrait of a monstrous world. Adonis and the Gargoyle are curiously out of balance here. The Gargoyle is a good example of those fading women that Williams has often done but almost always does very well. Adonis is, in himself, not much; his adventures are a good deal more interesting than he is. Unfortunately, Adonis dominates the main plot. In The Enemy: Time, the one-act play on which Sweet Bird of Youth is based (published in The Theatre, March 1959), the Gargoyle is barely present. The prominence she gets in the full-length play is all to the good. She is a vivid, distinctive person, and she therefore contributes less directly than the other martyrs to the heavy emphasis on the inevitably and universality of the play’s strange world. Curiously, Williams first came to Broadway with a dream play, “a memory play,” explicitly labelled as such; he has been continuing with nightmare plays which he represents as the most typical reality.

In his introduction to Carson McCullers’ Reflections in a Golden Eye, Williams justifies the practice of the “Gothic School” (which presumably includes Mrs. McCullers, Truman Capote, and Williams himself) by citing the distinguished example of William Faulkner and the greater, if less melodramatic, horror of life itself. When he mentions Faulkner, Williams associates the Gothic writers with their Southern environment: “There is something in the region, something in the blood and culture, of the Southern state that has somehow made them the center of this Gothic school of writers.” To identify Gothicism with the South is to recall a more distant literary ancestor, Edgar Allen Poe, who, in the grinning skull of “The Masque of the Red Death,” anticipated Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” and, in the cannibalism of “The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,” looked forward to Williams’ Suddenly Last Summer. But literary traditions and the possible reality of Southern horrors can only partially explain the Gothic School. Williams carries his justification a step further when he notes the violence and grotesquerie of the contemporary world. Mrs. McCullers’ art intensifies these qualities: “The awfulness has to be compressed.” Such a purpose may be detected in the public statements of Williams’ later plays, but its fulfilment is questionable. In compressing the world’s violence into the story of Val
Xavier or Chance Wayne, Williams has not made it universal; he has only made it individual, and an individual, incredible, nightmarish horror story as well.

Another explanation may be added for the Gothic elements in Williams' plays. Taboos are rapidly disappearing among us, and Williams has been in the vanguard of those dramatists who have moved into previously forbidden areas. His treatment of homosexuality, for example, is much franker than any references by the earlier "serious" dramatists (like Lillian Hellman in *The Children's Hour* and the British Mordaunt Shairp in *The Green Bay Tree*). If no one had written plays on cannibalism and castration, it is likely that no one had expected to find receptive audiences for these subjects. As Williams takes Broadway beyond one tacit taboo after another, Hollywood follows in his wake, purchasing each of his shockers in turn and filming it as frankly as the watered-down Production Code will permit. Williams now seems to be in a sort of race with himself, surpassing homosexuality with cannibalism and cannibalism with castration, devising new and greater shocks in each succeeding play. It is as if he is trying to see how far he can push the Gothic mode of playwriting. But if his plays offer shocks for their own sake, they are ever further divorced from the profound reality which Williams pretends to disclose. They are still the monstrosities of the nightmare, embellished by the playful ingenuity of a Gothic temperament.

NOTE

1 Robert Brustein has suggested that punishment is more significant than innocence in Williams' plays; he draws from them the conclusion that "deviant sex, in William's view, brings on terrible punishments." (*Encounter*, June 1959). Certainly weight must be given to the disasters which overtake the heroes of *Orpheus* and *Sweet Bird*, but corresponding disasters are modified in *Cat* and avoided in *The Rose Tattoo*. If their fantastic qualities lend importance to some of the disasters, the same may be said for Williams' fantasy of innocence. One dream tends to cancel the other, and that leaves us with Williams' conscious intention—to exonerate "deviant sex."

Stanley Edgar Hyman (*Hudson Review*, Autumn 1958, and more recently in *College English*, October, 1958) has discovered an "Albertine strategy"—the substitution of women for men—in much of Williams' writing. This reading has led him to find a celebration of "a homosexual love selfless and purged." "Purging" is a useful term; I think it comes closer to what Williams has in mind than does the notion of deserved punishment.