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All That we Have to Cling To" : Mothers and Motherhood in the Plays of Tennessee Williams

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**“All that we have to cling to”: Mothers and
Motherhood in the Plays of Tennessee Williams**

**Submitted by: Trina Di Crescenzo
in part completion of,
Bachelor of Arts (Drama Studies) Hons.**

**Submitted at:
Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University,
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on July 15th 2005**

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the characterisation of motherhood within the plays of American playwright, Tennessee Williams. A central part to my argument is that these mothers are abandoned and left alone because of their own personal complexities.

After investigating the life of Edwina Dakin Williams and the influence that she had on her son's life and work, I will proceed to examine the nature of the mother in the following plays:

- *The Glass Menagerie*
- *The Rose Tattoo*
- *Battle of Angels*
- *Orpheus Descending*
- *Suddenly Last Summer*

All of the plays are "major" works of the writer, with the exception of *Battle of Angels* which was produced before Williams was an established playwright.

In particular, I will explore the "clinging" characteristic that is common in all the mothers discussed in this thesis. I will examine how the mother "clings" to her children and loved ones as a means of affirming her past life, and denying her difficult present life. Whether clinging to their children for means of affirming love, of feeling less alone, or wanting vengeance, these women all reveal a negative manifestation of the Williams mother.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without my knowledge any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature:

Date: July 15th 2005

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Last of all I am indebted to the “mothers” in my life: to my mother Ornella, nonna Angiolina and nonna Rosina, whose lives and spirit inspired me to explore the world of the marvellous Williams mother.

Questo tesi e dedicato alla memoria di Angiolina Grandile.

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Introduction

In a *New York Times* interview conducted by Robert Berkvist, Tennessee Williams commented on the influence his mother had on his work:

I must say, she contributed a lot to my writing – her forms of expression, for example. And that underlying hysteria gave her great eloquence. I still find her totally mystifying – and frightening. It's best we stay away from our mothers (cited Leverich, 1995, p. 9).

Born in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1911, Tennessee Williams endured a close yet strenuous relationship with his mother, Edwina Dakin Williams. Perhaps detrimental to his relationship with his father, this relationship fuelled much of his art throughout his career. Williams himself has said,

you can't manufacture unreal people... You have to transmute their reality through your concept of them. They become sifted through myself so that something of my own life went into their creation (cited Kakutani, 1983).

For this reason, Williams was unable to “stay away” from his mother, at least not in his writing, as a version of Edwina Williams can be found in much of his work.

From Williams' early literary days of writing short stories in the 1930's and 40's, a particular mother figure has been ever present. His short stories, such as the biographical *The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin*, have often presented an overbearing mother figure – a woman concerned only with the frivolity of her own past and with the future of her children. Like Edwina Williams, these women experience great difficulty in allowing and accepting their children's autonomy and their own present lives.

In *The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin*, Williams shows a mother's adversity at witnessing the growth of her daughter; “Upstairs my mother began to sing to herself which was something she only did when my father had just left on a long trip with his samples and would not be likely to return for quite a while” (Williams, 1960, p.184). In *Angel in the Alcove*, Williams has presented his reader with two mother-like figures; the overbearing landlady who views her tenants with “paranoid suspicion”, and the spirit of the maternal grandmother, whose comforting presence soothes the restless protagonist: “[she] seated herself on the bench between the window and began that patient watching which put me to sleep” (Williams, 1960, p. 172, 175).

In his *The Faces of Eve: a Study of Tennessee Williams' Heroines*, Gulshan Rai Kataria studies the different types of women found in Williams' plays. Using a Jungian, symbolic approach to the feminine, Kataria outlines the different forms of the feminine psyche that appear in Williams' female characters. One of the groups outlined is that of the *Mother*; described as being

primarily maternal in orientation... In its positive manifestation, the archetype induces in a woman maternal cherishing and concern for those things which are yet undeveloped. In her negative orientation she fixates by continuing to nurse and protect when it is no longer required. Her mothering continues unabated and results in infectious anxiety when it is denied to her (1992, p. 26).

The mother in Williams' plays can therefore be a woman who incessantly clings to both her children and husband/lover, or to the idea of the maternal, of becoming a mother. Amanda Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie*, one of Williams' most famous characters, says to her son Tom, "In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is – each other" (Sc. 4, p. 258). Possibly, this doctrine of Amanda's has been taken up by the other mothers in Williams' repertoire, noting that most of these women will take on the "negative" stance described by Kataria.

This incessant clinging of the mother occurs for many different reasons. When the plays in this study begin, the family unit demonstrated is no longer a whole unit; usually the father figure, or any significant paternal figure, is not present. Tom Scanlan believes this portrayal of the family by Williams to be a reaction "to the failed family dream", as Williams dramatises "the family world in a state of collapse" (1978, p. 156, 166). It will become apparent in this thesis that, of all the five mothers discussed, each has been abandoned by their significant other, or love-of-their-life. This abandonment and destruction of the family unit, be it through death, infidelity or escapism, is a tragic event in the mind of the mother and fuels her need to cling to her children. If the abandonment stemmed from malice, according to Esther Merle Jackson, the Williams mother then uses her children or her body, that which conceives a child, as a tool for vengeance against the paternal figure (1966, p. 147).

A major theme seen in Williams' work is a denial of the harsh present and an indulgence in the past. The past lives of the women discussed in this thesis are important in shaping their present lives. Through a desire for their past, these women have created, in their minds, idealised memories. Roger Boxill remarks on this theme;

Tennessee Williams is an elegiac writer, a poet of nostalgia who laments the loss of a past idealised in the memory... he draws on the myth of the Old South... he makes his version of it a feminine dream (1987, p. 1-2).

Children are often used, then, in helping these women relive their past lives and in denying the present and being protected from it. In looking at the character of Amanda Wingfield, C.W.E. Bigsby comments that "denial of reality is a necessary condition of life to Amanda [Wingfield] and so many other Williams characters" (1984, p. 42).

Williams' mother, Edwina, admits somewhat to denying the harshness of reality. In her autobiography, *Remember Me to Tom*, she justifies her need to deny what was wrong with her present life: "But I believe it would have been far more grim had I not pretended things weren't as bad as they seemed. All of us are actors to the degree we must be to survive" (1963, p. 255). Bigsby's above comment, that denial is a necessity, is reminiscent of Edwina's words. Although Edwina Williams' book was not received well by critics, it was noted, according to Nancy M. Tischler, "that her voice was clearly the voice of Amanda" and many other Williams mothers (1998, p. 649).

Whether these mothers cling to their children for means of vengeance, past affirmation, or to feel less alone in a cruel world, one detail remains ever present – a Williams mother is portrayed in a negative light and does not succeed in being, simply, a good mother. These women create warring families and cause the driving out of their loved ones. They also do not find reconciliation with their children, and the tragedy, according to Daniel Mendelsohn, is in the "playwright's use of female characters to represent... the inevitability of defeat" (2005, p. 23). If a positive manifestation of the mother is created, then due to her psychological nature and environment, she will not be allowed, by Williams, to survive.

Chapter 1

The Glass Menagerie

The Makings of a Menagerie

Francis Donahue believed Williams wrote his short stories with autobiographical episodes in mind and “with personal observations and revelations, which help us to understand the playwright” and his family (1964, p. 179). With his family history in mind, in 1943 Williams wrote *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*; the story of Tom, of his chronically shy sister Laura, and of his “relatively aggressive” mother, named only as Mother (Williams, 1948, p. 97). It is the narrator Tom who refers to his mother as aggressive, and his opinion of this poor and “terribly stringent housekeeper” (Williams, 1948, p. 104) is affirmed when the thought of Laura not being married seems for Mother, simply “awful” (Williams, 1948, p. 103). Although the focus of the story is the plight of poor Laura, it is Mother who sets about finding a Gentleman Caller for her daughter. During a dinner with the eventual Gentleman Caller, a strong characterisation of the mother surfaces - Tom says: “To Mother belonged the conversational honors such as they were” (Williams, 1948, p. 107). Her self-indulgence shows a lack of sincere care for her children, as Tom tells of Laura “trembling more and more beneath the incredible unawareness of Mother” (Williams, 1948, p.108).

On the title page of an original copy of *Portrait of a Girl in Glass* Williams noted, “This is a short-story treatment of the material used in a play I am now working on, called ‘The Gentleman Caller’ ” (cited Leverich, 1995, p. 489). Williams wrote to his friend Donald Windham concerning his progress in writing this play. He describes the autobiographical tone: “I might also call it the “Not so Beautiful People” or “The Human Tragedy” as it is taking on the atmosphere of 53 Arundel Place” (Williams, 1996, p. 59). The play, *The Gentleman Caller*, which was “based upon family history” (Donahue, 1964, p. 17) and his 1942 short story *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*, became Williams’ first commercially successful play, *The Glass Menagerie*.

A Mother’s Influence

Williams’ portrayal of Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* can be seen as reminiscent of his own mother, Edwina Williams. Perhaps the most apparent of Edwina’s characteristics reflected in Amanda are in her physical and vocal

mannerisms; those which reflect a Southern genteel upbringing. Although born in central Ohio, Edwina spent the early years of her life in Tennessee and so “thought of herself as southern, and consummately played the role for the rest of her life” (Leverich, 1995, p. 15-16). As the only child of Reverend Walter Edwin Dakin and Rosina Otte Dakin, Edwina was privy to the finer things in life, and at the age of sixteen she was attending an Episcopal finishing school, Harcourt Place Seminary. Here she was “pretty and popular” and attended “an endless swirl of entertainments at dinners, dances, sports events, and weekend outings”, all chronicled in her diaries (Leverich, 1995, p. 15). Due to Edwina’s father being a minister in the Episcopal church she was given a “respectability that opened doors at the homes of their more prosperous neighbours” (Leverich, 1995, p. 22).

According to Ronald Hayman, Williams saw in Edwina a “façade of genteel refinement” that she erected “like a barricade” against the harsh reality of her present life (1994, p. 52). It is clear that Edwina was “accustomed to gentler ways of life” (Kataria, 1992, p. 3) than those given to her by her husband Cornelius Coffin Williams. In the years between 1918 and 1926 Cornelius moved his family sixteen times. Small apartments in industrial areas, including St. Louis, became the family’s homes. Donahue writes that Williams understood Edwina’s “inability to cope with the world in which she was living” and parallels this trait with Amanda; “she, like Amanda Wingfield, could not adjust to the apartment existence in St. Louis, nor perhaps to life with a husband who spent much of his time on the road and showed comparatively little feeling for her or her children” (1964, p. 213). Perhaps Williams felt his plays were a justification for his mother’s behaviour.

As a child, Williams had a great fondness and admiration for Edwina, however, later his feelings changed. Williams blames Edwina for the lack of relationship had with his father: “if Mother hadn’t held me so fiercely close to her, the situation might not have got so bad” (cited Hayman, 1994, p.28). This holding “so fiercely close” of the son to the mother and lack of father/son relationship, though embellished, is certainly represented through Tom, Williams’ namesake in *The Glass Menagerie*.

When *The Glass Menagerie* went into production, veteran actress Laurette Taylor was persuaded to play the part of Amanda Wingfield. According to Williams, in all her amazing but worrying self directing and improvisation “she never disturbed the central characterization” (cited Spoto, 1997, p.111). So well must Taylor have known the origins of Amanda Wingfield that after the Chicago opening, when introduced to

the character's inspiration, she asked, "Well, Mrs Williams, how did you like yourself?" (Williams, 1975, p.85). Lucy Freeman, who worked closely with Edwina Williams on her autobiography, recognised the woman and her characteristics in *The Glass Menagerie*: to Donald Spoto, she said, "She simply *was* Amanda" and "Edwina infantilised everyone... She was ever the dominant Southern Belle" (Spoto, 1997, p. 250, 346).

A Particular Southern Belle

Amanda Wingfield lives with her two children in a dull apartment in lower-middle-class St. Louis. Abandoned by her travelling salesman husband and unable to live the comfortable gay life of her youth, she bestows all her attention and care on her son Tom and daughter Laura. And so through Amanda, *The Glass Menagerie* became the first of Williams' major dramatic works to explore the characterisation of motherhood.

Williams, being a playwright who carefully articulates his characters' traits in production notes, writes of Amanda:

A little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place... She is not paranoiac, but her life is paranoia... and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is a tenderness in her slight person (character notes, p. 228).

She is a woman who lives with a contradictory persona; tenderness can be seen in her over-solicitous care for her children, yet this tenderness is often juxtaposed with cruelty as she clings to her children for her own benefit. One sees that Amanda is worried for the physically and socially crippled Laura, whom she considers to be unfit for marriage. She desperately wishes for her daughter to be taken care of – in the opening scene she forbids Laura from clearing the dinner table, "I want you to stay fresh and pretty – for gentleman callers" (Sc. 1, p. 237). Amanda and Laura, if only subconsciously, comprehend that this will not be a part of Laura's reality. Amanda, however, uses this situation as a segue to embellishing her own desire for her lost past. She recalls:

Sometimes they come when they are least expected! Why, I remember one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain... your mother received – *seventeen!* – gentlemen callers! (Sc. 1, p. 237)

Amanda does cling "frantically to another time" (character notes, p. 228) as she constantly uses her children as an audience to her past life. Retelling her past to her children affirms for Amanda that it was once her reality and allows her to escape the

monotonous and passionless life she now leads; “they do without it! not everybody has a craze for adventure” (Sc. 4, p. 260). This characteristic of Amanda, her need to indulge in her past is, as Williams directs, cruel. Amanda’s constant nagging of her daughter is like a private joke to her, yet becomes a harsh reality for Laura,

AMANDA: Not one gentleman caller? It can’t be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!

LAURA: It isn’t a flood, it’s not a tornado, Mother. I’m just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain (Sc. 1, p. 239-40).

Going to the Movies

Stark Young, in his review of the New York opening of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1944, termed the characterisation of Amanda Wingfield as “both appalling and human, cold and loving” (cited Donahue, 1964, p. 21). This statement clearly articulates the actions and involvement of Amanda Wingfield in the lives of her children. As loving and as human as her care for them may seem, in scene three she cruelly dictates what her adult son, Tom, reads:

I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them – BUT I WON’T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! (Sc. 3, p. 250).

Amanda returns a D. H. Lawrence book to the library from where it was borrowed by Tom. She may genuinely be worried that Tom will be influenced by “that insane Mr. Lawrence” (Sc. 3, p. 250) but her over involved care for Tom frustrates him immensely. He is hurt by her actions and appears desperate as he appeals to his mother for some independence, “I’ve got *no thing*, no single thing – In my life here that I can call my OWN!” (Sc. 3, p. 250).

Amanda Wingfield is a mother who takes part in a constant power struggle with her children as she endeavours to manipulate their lives. To an extent, Amanda demonstrates the traits of a mother who “fixes, ensnares, destroys initiative, stunts growth and even dismembers her young ones” (Kataria, 1992, p. 47). Words like “ensnares” and “dismembers” may appear extreme, yet these qualities do come to the fore metaphorically, as Amanda takes part in the fixing of her children in their current repetitive and unstimulating lives.

On occasion Amanda employs guilt and exploits Tom’s devotion to Laura to ensure he stays working at a job he despises in order to provide for the family. She has placed much of the family’s financial responsibility and security on Tom, who has been

led to believe that if he leaves, the two women left behind will not survive. Amanda constantly reminds Tom of this, as demonstrated in the third scene when Tom proceeds to go to the movies after a quarrel with his mother. Amanda remarks "What right have you to jeopardize your job? Jeopardize the security of us all?" (Sc. 3, p. 251). To ensure that her son will continue to provide for the family Amanda begins to manipulate Tom, utilising his devotion to Laura;

AMANDA: You know how Laura is... A few days ago she came in crying.

TOM: What about?

AMANDA: You.

TOM: Me?

AMANDA: She has an idea that you're not happy here (Sc. 4, p.259).

For the present time in the play Amanda succeeds in keeping her clinging hold on Tom. He will stay and provide for his mother and sister, as well as find Laura a gentleman caller.

Until the end of the play, Tom does not display the initiative to leave or alter his mundane existence - Amanda's constant exploitation and manipulation of him has destroyed his drive to succeed or discover a better career. A desire for passion, life, or even Tom's sexual drive is non-existent in the play, showing a metaphorical "dismemberment", as Tom resorts to the anti-social activity of "going to the movies" alone (Sc. 5, p. 272). Amanda has gained, through fierce arguing and emotional manipulation, a power over her adult son.

If You Breathe She'll Break

Amanda also takes part in a power struggle with Laura. Being a dependant, Laura allows her mother to rule her life to a great extent, as she resides only in a world of glass animals and victrola records. As she did with Tom, Amanda uses Laura's weaknesses, her social and emotional disabilities, as a means of "clinging" to her daughter. In scene two it becomes clear that Laura lives somewhat in fear of her mother. The scene opens with Laura polishing her glass collection; upon hearing her mother ascend the fire escape Laura "*catches her breath, thrusts the bowl of ornaments away and seats herself stiffly before the diagram of the typewriter keyboard as though it had her spell-bound*" (Sc. 2, p. 241). The urgency of this direction shows Laura's need to put on a façade that will please her mother. Having quit Rubicam's Business College, Laura leads Amanda to believe that she is still attending. Amanda reveals that

she has discovered this “deception” and here it becomes evident how Amanda keeps her clinging hold on Laura; by being over-dramatic and victimising herself. She “*leans against the shut door and stares at Laura with a martyred look*” as she questions “Deception? Deception?” (Sc. 2, p. 241). Laura, alarmed by Amanda’s performance, endeavours to calm the situation by asking Amanda if she enjoyed her D.A.R. meeting – to which Amanda’s marvellous response is,

I did not have the strength.... In fact I did not have the courage! I wanted to find a hole in the ground and hide myself in it forever! (Sc. 2, p. 242)

The power in the situation now belongs to Amanda.

Amanda’s manipulating to gain power over Laura is different from the aggressive struggle she had with Tom. With Laura, Amanda knows she needs to be more emotionally and psychologically manipulative. Even though Amanda was informed of Laura’s ill reaction to taking a test, she does not give her daughter emotional support or comfort. Instead of concern for Laura’s well-being, it was Amanda who needed to “sit down while they got me a glass of water” (Sc. 2, p. 243). Amanda has clung so intensely to Laura and to the idea that Laura too will become a financial support, that she feels the whole situation was about Laura “deceiving” her. As Amanda holds the power, Laura knows she has to do all to please her mother or else face the power struggle and manipulation. Laura says: “Mother, when you’re disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus’ mother in the museum!” (Sc. 2, p. 245). Laura is trapped by her mother’s emotional manipulation and her initiative has been destroyed; she will simply try to “settle for a moment’s peace and tenderness” (Scanlan, 1978, p. 157).

All That She Has to Cling to

Many reasons can be found as to why Amanda clings so specifically to her children. She lives in a world of sentiment and illusion, with her children allowing her an affirmation of a past life she did not wish to leave; a world of glamorous parties and bright, successful young suitors. In the first scene we hear of that one day in Amanda’s youth when she received “seventeen gentlemen callers” and entertained them quite successfully as she “understood the art of conversation!” (Sc. 1, p. 237). Laura implores Tom: “let her tell it... she loves to tell it” (Sc. 1, p.237). And so Amanda

takes great pleasure in listing for her children all the men that courted her and the success they each eventually had:

There was young Champ Laughlin who later became vice-president of the Delta Planters Bank... And there was that boy every girl in the Delta had set her cap for! That brilliant, brilliant young Fitzhugh boy from Greene County! (Sc. 1, p. 238-39).

Finally Amanda touches on reality: "And I could have been Mrs Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But – I picked your *father*!" (Sc. 1, p. 239). Donahue gives a very valid reason as to why Amanda clings so furiously to her to past; "if she accepted the alley apartment in St. Louis at its real value, with its drabness and absence of hope, she would perish" (1964, p. 23). Constantly Amanda uses Tom and Laura as tools for her continued living in the past and denial of the present.

Abandoned by her husband, Amanda clings to her children as a reminder of the marriage she did have, a life in which she was not alone. Her children are the product of the marriage to the man whose picture looms over their lives:

A blown-up photograph of the father hangs on the wall of the living room... He is gallantly smiling, ineluctably smiling, as if to say 'I will be smiling forever!' (Sc.1, p.234).

On occasion Amanda alludes to her husband's presence, as in scene four when she confronts Tom about his drinking: "There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you! I've never told you but I – *loved* your father" (Sc. 4, p. 259).

The family situation presented in this play indicates that Amanda has been left alone and shows that she was not needed by her husband. Dictating what Tom is allowed to read or throwing herself into giving Laura and the apartment a make-over for the Gentleman Caller, allows her to feel needed; "as she cares for [her children] we realise how much Amanda herself needs to be cared for" (Scanlan, 1978, p. 168). Her children however, feel uncomfortable with this. Tom, in his opening monologue for scene three tells us how Amanda's 'mothering' affects his life and that of Laura's.

... the idea of getting a gentleman caller for Laura began to play a more and more important part in Mother's calculations. It became an obsession... the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment... hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields! (Sc. 3, p.248).

Such mother figures as Amanda Wingfield have a tendency to turn their mothering into "smothering" (Kataria, 1992, p. 33), giving their children and husband a lack of independence. When Amanda, in scene four, is confronted by Tom she

becomes upset that she perhaps cares for her children entirely too much: "My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children" (Sc. 4, p. 257). She martyrs herself in her care for her children and so becomes overindulgent, reiterating her mothering is for her own benefit. Amanda is possessive and has shown that she is "neurotically attached to her family and its welfare because she feels it will go to pieces without her indulgent care and attention" (Kataria, 1992, p. 33). It becomes apparent throughout the play that Amanda's family is going to pieces because of this over indulgent care. After an argument with Tom in scene three, Laura's only spiritual and independent possession, her glass menagerie, is destroyed. Perhaps it is expecting too much of Amanda's character, but she does not flinch when Laura's 'life' goes to pieces. Williams' directions reveal that it is the children themselves who hold the family together, not the mother:

But Amanda is still stunned and stupefied by the 'ugly witch' so that she barely notices the occurrence... She crosses through the portieres and draws them together behind her. Tom is left with Laura... Drops awkwardly to his knees to collect the fallen glass (Sc. 3, p. 253).

In this scene the mother does not stay to help pick up the pieces of her physically and emotionally broken daughter. However, when the play ends it is Tom who abandons his mother and sister, and the notion is created of Amanda continuing to cling to Laura in the same way, if not more so, as she always has; there is no positive resolution to this play, no reconciliation between mother and son, and no emancipation for the daughter.

Chapter 2

The Rose Tattoo

In a letter to Donald Windham dated February 2, 1950, Williams discussed the progress of a play he was writing which was on the subject of “a Sicilian-American widow with terrific emotions! Decidedly not neurotic unless being passionate is” (Williams, 1996, p. 254). He also disclosed his plans to travel to Sicily where he would learn the dialect and procure the talents of Anna Magnani, whom Williams thought of as the ideal actress to play this Sicilian-American widow. The widow became Serafina delle Rose in *The Rose Tattoo*, who loses her husband in a truck driving accident. Living with her daughter Rosa, Serafina succumbs to her grief until finally she is re-awakened with sexual desire and life. It is however her mothering function that comes to the fore as her self-indulgent grieving jeopardises the relationship with her daughter.

Miss Edwina’s Monolithic Puritanism

Unlike *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams did not base *The Rose Tattoo* directly on his family history. However, the characters of Serafina delle Rose and her daughter Rosa, and the relationship they share, do reflect that of Edwina Williams and her daughter Rose Isabelle Williams. A clear parallel between these two sets of women is seen in the controlling nature of mother over daughter, to which Tennessee Williams was often exposed. In his *Memoirs*, he recalls his mother’s objection to his relationship with his “first love” Hazel Kramer, “nor for that matter had Miss Edwina ever seemed to want me to have any friends” (1975, p. 15). More significant to Williams, however, was how his mother would dictate his sister’s relationships, and this he would empathise with and write about:

This also applied, I’m afraid, to Miss Edwina’s attitude toward my sister’s friendships and little romances. And in Rose’s case, they applied with more tragic consequences (Williams, 1975, p. 15).

Lyle Leverich gives a clear account of the Edwina/Rose relationship in his *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*. The dictatorial power of Edwina over Rose became prominent when Rose reached her adolescent years – a similar age to Rosa in *The Rose Tattoo*. In September of 1925, Edwina sent Rose away to an Episcopal school for girls in Vicksburg, Mississippi, hoping that the school like the “ones she herself had attended could straighten Rose out” (Leverich, 1995, p. 68). Rose was simply

emulating her modern friends of the 1920's, acting like a typical teenager and being punished for it;

raising hemlines above the knees, making up with lipstick and mascara, bobbing their hair, smoking in one another's company, dancing foxtrots, and necking with their boyfriends. It was "flaming youth"... and Edwina would have none of it (Leverich, 1995, p.68).

In 1926 Rose wrote home to Williams. On the back of the letter she drew a picture of a red-haired, 1920's flapper which she captioned "Hazel E. Krammer" [*sic*], showing the woman she admired and what she hoped to be. Notably it was the exact girl that Edwina had rejected in her son's life (Leverich, 1995, p. 78). Leverich makes it clear that Edwina was afraid of letting Rose grow up, when all that the girl wanted was "peer recognition and to be accepted among her friends" (1995, p.60).

Part of Edwina's hold over her children, especially Rose, was that of not educating them in matters of a sexual nature, thus instilling in them a fear of sex. In a 1987 letter written to Lyle Leverich, the youngest Williams sibling Walter Dakin Williams wrote "Mother was president of the anti-sex league" (Leverich, 1995, p. 61). As a result,

Tom would be twenty-seven before he had his first sexual experience; Dakin would be inexperienced until his marriage, when he was in his late thirties; and Rose would remain a virgin all her life (Leverich, 1995, p. 61).

As Rose developed through adolescence her behaviour became worrying to Edwina and as it was, Williams remembered the family doctor pointing out that Rose was "a very normal – but highly sexed – girl" (Williams, 1975, p. 119). Williams believed that his sister was a "girl who was tearing herself apart mentally and physically by those repressions imposed upon her by Miss Edwina's monolithic Puritanism" (Williams, 1975, p. 119).

The Overbearing Edwina

In April of 1943, Williams reported to Donald Windham that his father accused his mother of hiding his poker chips in the attic (Williams, 1996, p. 58). Another letter dated January 4, 1944, ends with a report that Edwina has just told him to go to bed, "Mother says late hours will wreck my health" (Williams, 1996, p.126). Similarly in April of 1944 when a friend had rung the house, "He has called me long-distance collect a couple of times, with Mother scuttling downstairs to grab up the downstairs

phone so she could listen in on the conversation” (Williams, 1996, p.188). It is clear from Williams’ letters that the Williams children were not allowed privacy or independence.

Also revealed in Williams’ letters to Windham are the strong religious foundations of Edwina. In a letter dated August 4, 1943, when Dakin was made Second Lieutenant in the air force Williams wrote, “Mother is full of sorrow and religion – poor old girl” and in another dated November 3, 1944, upon Dakin’s conversion to Roman Catholicism, “Mother is praying over it” (Williams, 1996, p.102, 153). With her own father being a minister, Edwina had a strong religious upbringing in the Episcopal church and as such the same upbringing was imposed on Williams:

[it] instilled in him a love of God in heaven and a dread of Judgement. Edwina, reared under the same religious influences, added her own authority as the boy’s mother, admonishing him when he misbehaved, “God will punish you” (Leverich, 1995, p. 37).

So with his god-fearing mother and puritanical upbringing, Williams found another aspect of the “mother” that would surface in his play *The Rose Tattoo*, as well as in others.

It was, however, in the Italian people, especially in his relationships with Sicilian lover Frank Merlo and Italian actress Anna Magnani, where Williams felt he could find a character to successfully express the “clinging mother” characteristics he had seen in Edwina. In June of 1950 Williams and Merlo travelled to Europe where they spent time with Magnani whom “they at once adored, and she relished the adoration and returned it with a raucous affection that was both sisterly and maternal” (Spoto, 1997, p.165). Williams wrote in his memoirs of choosing Magnani for the part of Serafina and her similarity to Edwina, “I guess you could say that Anna was also a Southern Lady, although a Southern Italian Lady” (1975, p. 61). Magnani however, would not appear in the Broadway production due to her lack of proficiency in English and only later agreed to appear in the 1955 film version.

The Wife of a Baron

Serafina delle Rose, being a culmination of the strict Edwina Williams and the passionate Anna Magnani, is first seen dressed immaculately, “*like a plump little Italian opera singer in the role of Madame Butterfly*” (Act 1, Sc. 1, p. 19), awaiting her husband’s return. The relationship she has with her husband is revealed as she speaks to

Assunta, the local *fattuchiere*, or medicine woman. She is obviously satisfied sexually by him as she refuses a powder from Assunta that helps men in the bedroom. This sexual satisfaction turns into obsession when she is able to differentiate between the sound of her husband's truck and others:

ROSA: [*joyfully*] Papa's truck!

SERAFINA: [*to Assunta*] That wasn't him. It wasn't no 10 ton truck. It didn't rattle the shutters! (Act 1, Sc. 2, p. 21)

Waiting for her husband to return from work appears to be something she has done every day for a long time, showing a mother-like care for her husband. Serafina is seen to infantilise Rosario by "waiting up" for him, and also by using him simply as a means of support for her growing family and for her maternal nature. Serafina gloats to Assunta: "I uncovered my breast! – On it I saw the rose tattoo of my husband!... And when I saw it I knew I had conceived" (Act 1, Sc. 1, p. 22), and then when telling Assunta that Rosario is buying his own truck, "We live with dignity in America, then! Own truck! Own house! And in the house will be everything electric!" (Act 1, Sc. 1, p. 23). Rosario, although sexually satisfying for Serafina, was simply used by her for procreation and financial support.

According to Louise Blackwell in her article, *Tennessee Williams and the Predicament of Women*, Williams' most down-to-earth plays are about the "suffering of a woman who has known and lost a mate who gave her complete sexual happiness" (1970, p. 14). Rosario did give Serafina this happiness which resulted in her bearing his child; her happiness was complete because she could fulfil her mothering role. There are, however, consequences to this clinging of Serafina to her husband. Without spiritual satisfaction or depth of relationship, the husband is often forced to find it elsewhere, such as "in male company, in the arms of a mistress, in virile devotion to political ideas, or else exaggerated attachment to his profession" (Kataria, 1992, p. 33). It was in the arms of his lover, Estelle Hohengarten, that Rosario found his satisfaction and refuge from the over-bearing and demanding Serafina; just as Amanda Wingfield's husband found refuge in 'long distances', and Edwina Williams' husband found refuge in "a poker night with the boys in a downtown hotel, where he could indulge in some hard drinking and an occasional dalliance with a lady of the evening" (Leverich, 1995, p. 53).

Ho Solo Te – In Questo Mondo (I have only you - in this world)

Succumbing to her grief after Rosario's death and her miscarriage, Serafina's clinging nature manifests itself in her relationship with her daughter Rosa. Act one, scene four opens on "*a June day, three years later*" and it is learned from the gossiping Sicilian mothers that Serafina has locked Rosa's clothes away because she had met a boy;

he's a sailor... She met him at the high school dance and somebody tell Serafina. That's why she lock up the girls clothes so she can't leave the house (Act 1, Sc. 4, p. 32, 33).

Such behaviour is reminiscent of Edwina sending the "boy-crazy" Rose away to a boarding school.

For Rosa, seeing her mother's self-indulgent grieving, not dressing appropriately, worshipping a shrine of her husband's ashes and expecting Rosa to do the same, has made her ashamed of her own mother;

For three years she sits at the sewing machine and never puts a dress on or goes out of the house, and now she has locked my clothes up so I can't go out. She wants me to be like her, a freak of the neighbourhood, the way she is! (Act 1, Sc. 4, p. 35 – 6).

Later in act one, when Rosa brings home her sailor boyfriend, Jack Hunter, Serafina makes him swear on the Statue of Madonna to respect her daughter's virginal innocence: "I promise the Holy Mother that I will respect the innocence of the daughter of..." (Act 1, Sc. 6, p. 58). It is clear that Serafina wishes Rosa to have the same innocence that she believes she had in her marriage to Rosario,

I'm just satisfied to remember the love of a man that was mine – only mine! Never touched by the hand *to nobody*! (Act 1, Sc. 5, p. 45)

Forcing Jack to swear an oath allows Serafina to now have that clinging hold she had on her husband, on Rosa. Hayman notes, "after Rosario's death she makes him into a legend, and lives with it chastely, simultaneously imposing chastity on her nubile daughter" (1994, p. 135). With this she coddles her daughter, and hampers her individual and sexual growth.

My Husband's Body With the Head of a Clown

After the incident with Jack and Rosa, and learning that her husband was unfaithful during their marriage, Serafina seems to have lost her clinging hold on her husband's memory and her daughter's innocence. As a result her "mothering" must be applied to someone else and that someone becomes Alvaro Mangiacavollo. When she first meets him, her "mothering" manifests in a physical nature; she hands him a scrap of white

voile for him to clean his nose and sews his torn jacket. What proceeds is a very normal and human conversation, and it is the most composed Serafina has been since the beginning of the play. However as the conversation progresses Serafina realises how like her husband Alvaro is and proceeds to cling to Alvaro in the same way she did Rosario, "*Non posso crederlo! – A clown of a face like that with my husband's body!*" (Act 2, Sc. 1, p. 75).

As this scene progresses Williams' stage directions show that Serafina is beginning to realise Alvaro's worth; that he is someone she can cling to, "*like the meeting of two lonely children for the first time*" (Act 2, Sc. 1, p. 77). As with Serafina's relationship with Rosario, she has an ulterior need for the man; Alvaro is not only an emotional opportunity for passion and love, he is "one for making a warm containing shelter where, as in a sparrow's nest, a family is raised" (Kataria, 1992, p. 32). According to Toni Wolff, a close collaborator of C. G. Jung, the mother finds satisfaction and fulfilment in the maternal; her body is "a vessel wherein she encloses her man, fertilises his seed, produces and nurtures his children" (Kataria, 1992, p. 32). From this point in the play and till its end, Serafina clings to Alvaro so that she can conceive another life in her body and feel alive and complete. At the end of act three, with the memory of her husband tainted and her daughter having gained independence from her, Serafina is given something to live for, something to compel her maternal clinging. She reveals to Assunta:

Just now I felt on my breast the burning again of the rose. I know what it means. It means that I have conceived!... Two lives again in the body! Two, two lives again, two! (Act 3, Sc. 3, p. 113)

This shows that Serafina does not necessarily "mother" Alvaro but uses him to help carry out her maternal functioning.

The Rose and the Madonna

To reinforce Serafina's clinging nature as a mother, Williams has filled the play with much symbolism. When first writing the play, Williams used a number of working titles, including *Novena to a Rose*, *A Candle to a Rose*, *A Rose for Our Lady*, *A Rose from the hand of Our Lady*. According to Spoto "there was not so much a religious obsession gripping him that season as there was a cultural interest in Sicily and a growing concern for Rose" (1997, p. 161). The rose is the most prominent symbol in *The Rose Tattoo*. Generally the rose is a symbol for love and passion; also, according to

Phillip C. Kolin, the rose in folk lore is associated with sexual powers and “by eating a rose, according to one popular superstition, a woman could conceive” (cited Kataria, 1992, p. 35). Filled with such archetypal connotations, the rose symbolises Serafina’s need for love and passion, her need to conceive and have life in her body once again, as well as her need to use her maternal instincts and mothering function. The set is filled with the symbol of the rose; “rose-patterned wallpaper and a rose coloured carpet... the projection of a woman’s heart passionately in love” (production notes, p. 17) and the play opens with Serafina dressed in a “rose silk” with a rose pinned in her hair and holding “a yellow paper fan on which is painted a rose” (Act 1, Sc. 1, p. 20). Serafina clings rather violently to this symbol as it becomes the burning sign of her conceiving.

These symbols of the rose are also shown in the names of Serafina’s family, with her daughter named Rosa. Similarly she married a man named Rosario with the surname delle Rose. In a literal translation the former means “rosary” and the latter “of the rose”. Her husband’s name, therefore, discloses another group of symbols, that of the religious; the Rosary is a devotion to the Virgin Mary. In the physical setting of the play we see a shrine erected by Serafina,

consisting of a prie-dieu and a little statue of the Madonna in a starry blue robe and gold crown. Before this burns always a vigil light in its ruby glass cup (production notes, p. 17).

Throughout the play, Serafina, who believes wholly in signs, prays at this shrine and to the Madonna: “Oh, Lady, give me a – *sign!*... Che? Che dice, Signora?” (Act 1, Sc. 5, p. 48), and often exclaims her name at points of high tension, “Madonna! Madonna mia...” (Act 1, Sc. 4, p. 34). Serafina clings to the Virgin Mary as a symbol of the innocence of both her husband’s name and her daughter. According to Joan Wylie Hall this “plaster statue is the most direct expression of the Virgin Mary imagery that Williams attaches to the eager childbearers in his plays” (1995, p. 677). Child bearing in a Williams play often embodies the religious as these “desperate Madonna’s whose urge to bear attains such religious intensity that Williams portrays them through imagery of the Mother of Christ” (Hall, 1995, p. 677).

Serafina is a mother filled with passionate love for the memory of her deceased husband and the innocence of her daughter; being a mother gives her a reason to love and one may go as far as to say it gives her a reason to live. When this love is jeopardised or is no longer reciprocated, she finds other ways to utilize her mothering function. Her mothering, however, is “the cardinal function of her very existence”

(Kataria, 1992, p. 35) and it is perceived that this alone constructs the character of Serafina delle Rose.

Chapter 3

Battle of Angels and Orpheus Descending

Battle of Angels

Williams' first professionally produced play, *Battle of Angels*, produced by the Theatre Guild in 1940, contains the least amount of familial influence and is void of Edwina Williams' characteristics that have featured in his works discussed thus far. The play was written as a reflection of Williams' beliefs and how he felt as a young artist. The following entry appeared in his journal in 1939:

My next play will be simple, direct and terrible – a picture of my own heart... It will be myself without concealment or evasion and with a fearless unashamed frontal assault upon life... a passionate denial of *sham* and a cry for beauty (cited, Leverich, 1995, p. 301).

Allean Hale believes Williams' plays to have often "evolved from an image spelled out in early life" (1997, p. 21). The working titles used by Williams whilst writing *Battle of Angels* express specific images: *The Memory of an Orchard*, *The Snakeskin Jacket* and *Something Wild in the Country*. The title *The Memory of an Orchard* and the subject of Myra Torrance comes from a woman Williams was introduced to in his childhood, Mrs. Maggie Wingfield. Often spoken of as a sad woman, she lived in a home surrounded by blooming trees (Hale, 1997, p. 21), and as former neighbour Alida Clark Heidelberg recalled, she had "a collection of glass animals in her front window... everyone would remark that they were just absolutely gorgeous!" (cited Leverich, 1995, p. 55). Here, images are expressed of new and growing life, of an orchard and of celebratory glass ornaments, which Williams turned into the character and life of Myra Torrance. With *Battle of Angels* being written in 1940, Mrs Wingfield was first the inspiration for Myra; desperately wanting children, and once finally conceiving, Myra decorates herself in glass Christmas ornaments. Certainly after this play, Mrs Wingfield also became an inspiration for Laura Wingfield and her glass menagerie.

In *Battle of Angels* Myra Torrance's mothering function has not manifested physically in a relationship between mother and child; it is seen only in her longing to conceive a child and in her "mothering" of others. Myra is introduced in the prologue, as the chorus-like characters of Eva and Blanch Temple have turned Myra's plight and the Torrance Mercantile Store into a Tragic Museum; "nothing has been took out that had a connection" (prologue, p. 6). An artefact shown to a tourist group is the dress that

Myra wore the night of her death. It is the colour of the dress that Eva and Blanch emphasise,

EVA: Beulah said to her, "What do they call that colour?"

BLANCH: She smiled an' she said, "They call it ecstasy blue!"
(prologue, p. 7)

The "ecstasy blue" sets the maternal theme for the play. The colour blue is often used by Williams to suggest Mary, the holy mother, and in the context of the play this symbol reinforces Myra's longing to be a mother. "Ecstasy" suggests that she will, at some stage in the play be happy, even if only for a brief moment. Myra, with her desire to become a mother, is therefore "important in the Williams canon, and in American theatre, as his first of many woman characters who are allowed their eroticism" (Hale, 1997, p.22).

Rejected in her youth by the love-of-her-life, David Anderson, and at present married to the sick and dying Jabe, Myra longs only for life. Her emotional hardship and longing are described by Williams in his stage directions,

She is a woman who met emotional disaster in her girlhood and whose personality bears traces of resulting trauma... But when in repose a girlish softness emerges – evidence of her capacity for great tenderness (Act 1, p. 20).

Myra's maternal tenderness is often contrasted throughout the play with the insensitive Dolly Bland. Pregnant with her seventh child, Dolly remarks on not being able to fit into a one piece dress "for the usual reason", then continues to speak about this injustice of nature, with the sad Myra "*averting her face*":

I mean the way she ties some women down while others can run hog wild. Look at Myra, for instance. Not one kid an' me turning out the seventh (Act 2, p. 40).

With the delayed arrival of her maternity apparel, Dolly jokes, "I guess I'll have to hang a sign, 'Excuse me, people'". At this comment Myra "*turns away in distaste*" (Act 3, p. 84).

Myra Torrance, as a "potential" Williams mother, shows a positive "maternal cherishing and concern for those things which are yet undeveloped" (Kataria, 1992, p. 26). This is clearly shown in her concern and care for the characters in the play that the majority of the town perceive as "undeveloped". She speaks very kindly to the black characters, offering them jobs and giving their children bags of peanuts and lollies (Act 1, p. 82-83). Where Dolly only boasts physical motherhood, Myra acts maternally

instinctive, showing her “*capacity for great tenderness*” (Act 1, p. 20). She speaks tenderly and with concern to the stranger Val Xavier, whom she wishes to nurture;

[very softly, gently, with a slight mournful, tender shake of her head]:
Lawd, child, come back in the mawning and I’ll give you a job (Act 1, p. 33).

Her concern and connection with Val is, however, deeper than maternally instinctive. In *Battle of Angels* a theme of “sexual communion” is developed as the characters endeavour to combat the major theme, which Leonard Quirino notes as being “the fact of human aloneness. [It]... concerns the existential solitude of incarnation” (1987, p. 43). In his essay “The Past, the Present, and the Perhaps” Williams noted that *Battle of Angels* was indeed about loneliness (1976, p. 240). Involving herself in a sexual communion with Val signifies a number of things for Myra. The act itself is shared with another, allowing Myra a physical togetherness; “So now you see we can’t be separated! We’re bound together, Val!” (Act 3, p. 107). The result of the act is pregnancy – new life. As with Serafina delle Rose, sex creates a new relationship between mother and child; with a child Myra would experience innate love, ending her solitude within a barren marriage, “Because I’m not barren. I’ve gotten death out of me and now I’ve taken life in” (Act 3, p. 115). Adversity abounds however, as Myra’s act of creating love and life causes Jabe to murder her, “There’s nothing but death in me now” (Act 3, p. 116). Williams has juxtaposed clear images of life and death - “he portrays death in the figure of Jabe who, himself dying of cancer, is united in a loveless, barren marriage with life in the person of Myra” (Quirino, 1987, p. 46).

The Daughter of a Wop Bootlegger

Opening in Boston in December 1940, *Battle of Angels* suffered a hasty close, and after seventeen years of revision became *Orpheus Descending*. Myra became Lady Torrance, an Italian migrant, who was “bought” by her husband, the now dying Jabe Torrance. As one of Williams’ “desperate Madonnas” (Hall, 1995, p. 677), although with no children to speak of, Lady’s need is similar to Myra’s - to conceive and produce children. In this play Williams has reinforced the maternal longing by changing “Myra” to “Lady”; signifying a closer relationship to the Madonna, often called Our Lady.

Though *Battle of Angels* makes reference to Myra’s past life, it is not fundamental to her maternal wanting; however in *Orpheus Descending* Lady’s past life

is fundamental in instilling this want in her. Dolly Hamma and Beulah Binnings, “*wives of small planters and tastelessly overdressed in a somewhat bizarre fashion*” (Act 1, prologue, p. 245), allude to Lady’s past whilst preparing a welcome dinner for Lady and Jabe, who is returning from hospital. Dolly is surprised to discover that the Torrances sleep in separate bedrooms. But Beulah is not surprised with this indication of a cold marriage:

Well, I wasn’t surprised. Jabe Torrance bought that woman... when she was a girl of eighteen! He bought her and bought her cheap because she’d been thrown over and her heart was broken by that - ... - that Cutrere boy (Act 1, prologue, p. 247).

Beulah’s remark tells of a past incident between Lady and her first love, David Cutrere. Beulah goes on to say, “and those two met like you struck two stones together and made a fire!” (Act 1, prologue, p. 247). The story is then told of Lady’s Dago father, “people just called him The Wop”, of the orchard he planted and the arbours he built for young couples to “court up a storm” in (Act 1, prologue, p. 248). After selling liquor to “niggers”, Lady’s father was killed in a fire set by Jabe Torrance and the Mystic Crew;

not a single fire engine pulled out of a station that night in Two River County! – The poor old fellow, The Wop, he took a blanket and run up into the orchard to fight the fire single handed – *and burned alive* (Act 1, prologue, p. 250).

Lady is unaware of her husband’s involvement in this tragedy, however Beulah suggests that if Lady was aware “she *could* live with him in hate” (Act 1, prologue, p. 250).

During a run in between the town’s folk and Carol Cutrere, David’s sister, Lady remarks with hostility, “I’m delighted that wild girl is givin’ her brother so much trouble” (Act 2, Sc 1, p. 289). Lady learns that David will be collecting his sister from the Torrance Mercantile Store, to which she cries out “*David Cutrere is not coming in this store!*”, and plans for Carol to leave before he arrives so that his hand will not even “touch the doorhandle” (Act 2, Sc. 1, p. 291-92). David does come into the store, and Lady must confront him – here their past is revealed:

LADY: I didn’t write you no letter about it; I was proud then; I had pride. But I had your child in my body the summer you quit me, that summer they burned my father in his wine garden, and you, you washed your hands clean of any connection with a Dago bootlegger’s daughter...

DAVID: - I – didn’t know.

LADY: Well, now you know, you know now I carried your child in my body the summer you quit me but I had it cut out of my body, and they cut my heart out with it! (Act 2, Sc. 1 p. 297)

Although their relationship ended in hostility, great love still exists between the two. As with Serafina delle Rose, Lady clings to her past love and conception. She wishes to recreate her past; her father's orchard, the love of David and their child, and the happiness she felt before the tragic separation. Lady tells David, "in there's the confectionary which'll reopen this spring, its being done over to make it the place that all the young people will come to, it's going to be like – the wine garden of my father, those wine-drinking nights when you had something better than anything you've had since!" (Act 2, Sc. 1. p. 298).

Julie Adam, in referring to the male "hero" in Williams' plays, defines the role that the past plays in the hero's life. Her definition is, I believe, significant to Lady's love with David, and her maternal wanting; "this memory of an uncorrupted past, even if inexact because recreated by desire, provides the only comfort in an imperfect world and the only sense of a genuine identity" (1991, p. 130). Abandoned by her lover, Lady now relies on the memory of her "uncorrupted past" to assist her in living with her dying husband.

Coupled with Death

As Beulah perceived, Lady was "sold" to Jabe Torrance. Lady's own reasoning for marrying Jabe, without the knowledge of his involvement in her father's death, is given when she faces David Cutrere. David married a "society girl" for economic and social purposes and so Lady found it fitting to do the same; "*You sold yourself. I sold my self. You was bought. I was bought. You made whores of us both!*" (Act 2, Sc. 1, p. 297). With the action of the play being set in the Torrance Mercantile Store, according to John M. Clum, a representation is given of "the barren world of commerce, of people bought and sold" (1997, p. 137). There is no creation of love or new life, and the Torrances have produced no children. In this world of commerce, "the system, itself barren, will not allow Lady fertility... she is robbed of motherhood" (Clum, 1997, p. 137). And so her marriage to Jabe is filled with resentment and obligation. It may be suggested that Lady's constant care for Jabe whilst he is suffering with cancer is a part of her mothering function, that she feels for Jabe on a maternal level. However, it comes more from obligation that she should not bite the hand that feeds.

When Jabe is brought home, an equal resentment is clearly shown between each character. An “*instant hostility as if habitual between them*” arises, as Jabe notices the changes that Lady has made to his store;

LADY: We always had a problem with light in this store.
JABE: So you put the shoe department further away from the window?
That’s sensible. A very intelligent solution to the problem, Lady.
LADY: Jabe, you know I told you we got a fluorescent tube coming to put back here.
JABE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well. Tomorrow I’ll get some niggers to help me move the shoe department back front.
LADY: You do whatever you want to, it’s your store.
JABE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I’m glad you reminded me of it (Act 1, Sc. 1, p. 264).

While speaking to Val Xavier, Lady momentarily lets out her true feelings for her husband. Lady believes she will never feel the freedom of Val’s transparent, uncorrupted bird, “because I sleep with a son of a bitch who bought me at a fire sale, not in fifteen years have I had a single good dream” (Act 1, Sc. 2, p. 279).

As with *Battle of Angels*, it should be noted that Jabe is representative of death; Val states, “he looks like death” (Act 3, Sc. 1, p. 319). Jabe as death is juxtaposed with Lady, who, like Myra, is representative of life. Jabe, with “*muted ferocity*” says upon seeing Lady’s redecoration of the confectionary, “I married a live one! Didn’t I marry a live one?” (Act 3, Sc. 1, p. 320). For a while Lady appears to be winning the battle between life and death; she has been sexually reawakened by Val and her father’s orchard is now alive in the confectionary. Upon being exposed to these two signs of life, Jabe suffers a haemorrhage – death begins to die (Act 3, Sc. 1, p. 321).

Orpheus Descends

Due to the resentment Lady feels for her husband, her want for the maternal becomes an unsanctioned outlet for revenge. This brings the discussion to Lady’s relationship with Val Xavier, to whom Lady clings until she is pregnant with his child. Val, as a sexually “potent stranger”, enables Lady to

avenge betrayals from the past with [her] own powerful bod[y].
Procreation is retaliation: against David Cutrere for rejecting Lady.
against Jabe for murdering her father (Hall, 1995, p. 677).

Val plays a key role in *Orpheus Descending* as Lady’s rescuer. Using the myth of Orpheus and his wife Eurydice, Williams likens Val to Orpheus; he enters the underworld to rescue his beloved, Eurydice. She is rescued only momentarily before

she is wrenched back into hell by Hades and Persephone. Lady is clearly Eurydice, with her rescue also being brief, before she is murdered by Jabe.

Lady is a “love-starved” woman (Donahue, 1964, p. 84); she lacks the love of both a husband and a child. When Val enters, Lady is compelled to mother the dispossessed stranger. She agrees to employ him and gives him money for food. Lady’s maternal instinct and need for love does not falter, even when Val steals money for gambling;

I was touched by your – strangeness, your strange talk... I said to myself, ‘This boy is a bird with no feet so he has to sleep on the wind,’ and that softened my fool Dago heart and I wanted to help you (Act 2, Sc. 4, p. 312).

At the end of this scene, Lady’s feelings for Val show a clear shift, from motherly concern to a sexual need. Roger Boxill terms Valentine Xavier as being both “saviour and Valentine, a male sex object to whom the women of the play turn to for salvation” (1987, p. 122). Val is essential to developing Lady’s true nature. In Val, Lady sees “a foreseeable end to her monotonous sterile existence” (Kataria, 1992, p. 104). When Lady cries out “I NEED YOU!!!!... TO LIVE... TO GO ON LIVING!!!” their relationship is consummated as Lady and Val take part in their sexual communion (Act 2, Sc. 4, p. 314).

As the curtain falls across the alcove where Val and Lady reside, “*its bizarre design, a gold tree with white birds and scarlet fruit in it, is softly translucent*” (Act 2, Sc. 4, p. 314). This image creates much symbolic meaning: Adam and Eve tasting of the forbidden fruit brought about the creation of original sin in man, the barren fruit tree which finally bears in *Battle of Angels* comes to mind, and life itself is represented in the fruit tree. The latter image haunts the climax of the play, as it represents Lady’s vengeance, which has taken place in her “own powerful bod[y]” (Hall, 1995, p. 677).

At the beginning of act three, Jabe descends the stairs to inspect both the store and Val. As if to confirm life in the face of death, Lady is intent on showing Jabe the orchard-like confectionary; “Go in and look at it, Jabe. I am real proud of it!” (Act 3, Sc. 1, p. 319). Perhaps out of spite, Jabe notes the resemblance to Lady’s father’s wine-garden, and reveals his involvement in the murdering of her father. This, however, only adds to Lady’s need for vengeance, her need to conceive a child. Not consciously knowing that Val would be instrumental in her vengeance, Lady says to him,

Ask me how it felt to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when he touched me. But I endured it. I guess

my heart knew that somebody must be coming to take me out of this hell! You did. You came. Now look at me! I'm alive once more (Act 3, Sc. 3, p. 339).

Val has helped Lady create life, and when informed of her pregnancy by the nurse, Miss Porter, Lady releases Val from her clinging hold; "you can go... You've done what you came here to do" (Act 3, Sc. 3, p. 343). Lady then tells Val her story of the barren fig tree in her father's orchard:

Then one day I discovered a small green fig on the tree they said wouldn't bear! [*She is clasping a gilt paper horn*]... it seemed such a wonderful thing, after those ten barren springs, for the little fig tree to bear, it called for a celebration... I decorated the fig tree with glass bells and glass birds, and silver icicles and stars, because it won the battle (Act 3, Sc. 3, p. 343-44).

With elation Lady puts on a gilt hat and runs to the stairs crying out "I've won. I've won. Mr Death, I'm going to bear!" (Act 3, Sc. 3, p. 344). Lady is finally fulfilled; she will become a mother and experience the innate love of a child. However, she is punished for her defiance, she is not allowed to be complete and so is shot by Jabe. Val is then murdered by the town's men.

All that remains at the end of the play is Val's snakeskin jacket, the

sacramental sign of Val's fugitive nature... as surely as Lady carried his vitalizing seed in her body. New life is betokened – Easter will dawn in a few hours – though not the life Lady Torrance had hoped to deliver (Hall, 1995, p. 677).

Lady Torrance, among the women discussed in this thesis, represents the only, positive manifestation of the mother. Like Myra, with her potential for "*great tenderness*" (Act 1, p. 20), Lady possesses the love of a woman who would make a wonderful mother – yet Williams does not allow her this completion. Williams believed that women brought children into the world and then destroyed them, as he remarked in his memoirs (1975, p. 219). Perhaps he thought Lady would become another self indulgent Serafina delle Rose or a suffocating Amanda Wingfield, and so ended the play while she was still in a positive light.

Chapter 4

Suddenly Last Summer

The Consequences of Suppression

Williams' 1958 Off-Broadway success *Suddenly Last Summer* introduces audiences to his most malicious mother figure, Violet Venable, who plans to have her own niece lobotomised when she begins to tell the true and violent story of how Violet's son Sebastian died "suddenly last summer". It is the connection seen between Violet and her son that demonstrates disturbingly the clinging nature of her motherhood. Due to the psychological and biographical aspects of the play, it is important to continue the discussion of Edwina Williams' treatment of her children. Most significant to this play are the events that took place during Rose Williams' adolescent years.

In 1927 Williams' parents sent Rose to Knoxville, Tennessee, where Cornelius' sisters gave Rose her debut, a debut which failed. Upon her return Williams was convinced something had happened to Rose, "a shadow had fallen over her that was to deepen steadily through the next four or five years" (Leverich, 1995, p. 87). For Edwina the initial concern was the sexually explicit ravings of Rose and her "boy crazy" nature. An added stress was Rose's inability to gain employment, continue study or find a steady male interest, and by 1937 the situation became severe. From March onwards Rose was moved between many hospitals and sanatoriums, undergoing insulin and shock therapies, until finally on January 13, 1943, Rose was subjected to a bilateral prefrontal lobotomy (Leverich, 1995, p. 480) which would silence the sexually explicit ravings that so offended Edwina.

Many of Williams' biographers have noted that the cause of Rose's psychosis stemmed from both her mother's puritanical suppression of sexuality and also Cornelius' sexual advances on Rose (Spoto, 1997, p. 59); however there is no record, according to Lyle Leverich, that Cornelius ever made an advance on Rose or that she ever accused him specifically of such an act (1995, p. 247). The most information given on this matter is stated on Rose's 1937 Farmington Hospital admissions report by Dr Emmet Hctor, who notes Rose had only "delusions of sexual morality by members of the family" (Leverich, 1995, p. 224).

In Edwina Williams' book, *Remember Me to Tom*, she reveals information about Rose's allegations:

I don't know what [Cornelius] said, but he must have been abusive, for she fled upstairs and I heard her moving furniture around her room to block the door, afraid he would break it down as he had broken mine (1963, p. 59).

The day after this incident Rose packed her bags. Whether the abuse was sexual is not stated, however Edwina's reaction was as follows: "We drove around half the night trying to persuade her to return, and when she refused, we took her to the psychiatric ward of a general hospital, hoping she would be helped there" (Williams, 1963, p. 59). As Violet's answer to the ravings of Catherine in *Suddenly Last Summer* was to submit the girl to psychiatric help, so too was Edwina's answer for Rose. Although Edwina blames her husband for the final decision to operate on Rose, "the psychiatrists convinced Cornelius the only answer was lobotomy" (Williams, 1963, p. 85). Tennessee Williams blames his mother as he asks in his memoirs, "Why do women bring children into the world and then destroy them?" (1975, p. 219). Hence in 1957 Williams wrote of a young woman who would be silenced by brain surgery for telling the "truth", and although the play does not explicitly mention a father's sexual assault on his daughter.

Tennessee may have been resuming a topic he had broached on the couch when he implicitly raised the question of whether there had been any objective grounds for Rose's allegations... The play had been written as if Edwina had unilaterally condemned Rose to the operation (Hayman, 1994, p. 172).

I Had Something to do With All This

As with Amanda and Tom Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie*, how Edwina treated Williams should be noted before exploring the relationship of Violet and Sebastian Venable of *Suddenly Last Summer*. Edwina Williams felt that she should be the protector of her children, in all areas. Upon Williams's admission to the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1929, Edwina accompanied him and selected for him a residence hall "where male and female students met only at meals" (Hayman, 1994, p. 23). This is also reflective of her not wanting Tennessee to be involved with childhood sweetheart Hazel Kramer. Violet Venable, too, will be seen to manipulate her son's life in such a way that he was unable to have close relationships with any other person, least of all a female.

Just as Edwina tried to control her son's social and love lives, she endeavoured to control his conduct in everyday occasions. Actress Barbara Baxley, in a letter to director Elia Kazan, recalled how Edwina treated Williams at a Miami party in December 1958: "[she] couldn't stop telling Tennessee to stand up to greet a lady, to straighten his tie, to fix his coat, to use his napkin - as if he were five years old" (Hayman, 1994, p. 179). In regards to the situation with Rose, Edwina was intent on protecting Tennessee and Dakin from being exposed to her sexually-explicit language. In a letter written to her parents on July 3, 1937, she wrote, "She has been raving on the subject of 'sex' ever since and I was ashamed for Dakin and Tom to hear" (Leverich, 1995, p. 200). Edwina must have also felt she had some command over her son's work, yet she may not have realised the extent of her influence. She stated: "You know, I had something to do with all this... this life for my son" (cited, Donahue, 1964, p. 81).

In 1957 Williams began intense psychotherapy with Freudian analyst, Dr. Lawrence S. Kubie and began to visit his sister Rose at the Stony Lodge Sanatorium with a frequency that surprised both family and friends (Spoto, 1997, p. 219). Consequently Williams was inspired to write *Suddenly Last Summer*, painfully autobiographical, showing resentment towards his mother for approving a lobotomy on his sister. In 1958 after seeing *Suddenly Last Summer*, perhaps indicating a clear realisation of her influence on her son's work, Edwina said, "Why don't you write a lovely, long play again, Tom?" (Hayman, 1994, p. 176). Williams himself certainly realised the impact his mother had on his work, but in regard to how she treated both him and Rose, he did not seem to feel anger or strong resentment. In his memoirs he wrote, "Miss Edwina had not been quite so perceptive... but I feel that Mother always did what she thought was right and that she has always given herself due credit for it even though what she sometimes did was all but fatally wrong" (1975, p. 85).

Sebastian and Violet, Violet and Sebastian

Violet Venable, being of the same genteel refinement as Edwina Williams and in turn Amanda Wingfield, appears in *Suddenly Last Summer* as a "rich, venomous widow" (Donahue, 1964, p. 100), stubborn and very much secure with having the power in her relationships. The most telling of these relationships is with her son Sebastian, who resides in the play as a posthumous character. In Violet's retelling the type of relationship she had with her son, she unknowingly reveals her clinging, obsessive nature as a mother. Just as Edwina Williams felt she may have had "something to do"

with her son's work, Mrs Venable felt she was wholly responsible for Sebastian's. Her regimented love and care for her son helped him produce his annual summer poem and without her last summer he was unable to do so: "*Without me, impossible, Doctor! – he wrote no poem last summer... Without me he died last summer*" (Sc. 1, p. 116)

As a woman who clings incessantly to her role of mother, Mrs Venable's description of how Sebastian produced his poem is teeming with maternal imagery. Holidaying only in the summer, Mrs Venable explains that her son had nine months to prepare the poem, "the length of pregnancy, yes" (Sc. 1, p. 116). Be it an intended pun or otherwise, Dr. Cukrowicz then questions, "The poem was hard to deliver?" (Sc. 1, p. 116). Williams, throughout his life, often feared that his mother would destroy his work (Hayman, 1994, p. 176); a fear that manifests itself in *Suddenly Last Summer*. Violet Venable has not given her son the opportunity to share his work with anyone, "D'you know it still shocks me a little? – to realise that Sebastian Venable the poet is still unknown" (Sc. 1, p. 114). The printing of the poem even took place on an eighteenth-century hand press so that no one else was able to see it. Violet does mention that it was Sebastian's wish to keep his poetry private, but according to Kataria, Mrs Venable "exploited [this] condition to perpetuate her hold on him by allowing him no outlet or exposure" (1992, p. 60).

In detailing her son's character to Dr. Cukrowicz, Mrs Venable recalls the summer they travelled to the Encantadas and witnessed the birth process of sea-turtles:

It's a long dreadful thing, the depositing of the eggs in the sand-pits, and when it's finished the exhausted female turtle crawls back to the sea half-dead. She never sees her offspring, but we did... the just hatched sea-turtles scrambled out of the sand-pits and started their race to the sea... To escape the flesh-eating birds... the birds hovered and swooped to attack (Sc. 1, p. 117).

Not knowing why she recalled this event, "now, why am I thinking of this?" (Sc. 1, p. 116), Mrs Venable seems to be drawing a strong parallel to her relationship with her son – without the mother in constant attendance the child is consumed by an "other". As she was unable to travel with her son last summer, due to a tenaciously denied stroke, Sebastian's new companion was unable, according to Andrew Sofer, to "channel [his] self-destructive appetites into poetry" (1995, p. 336) and so he was literally devoured by a crowd of boys. Hall conveys how the Encantadas imagery is analogous to the mother/son situation in the play,

his death comes soon after Violet suffers a disabling stroke, abruptly cutting the umbilical cord that has nourished and strangled her son for over forty years. The severing is also traumatic for Violet, who projects her experience of childbearing onto her account of Sebastian's poetic production (1995, p. 677)

It should be noted that Mrs Venable refers to her relationship with her son as a "covenant" (Sc. 4, p. 49). Williams has formed religious implications with Mrs Venable's certainty that without her, her son could not produce poetry, and died. The father is absent and therefore representative of God, whom Sebastian felt he saw in the gruesome encounter in the Encantadas, "he said 'Well, now I've seen Him!', and he meant God" (Sc. 1, p. 119) and Mrs Venable sees herself as the Mother of God. Sebastian is therefore the Son of God, who speaks the Word, "As the word was planted by God in the Virgin, so the Idea is the seed planted by Inspiration in the poet" (Tischler, 1997, p. 156). Mrs Venable, however, is the selfish mother of a self-indulgent son, and will not share him. The labour in producing his poem should in effect "bring forth a creature separate from the bearer" (Tischler, 1997, p. 156), which Mrs Venable is very much aware of and will not allow it, "He was *mine*!" (Sc. 4, p. 150).

Mrs Venable's hold over her son is not restricted to his work. She, like Edwina Williams, controls her son's everyday living. She made sure his meals consisted of "a single lean chop and lime juice on a salad in restaurants famed for rich dishes" (Sc. 1, p. 121) and when Sebastian decided to enter a Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas, even though her dying husband called for her to be by his side in America,

I made the hardest decision of my life. I stayed with my son. I got him through that crisis too. In less than a month he got up off the filthy grass mat and threw the rice bowl away (Sc. 1, p. 120).

As with other Williams mothers, Mrs Venable hampers her son's growth and his individuality; she is coddling a man who is approximately forty years of age and in this instance she has hindered his attempt at autonomy. As Kataria writes, "Mrs Venable is the worse case of a pathological parasite, clinging to her forty-year-old son, manipulating his life in such a way that he comes to be more crippled and dependent than Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*" (1992, p. 54).

In scene one, Mrs Venable shows Dr. Cukrowicz two photos of her son in which he is two different ages yet looks exactly the same. She is proud and boastful of this because, "To allow his image to age would be to admit age and mortality exist"

(Clum, 1997, p.128). Like Amanda Wingfield, she clings to her child as a means of affirming youth; her son addressed her by her Christian name and others in their company referred to them as “Sebastian and Violet, Violet and Sebastian” (Sc. 1, p. 123). Refusing to count birthdays, and with a strict diet to keep her son looking young, “Both of us were young, and stayed young,” (Sc. 1, p. 121). To Dr. Cukrowicz, Mrs Venable calls herself an “elderly lady which I turned into last summer” (Sc. 1, p. 124), because she was without her youthful son.

Sebastian had no autonomy; his work life, eating habits and holiday life were all controlled by his mother. Most disturbing is that Mrs Venable’s controlling nature takes hold of Sebastian’s personal life. This becomes apparent in scene one when she is explaining how no one knew Sebastian as a poet. She proceeds to say: “the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can’t separate them” (Sc. 1, p. 114). If then, according to Mrs Venable, the life and work of a poet are inseparable, and she is unwilling to share her son’s work, is she then unwilling to share his personal life, his self, with anyone? The answer becomes clear throughout the course of the play. Mrs Venable, being intent on saving her son’s reputation from Catherine’s hideous account, reveals to Dr. Cukrowicz her son’s moral and sexual convictions,

DOCTOR: He lived a celibate life?

MRS. VENABLE: As strictly as if he’d *vowed* to! This sounds like vanity, Doctor, but I was actually the only one in his life that satisfied the demands he made of people (Sc. 1, p. 122).

This shows that Mrs Venable was unable to ‘share’ Sebastian on any level, not even sexually. For her son to be sexually active she would have to let in another person and “to allow [Sebastian] sexuality would be to lose her primacy in his life” (Clum, 1997, p.134). Violet would not allow this, “we had to keep very fleet-footed I can tell you, with his looks and charms, to keep ahead of pursuers” (Sc. 1, p. 122). It should be noted, that whether Sebastian actually remained chaste in his mother’s care is not known completely. When Catherine begins to recall the events leading to Sebastian’s death in Cabeza de Lobo she mentions that she, like Mrs Venable, was used by Sebastian to “procure” for him; Mrs Venable “*cries out*” upon hearing this (Sc. 4, p. 152). Catherine was made to wear a see-through bathing suit to attract people whereas Mrs Venable, “She didn’t *know* she was procuring for him...but she did it in nice places and in decent ways and I had to do it the way that I just told you!” (Sc. 4, p.

152). It is certainly insinuated that Mrs Venable did not have the hold over Sebastian's sexuality that she thought she did.

Cut This Hideous Story Out of Her Brain!

This brings the discussion to Violet Venable's reaction to Catherine Holly, Sebastian's cousin, with whom Violet was forced to share her son when she became unfit for travel, or perhaps unfit for "procuring". As with Edwina Williams, of whom Lucy Freeman said "every woman she saw was in competition for her in the lives of her children" (Spoto, 1997, p. 346), Violet was unwelcoming to another woman in her son's life. Mrs Venable refers to Catherine as a "vandal" whom "with her tongue for a hatchet she's gone about smashing our legend" (Sc. 123, p. 123). With Mrs Venable clinging to her son as an almost god-like figure, and having already heard Catherine's account of Sebastian's death previous to the play's commencement, she is strongly against this story as it will ruin her son's reputation. Due to Catherine's story being contradictory to what Mrs Venable believes her son's moral character to have been, and Sebastian's notebook being void of poetry, "by Violet's logic Catherine is guilty of Sebastian's murder" (Sofer, 1995, p. 336). And so when Catherine and Mrs Venable meet again, Mrs Venable openly accuses Catherine,

MRS VENABLE: She took my son away from me, and then she -

CATHERINE: Aunt Violet, you're not being fair.

MRS VENABLE: Oh, aren't I? (Sc. 4, p. 139)

Mrs Venable also believes the only reason why she was unable to accompany her son was because of a "slight aneurism... I had it when I discovered that she was trying to take my son away from me" (Sc. 4, p. 139). Catherine however, was able to determine the type of relationship there was between the mother and son and as a result tried to mimic that, "the only way he'd accept: - a sort of motherly way. I tried to save him, Doctor" (Sc. 4, p. 143). Although Catherine tried to recreate Mrs Venable's role she was unable to help him as Mrs Venable did, "I *did* give it! She *didn't*" (Sc. 4, p. 149), but in the end it was Sebastian's own self-destructive behaviour that caused his violent death.

Be it that Mrs Venable may have been hurt by her son's choice of a younger companion or was disgusted by and therefore in denial of Catherine's truth, she still wants her son's reputation protected. The deceased Sebastian is now a "blank text" (Sofer, 1995, p. 336), allowing Mrs Venable full control over how her son is

represented and known in the future, with the exception of Catherine's story. Sebastian is then a mere "object of artistic representation" (Saddik, 1998, p. 347) and subject only to the interpretation of others. Mrs Venable is so intent on keeping her clinging hold on Sebastian that she is willing to subject a young girl to life-altering brain surgery, so that her "version" of Sebastian is the only version.

Conclusion

Through studying the biographical details of Williams' life and family, it can be asserted that he was never completely comfortable in his relationship with his mother Edwina, nor with Edwina's conduct in her relationship with his sister Rose. With the feelings of resentment he had for his mother, Williams was heavily influenced to write similar mother figures and characterisations into his work. Edwina Williams' Southern upbringing, her puritanical beliefs and her need for control over her children's lives are the definitively dominant characteristics of the mothers discussed in this study; it is a negative manifestation of the Williams mother that is most prominent.

It has become clear that the Williams mother is not allowed happiness in her relationships with her children; her children do not find her to be maternally welcoming as a person they are confident to confide in, nor is the mother ever given a positive resolution to any conflict that may have occurred between her and her children. A constant mother and child conflict is depicted in *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Rose Tattoo* between Amanda and Tom, and Serafina and Rosa respectively; both relationships ending without a resolution to the conflict and with the child forsaking the mother. The lives of Myra Torrance and Lady Torrance are ended before their motherhood has manifested physically in a relationship between mother and child; they are not given a chance to fulfil and experience the role of a mother. Finally, in *Suddenly Last Summer* Violet Venable is left alone; with Catherine's hideous account of whom her son truly was not yet destroyed, Violet is left only with false memories.

The tragedy of the mother is that there is something within her nature that does not allow her a positive manifestation. In all of the five plays discussed the mothers use their children, or the act of conceiving a child, to continue to live in denial of the present. And so the mother clings violently to the child as a means of affirming a desirable past or as a means of vengeance for a past betrayal; all five mothers wish to affirm their past lives especially the melancholic Amanda Wingfield, and both Serafina and Myra/Lady Torrance use sexual communion with another to avenge their husbands' betrayals. This latter group of women, although they are desperately passionate and sexual in nature, "the consummation which they seek is nonetheless spiritual... seldom simply sexual. They long for completion" (Bigsby, 1984, p. 130). The mothers will also impose their own beliefs and social behaviours on their children, to ensure further

affirmation of the lost past; Violet was in full control of all aspects of Sebastian's life, from his work to his eating habits.

In the cruel and unforgiving worlds that Williams depicts so eloquently in these plays, his mothers will not be able to survive happily, if at all. Amanda Wingfield does not realise how poignantly incorrect her statement, "all that we have to cling to is – each other" (Sc. 4, p. 258), is. It is the very "clinging" of these women's nature that will not allow them continued existence, as it is because of this that their children and loved ones have all abandoned them. Whether the clinging is for an affirmation of youth, love, the past, or for vengeance, Amanda Wingfield, Serafina delle Rose, Myra and Lady Torrance and Violet Venable, all face the same predicament – aloneness.

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