

INTRODUCTION

The feeling of loneliness in mankind is age-old and world-wide, its causes multifarious. Besides the great insoluble problems in men's minds concerning God, nature, death, and the meaning of life itself, specific problems in each society have caused individuals to feel the appalling isolation known as loneliness; and repeatedly, by its embodiment in the communicative medium of literature, men have sought to allay this feeling.¹

In her book-length study of loneliness as a pervading theme in modern American drama, Professor Winifred Dusenbury discusses twenty-five plays under seven headings; loneliness resulting from 1) personal failure, 2) homelessness, 3) an unhappy family, 4) the failure of a love affair, 5) socio-economic forces, 6) conflict between the material and the spiritual, and 7) the lonely hero. Six of the plays that are discussed are by Eugene O'Neill, long recognized as America's leading playwright; two are by Clifford Odets; and the remaining seventeen are by seventeen different authors. One of these is Tennessee Williams (1914-); the play, A Streetcar Named Desire.

In eight of his other plays, Williams stresses the theme of loneliness and uses it to motivate action. It is the purpose of this study to examine in detail the nine plays by Tennessee Williams in which the problem of loneliness is central to the action and characterization.

In his introduction to the published text of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams speaks of the "pity that so much of all creative work is so closely related to the personality of the one who does it." He speaks of the creative artist's "special world" of "particular and sometimes peculiar concerns," and of the loneliness that he shared with the rest of mankind.

It is a lonely idea, a lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don't. And so we talk to each other, call each other short and long distance across land and sea, clasp hands with each other at meeting and at parting, fight each other and even destroy each other because of this always somewhat thwarted effort to break through walls to each other. As a character in a play once said, "We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins."

Personal lyricism is the outcry of prisoner to prisoner from the cell in solitary where each is confined for the duration of his life.²

Williams admits that he considers his play-writing as a means of bridging the gap that isolates him from other human beings.

. . . I thought of myself as having a highly personal, ~~even~~ intimate relationship with people who go to see plays. I did and I still do. A morbid shyness once prevented me from having much direct communication with people, and possibly that is why I began to write to them plays and stories. But even now when that tongue-locking, face-flushing, silent and crouching timidity has worn off with the passage of the troublesome youth that it sprang from, I still find it somehow easier to "level with" crowds of strangers in the hushed twilight of orchestra and balcony sections of theatres than with individuals across a table from me. Their being strangers somehow makes them more familiar and more approachable, easier to talk to.³

These passages show that Williams was aware of his own loneliness, and believed it to be a common condition of creative artists, anyway. In his plays, the characters who suffer from loneliness are not all artists; while no one could claim that they represent a cross section of American life, they are men and women of differing ages, social and economic classes, and occupations.

The theme of loneliness is of importance in the following plays :

The Glass Menagerie (1945)

A Streetcar Named Desire (1947)

Summer and Smoke (1948)

The Rose Tattoo (1950)

Camino Real (1953)

Orpheus Descending (1955)

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955)

Sweet Bird of Youth (1959)

The Mutilated (1964)

In The Glass Menagerie Williams uses memories of his own experience, using Tom Wingfield as narrator. Tom's family is like the glass collection in the frowsy apartment, ill-adapted to its environment. The playwright says of Laura, the shy daughter who has a slightly crippled leg, "Stemming from this defect , Laura's separation increases till she

is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."⁴ It is certain that her physical disability is small compared to her psychological isolation. George Jean Nathan calls her "a creature crippled deeply in inner spirit."⁵

It is no wonder that Laura suffers a painful sense of separation, for from the first scene to the last, her mother makes her feel her lack of popularity with men and her inability to cope with any kind of social situation. Laura's closing line in the first scene, "Mother's afraid that I'm going to be an old maid," is complemented by the final scene in which the gentleman caller departs, never to return. Laura's pitiful inner apartness from the life around her is increased by her mother's lack of sympathy with the girl's nervous sickness at business school; Laura says, "I couldn't face it. I couldn't." Any contact with people is almost more than she can face. Her only attachment is to her little glass animals. This feeling of closeness to them is so intense that when Tom throws his coat and accidentally knocks some off the shelf, she cries out "as if wounded," and covers her face with her hands. She substitutes playing her father's old phonograph records and dusting the figures in her menagerie for a healthy interest in living. As Tom says, "She lives in a world of her own," which is so unrelated to that of those around her that she seems "peculiar."

To increase Laura's sense of separateness, the playwright has inserted into the scene between Jim, the gentleman caller, and Laura stage business with a little unicorn, Laura's favourite glass figure. Since it has a horn and is different from all the other horses, Jim remarks, "Poor little fellow, he must feel sort of lonesome." Although Laura insists that he gets along well with the other animals, it is with deep feeling that she says, after the horn has been broken by a fall, "It doesn't matter. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise. . . . The horn was removed to make him feel less-freakish! Now he will ^{feel} more at home with the other horses, the ones who don't have horns. . . ."6

Laura's "horn" is the slight limp, which she has magnified to make her seem to herself a "freak." Knowing how alone she is and always will be, Tom, although he must run away to save himself, is forever haunted by a feeling of guilt towards her and pleads to her to extinguish her candles in his memory. As the final curtain falls, Laura blows out the candles, and having thus apparently been forgotten by her brother, is left in black loneliness forever. Unlike her mother, she has no past to which she can belong, and, as Tom recognizes, she obviously has no future to which she can look forward, so she exists from day to day, avoiding reality by withdrawing into herself, spending her lonely days dusting her little glass animals.

Amanda, the mother, is a pitiful, even a tragic figure, according to Williams. As Tom gives his closing speech of

the play and the light is upon the pantomime of Amanda comforting Laura, the playwright says of Amanda: Now that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty. Being deserted by her husband and being uncertain of her future, Amanda is dissatisfied with herself; her dissatisfaction with herself causes her to nag Tom and finally drive him away. She is left alone with Laura, whose withdrawal makes companionship impossible. "Amanda," says Williams, "having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions. . . ." Since she is removed from active participation in the life around her, she is able to return to the past, even going so far as to believe herself "girlish." Pitiful as is such suffering, she is not so alone as Laura, because of Amanda's ability to project the past into the present and be a part of a make-believe world.

Tom is lonely like his mother and his sister, but he is not a pathetic or a tragic figure. In the mind of the audience Tom, like his father, is more than justified in running away, for, as he says, "I haven't got a thing, not a single thing left in this house that I can call my own." Tom can actually escape from the isolation which he feels in his home by going into the great world of reality-- joining the Merchant Marine, and although his closing lines indicate that he does not find a sense of belonging in "motion," perhaps he has made an advance toward it by breaking

the bonds which tied him to his mother and sister.

A Streetcar Named Desire reveals that members of a former aristocratic society cannot maintain isolated existence in a world which has moved away from their way of life. Stella, the younger sister, is able to adapt herself to a new mode of living through her intense physical love for Polish Stanley Kowalski, whereas Blanche cannot relate herself to any mode of life open to her in the modern age, and so perishes. As Erich Fromm points out, since "complete isolation is unbearable and incompatible with sanity, "it is obvious that Blanche's end is the only possible logical conclusion to the drama. Fromm explains that

man cannot live alone and unrelated to others. He has to associate with others for defense, for work, for sexual satisfaction, for play, for the upbringing of the young, for the transmission of knowledge and material possessions. But beyond that, it is necessary for him to be related to others, one with them, part of a group.⁷

* As in The Glass Menagerie, the fact of the unbearable physical closeness of human beings to each other and their inner separateness is dramatized with clarity in A Streetcar Named Desire. When the play begins, Blanche, the elder sister, has failed at running the family plantation, at school teaching, and at keeping her good name. And her marriage of years

before had been a failure, because her young husband proved to be a homosexual who shot himself when Blanche found out about him. In desperation, Blanche goes to her sister Stella. She soon learns several painful facts: Stella will not leave her coarse husband, who cruelly presents to Blanche a one-way return ticket to Laurel; Mitch, Stanley's friend whom Blanche hoped to marry, fails to appear at her birthday party and then later comes in to taunt her with her past and to thrust a glaring light bulb into her face. Added to these shocks, on the night when Stella goes to the hospital for the birth of her baby, Stanley rapes Blanche. It is no wonder that Blanche, like Tom in The Glass Menagerie, speaks of her life as a "trap." Tom gets away by joining the Merchant Marine, but Blanche can escape only into a mental hospital. Her progress is into complete separation from normal life. When she first arrives at Stella's in her finery, she is very much out of place, and her frightened words indicate that she is appealing to Stella as a last hope. "I'm not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I can't be alone! Because - as you must have noticed - I'm not very well."⁸ The next time she explains her loneliness is to Mitch. She tells how she loved when she was young, how she accused her husband of homosexuality, how he shot himself, and how, ever since, the searchlight which had been on the world turned off with only candles to take its place. "I understand what it is to be lonely," she tells him.

In Summer and Smoke Williams states the contrast between the flesh and the spirit in human relationships. Alma Winemiller represents the spiritual side, whereas John Buchanan represents one who loves the flesh and all worldly pleasures. In this play, Williams has created one of his most memorable heroines, Alma, the daughter of a small-town minister, a sensitive, shy girl hopelessly in love with a pleasure-seeking young doctor. In his review of Summer and Smoke in the New York Times, Brooks Atkinson wrote:

. . . the insight into character is almost unbearably lucid. . . . Williams is a writer of superb grace and allusiveness, always catching the shape and sound of ideas rather than their literal meaning. As its title suggests, Summer and Smoke deals in truths that are unsubstantial. But as Mr. Williams sees it, these are the truths that are most profound and the most painful, for they separate people who logically should be together and give life its savage whims and its wanton destructiveness. Although he is dealing in impulses that cannot be literally defined, the twin themes of his tone poem are clearly stated: spirit and flesh, order and anarchy. He has caught them in the troubled brooding of two human hearts.⁹

The story is of the unfulfillable love of two neighbours. Though different in their way of life, they are sufficiently attracted to one another to try, over a period of years, to communicate. Alma's upbringing has made her excessively sensitive and repressed. Her senile mother has regressed to infantilism, making Alma to bear the responsibility of the lady in a clergyman's household. Her father is very puritanical. Alma has become hypochondriacal and subject to hysterical attacks and is unable to talk naturally

with young men. She is accused of "putting on airs" and of being "affected" by the other young people in the town. Williams describes her as a woman belonging to "a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France. Out of nervousness and self-consciousness she has a habit of prefacing and concluding her remarks with a breathless laugh. This will be indicated at points, but should be used more freely than indicated; however, the characterization must never be stressed to the point of making her at all ludicrous in a less than sympathetic way."¹⁰ Alma's social life, outside her duties as hostess at the rectory, is confined to a petty circle of culture addicts. During their meeting at her house, she gazes longingly out the window for a sight of the carefree John, who leads an uninhibited life while pursuing his medical studies.

The play begins with a childhood episode in the town's park. Meeting at the foot of the statue of the angel named Eternity, Alma gives John a package of handkerchiefs to use instead of his sleeve. Although irritated by the gift, he uses the opportunity to assure himself that Alma has a crush on him and to steal a kiss. In the next scene also before the statue, but years later, John has become a doctor, while Alma has become hostess at the rectory. There is a renewal of the old mutual attraction; they plan to go out for a drive. When John delays the promised date, Alma invites him to her literary circle, to which he hesitantly comes. He cannot stand the cattiness and pettiness of the



"intellectuals" and soon leaves.

Alma's hypochondria makes her fear that she has heart trouble, and a hysterical attack takes her to the doctor's house in the middle of the night. There, instead of the old doctor, she finds John with the voluptuous Rosa Gonzales. Overcoming her revulsion, Alma describes her symptoms to John, who diagnoses them as a "doppleganger." He gives her some sleeping tablets and agrees to take her on the promised excursion. A few days later, he appears at her door in a white suit and drives her out to Moon Lake Casino. After an attempt to hold her hand, he suggests that they go to one of the private rooms upstairs. Horrified, Alma takes a taxi home. After John's father has been shot by Rosa's father, John accuses Alma as the one who must take responsibility for his father's death. He also feels repentant and begins to take a more serious approach to a doctor's career. To complete the pattern of his new respectability, he proposes to Nellie Ewell, a voice pupil of Alma's who has been flirting with John all through the play. Alma is now left alone. Trying to find a substitute, she strikes up a friendship with a lonely travelling salesman, with whom, in the last scene, she walks arm in arm, headed for Moon Lake Casino. She may be headed towards the life that Blanche DuBois of A Streetcar Named Desire led before she came to stay with her sister.

Loneliness and her unrequited love for John leave Alma frustrated. She knows that John belongs to another world, the world that she has never understood. Being a

minister's daughter, she has to be very careful of her reputation. At the end, it is loneliness that causes her to pick up a stranger as her companion in "after-dark entertainment."

The Rose Tattoo has a happy ending - the marriage of Serafina della Rose, the widow, to Alvaro Mangiacavallo, the truck driver. When Serafina's husband Rosario died, she went into a three-year retreat with her memory of him in a world of her own. She is deeply religious and passionately devoted to her beautiful daughter Rosa. She is against Rosa's choice of a sailor boy-friend, for fear that Rosa may not have made as good a choice of a husband as Serafina did originally. Then Serafina meets Alvaro Eat-a-Horse, a man with a body like that of Serafina's first husband but with the face of a clown with big ears. In the scramble that follows Alvaro's entrance, the salesman's article explodes in Serafina's face. Alvaro, cursing the traveller for crowding him off the highway, is called names and kicked in the stomach. Alvaro starts crying like an injured child; Serafina joins in a wail; and soon "these adult children are on their way to love. Both have had their troubles, and confidences flow. Williams sentimentally compares their growing, fumbling intimacy to lonely children making their tentative acquaintance."¹¹

Alvaro talks of his dependents and his matrimonial plans, and his dream bride turns out to be someone more or less like Serafina, one who is older than he and who knows

the world well enough that he can depend on her. She talks of her husband, retells the legend of the rose that appeared on her breast when she felt she had conceived. Alvaro, having lost his job, can only offer his heart. "Love and affection - in a world that is lonely - and cold!"¹² Later Alvaro can prove that Serafina's husband had been unfaithful. Out of rage, she smashes the urn in which she kept her husband's ashes. Now she feels free to take a lover and she chooses Alvaro. The play ends happily with an understanding between Serafina and her daughter, who is allowed to go with her sailor into her own new life of shared happiness.

In Camino Real, Williams uses the "dream play" technique. He personalizes literary characters such as Casanova, Marguerite Gautier, Don Quixote and his servant Sancho, and Lord Byron. Most of them are the "fugitive kind," who have arrived at the end of a royal road of imagination to meet with reality - age, disease, cruelty, disillusionment, and death. Kilroy joins them as the modern American dreamer. Esmeralda, the Gipsy's daughter, sums up Williams' love for them all in her prayer:

God bless all con men and hustlers and pitch-men who hawk their hearts on the street, all two-time losers who're likely to lose once more, the courtesan who made the mistake of love, the greatest of lovers crowned with the longest horns, the poet who wandered far from his heart's green country and possibly will and possibly won't be able to find his way back, look down with a smile tonight on the last cavaliers, the ones with the rusty armour and soiled white plumes, and visit with understanding and something that's almost tender those fading legends that come and go in this plaza like songs not clearly remembered, oh, sometime and somewhere, let there be something to mean the world honour again!¹³

Kilroy, Casanova, and Marguerite (Camille) are all lonely people. They are afraid of old age and poverty. All remain trapped in the Camino Real, a plaza owned by Gutman, a mean and cruel man. Kilroy is made to wear a patsy's costume and click his electric nose. He arrives in the Camino Real alone, his days of youth and glory far behind. He has left his wife because of his weak heart and expects to do without sex for the rest of his life. He is cheated and robbed by Gutman's men. Left penniless, he has to sell his championship gloves and belt. He feels so humiliated that in the end he yields to every joke played on him by the authority of the Camino Real.

Casanova and Marguerite, the two lovers who have lost their popularity among modern people, arrive in the plaza hopeless and lonely. They have no hope of escape from the walled city of despair. In one attempt to prove her enduring charm, Marguerite tosses her ring to a gigolo and rushes off for a degrading night that ends in the bitter realization that her youth and charm have slipped away.

In Orpheus Descending Williams deals with the story of an aging wife who takes a lover because of loneliness. Lady Torrance, the poor wife bought by her mean and cruel husband Jabe, who is dying of cancer, feels terribly lonely and frustrated. She had been jilted by her handsome boyfriend when she was young. Her father had been burnt alive by her own husband because of having sold liquor to a Negro. She had also lost her child by a pre-natal operation. After

these sufferings she is certainly unhappy and depressed. When she meets Val Xavier, a handsome wild man of thirty, who can move her by his wild talk about the birds without legs which sleep in the air until they die, she feels attracted to him and cannot help desiring him as her lover.

Another important character is Carol Cutrere, who likes to make protests to the governor and against every unfairness in the town. She had been imprisoned for being an exhibitionist. She had walked barefoot in a burlap sack to deliver a personal protest to the governor of the state. She tries to seduce Val but does not succeed; though Val understands her needs, he takes her delicate wrist, examines it, and tells her she is not built for passion. She admits that the act of love-making is, for her, "almost unbearably painful, and yet, of course, I do bear it, because to be not alone, even for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger."¹⁴ Their understanding is mutual; she sees the danger for him just as he sees it for her. When he exchanges his snake-skin jacket for a blue serge coat, she protests: "You've taken off the jacket that said: 'I'm wild, I'm alone!'" and put on the nice blue uniform of the convict."¹⁵ These two anachronisms, the savage and the aristocrat, along with Lady, the foreigner, are the alien elements that disturb the town.

006940

Vee, the primitive-painter mystic, is more sympathetic. She is relieved of her former burden of Freudian "religious" paintings. Her frustrations in her marriage are clearer,

as is her repressed disgust with the horrors she sees in "lynch justice." Val understands her through his own love of music. Out of sex envy, Jabe murders Lady and Val. Hanging not being enough to sate their cruelty, the mob burns Val to death with a blowtorch.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is a "drama of the seething passions that beset a wealthy Southern family whose lives are stripped of pretense in shattering moment of revelation. Brick, the alcoholic son, is tortured by the death of his best friend and his guilt about their relationship. . . . Margaret, his wife, is tormented by her longing for the husband she cannot possess and her craving for security. . . . Big Daddy, his father, unaware that he is dying of cancer, exults in his lust for life. . . . Gathered together in a piously hypocritical celebration of Big Daddy's sixty-fifth birthday, the family's conflicts are suddenly, relentlessly exposed in an explosive series of climaxes that forces each of them to part with the half-lies that have shielded them from reality."¹⁶

The father and son have never talked frankly to one another. It is a moment of truth for Brick, and for his father, when they do have a private talk. Brick is still slim and firm; liquor has not yet visibly wrecked him. But he feels disillusioned and spent. His athletic fame and his friendship with Skipper, another football star, have been his only reasons for living. Now both are gone. Brick's wife has accused the men of having an unnatural relationship

and Skipper has committed suicide after he tries to prove himself by making love to Margaret and fails. Brick is left with his bottle and sees his wife as an enemy, recoils from sexual relations with her, and she feels as tense as a cat on a hot tin roof. In Williams' words, Maggie's tormented face, "her anxious voice, strident in the heat of combat, is unpleasantly, sometimes even odiously, disturbing" to Brick. "Too tenacious to jump off the roof although miserable on it, too passionate to leave the unspeakable unspoken,"¹⁷ she becomes shrill and hysterical. She tries to force Brick to discuss Skipper, to make him understand the hold he had on Brick, and then to come to bed with her. Mixed with love, lust, self-justification, and strength are Maggie's charm, wit, vitality, and common sense. She is catty about Mae and Gooper, her husband's brother and his wife, whom she despises; she suspects their greed; but she envies them their hideous, no-neck children. Maggie loves Brick and Big Daddy, but she also loves money. Having once been as "poor as a church mouse," she sees no romance in poverty. The title of the play itself suggests very well how frustrated she is. She is lonely and desperate because of her great love and worship of her husband, who refuses to have anything to do with her in a sexual relationship.

Big Daddy and Big Mama seem not to have much in common. He does not have any love for her, cannot even stand the sight of her. He loves only Brick and despises Gooper and Mae. But Brick wastes his life by drinking and seems to care little for his father. He always tries to avoid having a really understanding talk with his father. Big Daddy wants to know why Brick does not sleep with Maggie, why Brick quit his job

as sports announcer, and why he is so intent on throwing his life away. In return to his father's implication that he and Skipper had had an unusual relationship, he tells Big Daddy the secret that the family has kept from the old man, that he has incurable cancer.

Sweet Bird of Youth is set in a small Southern town on the Gulf of Mexico called St. Cloud. It is controlled by a powerful politician, Boss Finley, who claims to have been called there from the hills by the Voice of God. Chance Wayne, a 29-year-old man who had left St. Cloud in search of fame, has returned with a pathetic substitute --he has become the gigolo of a faded movie queen, Alexandra Del Lago, who calls herself "The Princess." The two are a study in lost youth. Alexandra is tormented by the fear that her comeback after several years of retirement was a failure. At the premiere of her comeback picture, seeing how the close-ups recorded the marks of aging, and hearing what she took to be scornful murmurs from the audience, she had dashed away in terrified flight. She had found a release from tension and self-pity at Palm Beach in the company of a handsome beach-boy-- Chance. Now they are travelling together, Chance acting as her servant-lover-nurse, bringing her oxygen to relieve her shortness of breath, preparing her hashish to settle her nerves, and satisfying her sexual desire.

Chance's good looks have won him entrance into a society where he does not belong; yet he still searches for a means to become the hero of St. Cloud. He hopes

now that his association with Alexandra can win movie fame for him and his girl, Boss Finley's daughter Heavenly. Unintentionally, long ago, he had infected Heavenly with a venereal disease which caused her to undergo a "whore's operation" and left her barren. Chance and Heavenly had become lovers while both were in their teens. She remains the single permanent thing for him. Her father, however, did not approve of their marrying. He had in mind a suitor more politically and financially useful. He threatens to castrate Chance if he does not get out of town immediately. Later, Alexandra learns that her comeback was not the failure she had believed, but a triumph. Her morale and her dignity flow back into her, and she becomes "The Princess" again. She knows, says the author, "that her future course is not a progression of triumphs." But this knowledge of temporary success lessens her depression for awhile. Then, with cruel accuracy, she analyses Chance's situation. The laurel wreath was placed too early on his golden hair, and now

the gold is thinning and the laurel is withered.
Face it - pitiful monster. . . . Of course, I
know I'm one, too. But one with a difference. . . .
Out of the passion and torment of my existence I
have created a thing that I can unveil, a sculpture,
almost heroic, that I can unveil, which is true.
But you? You've come back to the town you were
born in, to a girl that won't see you because you
put such rot in her body she had to be gutted and
hung on a butcher's hook, like a chicken dressed
for Sunday. 18

In the end, Chance, having refused to accompany Alexandra as her paid lover, chooses his doom, castration.

He is too proud to be bought again as now everything he had hoped for has been lost. His last scene on the stage is heroic. When he hears the whistled signal of his executioners, he turns to the audience in self-recognition, not self-pity, to request: "I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding - not even that - no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all."¹⁹

Chance and Alexandra are both lonely and frustrated. They are over conscious of losing youth and having to face old age. They have no one to cling to. Chance, being pushed by Boss Finley, his girl friend's father, has to strive for wealth and success, but in vain; his hope has all gone; he has to yield to his degradation and accept his fate at the end. Alexandra, approaching old age and being afraid of failure in her career, feels so lonely and desperate that she has to flee from reality by taking lovers and travelling. Francis Donahue wrote:

Chance and the Princess are striving to escape the inexorable march of Time, trying to make their jaundiced dreams come true. Chance gives us the clue when he says, "Time does it, hardens people. Time and the world you've lived in." The world he lived in turned Chance into a braggart, a blackmailing lover-on-call to Ariadne, not for passion or profit, but for a possible Hollywood contract - his last stab at fame. The Princess, likewise a fugitive from Time, is trying to escape that screen close-up which revealed, like the rings of a tree, the toll of years - years of corruption.²⁰

The play motivated Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times to take a long look back over Williams' career and

to conclude that there is an interesting new note in Sweet Bird of Youth, a feeling of pity for the two main characters:

. . . they are both empty people, fleeing emptiness in fraud and dissipation. Mr. Williams spares his characters nothing. But he does give them the dignity of knowledge of themselves, and he pities them as people who are lost and consigned to hells of their own choosing. . . .²¹

In The Mutilated, a shorter play, Williams also uses the theme of loneliness as motivation. Celeste and Trinket, two middle-aged women, have only each other to cling to, despite their scorn and hatred of each other and themselves, because they would rather be together than to be alone. Celeste is penniless, so it is necessary for her to do everything to win Trinket's friendship, even to being a blackmailer who threatens her friend to reveal the removal by surgery of one of her breasts. Trinket is lonely in spite of her wealth; she has done without love for a long time because of her fear that others will learn of her deformity. She longs to have someone to whom she can expose everything and not have to live in solitude. She finds no one except Celeste, the friend whom she tries in every possible way to reject. Thus, the two women have an uneasy truce with each other to escape the torments of loneliness.

In the chapters that follow, each of the above-mentioned plays is discussed in further detail.