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SIX PLAYS BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:
MYTH IN THE MODERN WORLD

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * * *

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"How myth gets into literature is variously explained by the Jungian racial memory, historical diffusion, or the essential similarity of the human mind everywhere." 1 This statement by John B. Vickery prefaces a 1966 collection of essays, Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice. Essentially it is an updating of the Harrison-Cornford-Murray anthropological school of criticism--it is Frazer's package of historical diffusion and the universality of the human mind tied up with the Jungian archetype. It enables the critic to examine the works of any author and to find mythic patterns and elements in these works whether the author intended them or not. Thus critics from Murray through Fergusson have discussed mythic patterns and rhythms in drama from Aeschylus through Eliot.

Certainly I could not suggest, nor would I wish to suggest, that such patterns and rhythms do not exist. This kind of criticism has offered valuable insights into the literature, particularly the drama, of the past and of the present. But when we begin to consider the number of playwrights who consciously set out to use myth as an artistic device, we begin to realize that yet another approach to these authors is necessary. It is not enough merely to
recognize the patterns of myth informing the various works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; of Gide, Cocteau, Giradoux, Sartre, Anouilh, and Ionesco; of Strindberg and Ibsen; of Eliot, O'Neill, and Williams; of the group collaborations of the Living Theater (Antigone) and the Performing Group (Dionysus in 69). The patterns, the ritual rhythms, are obvious; what must be examined now are the uses to which these elements are put. This is in no way to fall into the intentional fallacy. It is merely to recognize that a conscious use of myth exists and that, if we are to understand the dramatic impulse fully, we must understand one of the theatre's major devices and the employment of that device, the device of myth.

To date, there has only been one significant advance in this direction: in 1963 Richmond Hathorn examined a handful of major tragedies—primarily Greek—tracing them to their mythic sources and showing how their adaptations of particular myths were related to primal or archetypal patterns of fertility gods and goddesses, sacrifice and rebirth, and how they were related to the total meaning, the "mystery" which the play expressed. (Three years later Nelvin Vos published a study of comedy in which he compares the structure of comedy to the sacrifice-rebirth structure of Christianity, but he neither considers it as a conscious structural device nor evaluates its effectiveness.) This past year has produced in rapid succession three book-length
studies of myth in the drama: Hugh Dickinson's *Myth on the Modern Stage*, Angela Belli's *Ancient Greek Myths and Modern Drama: A Study in Continuity*, and Thomas Porter's *Myth and Modern American Drama*. Although all three critics are structuralists in their approach (thus departing from the Cambridge School of myth critics), all three fail to evaluate the results of the use of myth as a structural device. For Dickinson, a significant use of myth consists primarily of the dramatist's accuracy and consistency in adhering to the plot of the Greek myth. For Miss Belli, myth is a source solely of ideas—social, political, psychological, religious, philosophical—to be imposed directly, and generally superficially, on the play. And for Porter, the term "myth" is used so loosely that it can refer to any cultural milieu influencing the action—thus *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a "mythic" play because it deals with the "Southern plantation myth" or the "death of a myth." In Dickinson's book, perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most subjective of the three, there is, as Ruby Cohn points out in the December, 1969 issue of *Modern Drama*, "scant mention of the stage," and, as Miss Cohn also points out, both Miss Belli and Professor Dickinson "view modern mythic drama as part of a French cultural empire into which American tourists are admitted with proper credentials." Yet it is an American, Tennessee Williams, whose myth-infused dramas are most frequently staged today.
Williams' reputation has long been established in France, and revivals of his work have scored current success throughout Europe, while Eliot's and the "French empire's" mythic works are primarily read. And it is an American, Tennessee Williams, who uses myth in a highly theatrical way rather than relegating it to a purely thematic function—although this is certainly one of its functions—or regarding it as instant tragedy in a world hard-put to find the makings of true tragedy (the latter of which O'Neill tended to do). For these reasons it would seem profitable to examine some of Williams' works in order to discover some of the functions of myth for this prolific and frequently very successful playwright. By considering the myths in relation to certain essential elements of the play—i.e., to plot, structure, character, theme, and language—it may be possible to draw some conclusions about the uses and effectiveness of myth in the theatre of Tennessee Williams and, indirectly, in the modern theatre in general.

The first task in any discussion of myth is to determine the precise meaning "myth" is to be given. As already noted in relation to Dickinson's, Miss Belli's and Father Porter's books, the term has been employed quite differently by different critics in different times. For most nineteenth century myth scholars and some twentieth century ones (Edith Hamilton, for example), myth was the outgrowth of a natural human impulse to explain the various
phenomena of nature; a myth was a primitive scientific theory created in order to understand the origin of man, his cultures, institutions and religious rituals. "Myth," then, referred to any of the theories of origin, ritual, cult, prestige, and eschatology, as Samuel H. Hooke classifies them, whether they arose out of the Near, Middle, or Far East or the Western Graeco-Roman worlds. This is essentially an anthropological view of myth. For the metaphysician, however, a myth may be a "true story" or an allegorical one, or both. As Mircea Eliade explains it, "Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings.'" But if myth can be considered in historical terms, it can also be interpreted allegorically, for it is "sacred, exemplary, significant," and it "supplies models for human behavior and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life." As David Bidney has noted, "idealistic philosophers and theologians have, from ancient to modern times, interpreted myth allegorically as symbolizing some transcendental, timeless truth but have differed among themselves as to the nature of the object and truth so symbolized." This view is very similar to Hathorn's concept of myth as "literature that directly symbolizes man's position of mystery," i.e., the mystery of human existence. A modification of the myth-as-philosophy
concept is the view that although "myths offer . . .
 patterns of feeling and thought, . . . we are likely to
 find in them not philosophy but [as Eliot says] the
 'emotional equivalent' of philosophy. We may be sure at
 least that the myth is never philosophical without being
 something else." But whether myth is philosophy or the
 "emotional equivalent" of philosophy, the important point
 is that it does stand for something else. Once its element
 of allegory and symbolism are focused upon, the potential
 for the use of myth as an artistic device is obvious.

 There is a dissenting voice, however, in Joseph
 Campbell. "Mythology," says Campbell, "is psychology,
 misread as cosmology, history, and biography." Turning
 to the psychologists, we find myth viewed in quite another
 light. The general opinion of the early psychoanalysts
 (Freud, Abraham, and Rank), is that myths are "group
 phantasies," wish-fulfillments, sex symbolism. The
 anthropologist critics are not unaffected by this view;
 Jane E. Harrison cites Freud in her definition of myth:

 The myth is not an attempted explanation of either
 facts or rites. . . . The myth is a fragment of the
 soul life, the dream-thinking of the people, as the
 dream is the myth of the individual. As Freud says,
 "it is probable that myths correspond to the dis-
torted residue of the wish phantasies of whole
 nations, the secularized dreams of young humanity."
 Mythical tradition it would seem does not set forth
 any actual account of old events--that is the
 function of legend--but rather myth acts in such a
 way that it always reveals a wish-thought common to
 humanity and constantly rejuvenated.
Jung departs from the Freudian analytic interpretations, but accepts the universal psychological basis of myth. And finally, Erich Neumann, in his important studies of the Great Mother and the origins of consciousness, builds upon the theory of the collective unconscious, applying Jung's concept to the modern consciousness. Quoting Jung, Neumann declares: "Myth is the primordial language natural to these [unconscious] psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical imagery. Such processes deal with the primordial images, and these are best and most succinctly reproduced by figurative speech." This "figurative speech" is the language of the symbol, the original language of the unconscious and of mankind. Thus myth—whether it originated as science, history, philosophy or psychology—is a way of saying one thing in terms of another. Essentially, myth is symbol, and once this symbolism, with its "primordial images" of the archetypes and language of myth is fully focused upon, the potential for myth as an artistic device becomes clearer still.

That Tennessee Williams uses myth consciously as a dramatic device is not difficult to establish. Williams set the pattern with his first published short story in 1928. Based on a passage from Herodotus, the story opens
with the pagan priests of the city casting themselves against the stones of the pavement in an act of expiation for a great sacrilege which had been committed. They are the forerunners of the sacrificial Christ-figures and vegetation gods of the later stories, plays, and poems--the mythic figures planted prominently throughout Williams' work. There are the Christs of Orpheus Descending, Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore; there is the biblical Lot in Kingdom of Earth; there is the phoenix, central to Camino Real and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, as well as I Rise in Flame Cried the Phoenix. Additional mythic figures or derivatives are sprinkled liberally and obviously throughout the plays, stories, and poems. A cursory glance will produce a substantial list--Apollo, Medea, Prometheus, Bacchus, Neptune, Eros, Cupid, Aphrodite, Ariadne, Diana, the Furies, the griffin, and the Elysian Fields; Cassandra and Clytemnestra; Buddha; Adam, St. Paul, St. Sebastian, St. Valentine, and innumerable variations of Mary and Christ, together with chalices, lyres, crucifixes, statues of stone angels and hermaphroditic figures on dolphins, and other mythic artifacts. With such evidence there is little need to point to Williams' acknowledged wide-reading in his grandfather's classical library, to his exposure to Christian myth through his grandfather's Episcopalian
ministry and his brother's Roman Catholic crusading, or to his semester's study of Greek at Washington University. They do, however, further attest to Williams' knowledge (be it shallow or profound) of particular myths and of certain major mythic symbols which can be employed for literal purposes (plot or structure) and for metaphysical purposes.

That Williams is aware of the psychological aspects of myth is likewise clear. If myth is the "primordial language" of the unconscious mind of universal man, Williams has certainly had sufficient occasion to assimilate these images, either directly from the psychoanalysts themselves or indirectly from literary influences rich in psychological symbols such as Rilke, Rimbaud, Lawrence, and Proust. His year of psychoanalysis with Dr. Lawrence Kubie, begun in the spring of 1957, also spurred him to read widely in related subjects and increased his familiarity with psychological symbolism and its meaning. Nevertheless, Williams was already familiar with much psychological symbolism. In Battle of Angels, his first play to be produced professionally (1945), his protagonist is amused by Vee Talbott's painting of the red steeple of the Church of the Resurrection, much as the audience is amused by the fact that Serafina del Rosa's virile lovers both drive truckloads of bananas. And in reference to the
film-version of Sweet Bird of Youth, Williams could speak of the slashing of Chance's face as a psychological equivalent of physical castration.

Although Freudian symbols are perhaps the most obvious (and there is practically no critic who has not noted them and generally castigated Williams for them), there are still the more mythically—and, for the most part, artistically significant—Jungian images and themes. Williams has referred to the great influence of D. H. Lawrence and has acknowledged his early familiarity with the Letters of D. H. Lawrence in which Lawrence mentions Jung and his mother-incest theory, the Magna-Mater, the Terrible Mother, and the male's struggle against death in the womb. It was these letters which influenced Williams greatly when he was creating his vision of Lawrence in 1941 (I Rise in Flame Cried the Phoenix, produced in 1951). Williams has referred also to Frieda Lawrence's grip on her husband in a letter to Paul Bigelow in October of 1941. Describing the play in terms of Jung's "human odyssey" and mother-incest theories, Williams observed that it is "the story of a woman's devotion to a man of genius and a man's, a sort of satyr's, pilgrimage through times inimical to natural beings—a would-be satyr never quite released from the umbilicus." He later reiterated the danger of the Freudian and Jungian maternal world in a television
interview with Mike Wallace when he explained that his and all neuroses sprang from "infantile omnipotence," the security to which we become accustomed as children and whose inevitable loss outrages us. And on yet another occasion, referring to material security, he called it "a kind of death," declaring that it could be escaped "unless you embrace the Bitch Goddess, as William James called her, with both arms and find in her smothering caresses exactly what the homesick little boy in you always wanted, absolute protection and utter effortlessness." This is not to psychoanalyse Williams. It is simply to point out the playwright's familiarity with the Freudian and particularly the Jungian concepts and images—concepts and images which appear throughout his work.

It is impossible not to believe, even after such a brief survey of the evidence as this, that the mother-lovers, the cornucopias and other sundry womb symbols, that the son-lovers, the saviors, the deaths and rebirths—only to begin the list—are highly conscious, perhaps even self-conscious, uses of the "unconscious" images of myth. Indeed, Williams' very theory of symbolism is a paraphrase of the Jungian "collective unconscious": "We all have in our conscious and unconscious minds a great vocabulary of images, and I think all human communication is based on these images as are our dreams...." The extent, of
course, to which these symbols—both metaphysical and psychological—are integrated with one another and with the work as a whole will vary, but this does not affect the consciousness with which the symbols are employed. Only a writer who is keenly aware of the allegorical significance of his language could conclude a story with the creation of this curious monument: "It showed three figures of indeterminate gender astride a leaping dolphin. One bore a crucifix, one a cornucopia, and one a Grecian lyre."

In 1957, Orpheus Descending, the play which Williams had been revising for seventeen years, opened on Broadway. Although the full extent of the mythic device in this play, as in those that followed, has not yet been determined, the play marked a point in Williams' work in which the obvious use of myth—as illustrated by Val Xavier, the Orpheus and Christ figure—merged with the less obvious but no less significant mythic pattern of the vegetation god who is sacrificed in the name of the earth goddess and who, through his sacrifice, is reborn. In the decade following, Orpheus Descending was to be established as an archetype. Its basic Christ-vegetation god pattern was repeated in at least five of Williams' later full-length plays: Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, The Night of the Iguana, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and Kingdom of
Earth. Examination of the plays—three of them major successes—reveals that each revolves essentially about god and goddess, sacrifice and rebirth. Although specific Christian and classical myths are frequently referred to—there are Christs, Marys, and any number of martyrs and saints, as well as such Greek and Roman deities as Aphrodite, Athena, Eros, Venus, Orpheus, Dionysus, Hermes, Apollo, Prometheus, etc.—Williams' mythic pattern more often involves a much looser framework. There is something of Frazer's dying gods in these plays, for example. There are Attis and Kybele, Adonis and Astarte, Osiris and Isis. But much of the seasonal myth is drawn from outside the realm of The Golden Bough. Adonis and Aphrodite, Dionysus and Semele, Tammuz and Ishtar, Dumuzi and Inanna—all are vegetation gods and goddesses and all share many of the characteristics of the more popularly-known myths. It should also be observed that there is in these myths—by their very nature—much violence: sacrifice and death by immolation, dismemberment, and crucifixion; castration, rape, and cannibalism. There is even—surprisingly or not, depending on how well we know our myths—androgyny, hermaphroditism, transvestism, and homosexuality. These provide a good deal of the violence and perversion which permeate Williams' work and are generally condemned as "gothic" at best and sensationalism at worst. A study of his use of
myth may also help to explain something of this use of violence and perversion.

Clearly, Tennessee Williams has selected the use of myth as a major dramatic vehicle. And clearly, that vehicle must be studied if we are fully to understand and accurately to evaluate Williams' work. We must recognize the elements of the vehicle—the types of myth that are employed and the ways in which those types—Greek, Christian, Middle Eastern, Oriental, etc.—are integrated. We must also recognize the levels on which the vehicle operates. An understanding of the myth usage in Orpheus Descending, the archetype of Williams' mythic plays, is the first step toward such recognition.
NOTES


4Middle Eastern Mythology (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), pp. 11-16.


6Ibid., pp. 1-2.


9Richard Chase, "Notes on the Study of Myth," Myth and Literature, p. 73.


ORPHEUS DESCENDING AS ARCHETYPE

Orpheus Descending opened on Broadway on March 21, 1957 after at least five rewrites following its original production in 1945 as Battle of Angels. It closed after sixty-eight performances. Although in his introduction to the published play Williams claims that "about 75 per cent of it is new writing," the plot is essentially unchanged from that which he had conceived seventeen years earlier. As Williams himself points out, "on its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop."¹ To summarize: Val Xavier wanders into a small-town store operated by Lady Torrance whose husband, Jabe, is dying of cancer. Val's animal magnetism attracts all the women of the town from Vee Talbott, the religious fanatic whose "visions" become centered around him, to Carol Cutrere, the rebellious rich girl who finds meaning only in sex, to Lady Torrance herself, who seeks Val's attentions and becomes pregnant by him, finding fulfillment at last. But having discovered that Jabe was among the men who had burned her father's wine garden and caused his death, Lady is determined to hold a
gala opening of the confectionary she has created while Jabe is still alive in order to "square things away, to . . . be not defeated." In the meantime Sheriff Talbott has discovered Val's effect on his wife's visions and ordered him out of the county. Before Val can leave, however, Jabe attempts to kill him, but kills Lady instead. Val is accused of the shooting and is burned to death with a blowtorch. It is a violent, melodramatic, but straightforward and uncomplicated plot which holds little hint of mythic influences.

Nevertheless, the play is an archetype in itself, for the presence of not one but two specific myths in addition to a whole underlying mythic mechanism makes Orpheus Descending the axis of all of Williams' myth-inspired plays. In his chapter on Williams, Hugh Dickinson (Myth on the Modern Stage) selects the original Battle of Angels version as the archetype. His choice seems unfair, however, for Orpheus Descending is Williams' first mature production in which myth figures so obviously and so extensively. In the original version, not only is the Orpheus myth missing or obscure, but the vegetation god myth is altogether absent. The god-goddess and sacrifice-rebirth pattern which informs all of Williams' subsequent plays is not a part of Battle of Angels. Because Orpheus Descending is the archetype, then, of the mythic plays, it
is important to view it in considerable detail and to
determine the full extent of the myth usage while, at the
same time, providing the framework for an understanding
of the mythic device in the other five plays. Williams
employs two specific myths in Orpheus Descending, that of
Orpheus and that of Christ. The title itself announces
the classical framework of the play. Although the Orpheus
myth was directly alluded to only in the revised version,
classical parallels were nevertheless a definite element in
the original Battle of Angels (first published in Pharos in
1945). The original of Carol Cutrere was named Cassandra
Whiteside, and she made obvious reference to her classical
namesake, "a little Greek girl who slept in the shrine of
Apollo. Her ears were snake-bitten, like mine. . . ."3 The
gift of prophecy signified by the snake-bitten ears was
retained by Carol, but like Cassandra of the myth and
Cassandra of Battle she is doomed not to be heeded. In the
earlier version of the play, as in Orpheus, Williams had made
an issue of the trees on Cypress Hill where Cassandra-Carol
goes "jooking." The cypress tree is the tree sacred to
Artemis (Diana), goddess of the moon, twin sister of
Apollo, and the Lady of Wild Things, and Cassandra-Carol
is a votary of Wild Things as well as being a wild creature
herself, rejecting all conventional codes and declaring
fiercely, "I RUN WITH NOBODY!" (p. 59) Indeed it is her
recognition of the wild, Dionysiac quality in Val that attracts her to him. Cassandra tells him: "That snakeskin jacket, those eyes... You're beautiful, you're wild," (Battle, p. 160) and when he accepts the suit of a salesman Carol tells him: "You're in danger here, Snakeskin. You've taken off the jacket that said: 'I'm wild, I'm alone!' and put on the nice blue uniform of a convict!" (O.D., p. 59)

Since the plot was changed very little during the rewriting, it is possible that Williams had the Orpheus myth in mind in the 1940 version. At any rate, he made an obvious point of the parallel in his new version by titling it Orpheus Descending, and critics have made a game of fitting the plot to the myth. As Gerald Weales remarks: "It is amusing... to see Orpheus (Val) with his lyre (guitar), descending into Hades (a small southern town) to rescue Eurydice (Lady) from Death (Jabe)."4 Dickinson is more specific, labelling Jabe Pluto, god of the underworld, the stage villain.5 In addition to these parallels, several critics see Val in terms of the artist archetype, suggested by Orpheus' renown as a musician, while Esther Jackson unsympathetically tags Vee, Carol, and Lady all as "reveling maenads" "who envy his strange and magical music."6 Except for the latter--an unfounded charge since none of the women are directly responsible for Val's death--I would take
issue with none of these parallels, although I would note that Val was not seeking Lady—in fact he resisted her advances before finally becoming her lover. What I would take issue with, however, is the fact that when drawing the parallels between Orpheus' and Val's lives, no critic looks beyond the Orpheus-Eurydice episode, in spite of the fact that in his attempt to rescue Eurydice from the underworld, Orpheus was not destroyed as Val was. He lost his beloved just as she was about to re-enter the world of the living, but he did not die as a result of his attempted rescue or his loss. It is, therefore, important to recognize that in Williams' play it is not just a matter of Orpheus descending but of Orpheus descending. This means that in relation to the mythical basis or parallels of the plot and of Val's characterization, all the aspects of the Orpheus legend and not merely this episode may be pertinent and must be considered.

If we are talking about Orpheus descending, we are talking about the son or at least an emissary of Apollo—a gentle, ascetic person and musician supreme in his art, who gathered wild creatures to him by his music, who preached his ascetic beliefs and the worship of Apollo to a society which lived the religion of Dionysus, and whose death—a violent one followed by a kind of rebirth—was the beginning of Orphism.
As a musician, his song was said to have magical powers for the Greeks and his name was associated with magic—with charms, spells, and incantations. According to W. K. C. Guthrie in his exhaustive study of Orpheus and the Orphic movement, "for at least a thousand years it was a name to conjure with." For Williams, Orpheus is an artist-archetype as he was for Rilke (who had selected Orpheus as his ideal poet for a sonnet sequence and whose work was known to Williams), and Val is patterned on this concept. In *Battle of Angels*, Val frequently alludes to his work-in-progress, the "Book of Life," and the allusions lead most critics to view him as the Suffering Poet. But in *Orpheus Descending* Val has turned in his Book of Life for a guitar, quite likely in order to be more consistent with his newly-announced mythical basis. Val's music, like that of Orpheus, possesses an enchanting power. Williams, however, has cast it in a sexual context in his play, using it to draw Lady into the alcove "like a spell-bound child" and to reassure her in a moment of uncertainty just before Val makes love to her. (p. 81)

If there are sexual overtones in Val's music, there are also religious ones. Traditionally Orpheus was "not only a singer, but a religious one," and he sang of "the gods and their relationships, and the origin of all things. . . ." Val describes his guitar in simplisitic
religious terms: it is "my life's companion! It washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched me..." He speaks of Leadbelly, King Oliver, Bessie Smith, and Fats Waller with reverence, calling them "immortal[s]" whose names are "written in the stars" (p. 37), and when he begins to sing "Heavenly Grass" we sense that he regards his own music and singing as expressing a kind of lyric, almost elegiac, religion. Published in 1946 in the Blue Mountain Ballads collection, "Heavenly Grass" expresses the longing for freedom from the weight and corruption of earth:

My feet took a walk in heavenly grass.
All day while the sky shone clear as glass.
My feet took a walk in heavenly grass,
All night while the lonesome stars rolled past.
Then my feet come down to walk on earth,
And my mother cried when she give me birth.
Now my feet walk far and my feet walk fast,
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.

Val's image of the tiny birds without legs that "sleep on the wind and--never light on this earth but one time when they die" (p. 44) expresses the same longing for freedom. It is this freedom that Val is seeking and it is this freedom that has become Val's "religion." Like Orpheus and Artemis-Carol, Val is a champion of "Wild Things."

The twin sister of Apollo and the son of Apollo both are the representatives of the creatures of the wild. Carol is infamous for her refusal to be bound by convention, and
Val will accept no bonds, not even to a woman for whom he has, for the first time, felt "a true love." (p. 107)

When Carol offers the Conjure Man a dollar for the Choctaw cry, the Negro "utters a series of sharp barking sounds that rise to a sustained cry of great intensity and wildness," and immediately "Val sweeps back the alcove curtain and appears as if the cry were his cue." (pp. 102-103) And when he dies, Carol buys his snakeskin jacket from the Conjure Man murmuring, "Wild things leave skins behind them . . . and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind. . . ." (p. 117)

Yet there is an important difference here between Orpheus and Val. If Orpheus gathered wild things to him, he also tamed them, soothed them, and made them gentle—unlike Val. And in teaching the arts of agriculture as he did, Orpheus was, in a sense, binding men to the earth. Williams has taken from the Orpheus legend a Dionysiac quality which reflects his own ideal of life and enlarges upon it for thematic purposes. But if, in his glorification of absolute freedom from conventional bonds and conventional morality, Williams has wavered for a moment in the direction of Dionysus, the god who, in later tradition, hated Orpheus for his worship of Apollo, he hastily qualifies his religion of freedom. If Carol regards sex as synonymous
with life, Val has denounced it as a part of the corruption of his life. Williams has made Val become, temporarily, an ascetic like Orpheus who renounced sensual pleasures after Eurydice's death and taught the arts of peace, making men give up their frenzied animal sacrifices and cannibalistic feasts. Again the parallel is loose, even strained, for while Val denounces the "sins of his past life" and declares that he has lived in corruption without being corrupted, nevertheless, he has once again found pleasure in sex (even though it is now related to "true love"). Williams has placed the romantic concept of free love alongside the austerity of Orphic asceticism, and the alliance appears illogical if not contradictory in terms of the Orpheus myth.

In terms of plot and another mythic aspect, however, the freedom theme is not so illogical. Williams' modern rendering of Orpheus' rescuing Eurydice from the dead is for Lady to regain her fertility, only to have her lose both her life and that of her child moments before she is to open the confectionery and return fully to the world of the living. It would hardly be appropriate for the child that is the symbol of new life to be a product of a lust-union, and Williams avoids this by spiritualizing Val's "backsliding" and calling it "true love." As for the mythic aspect, Williams is not as unfaithful to the Orpheus myth as he first appears. In the course of the evolution of the
Orphic and Dionysiac cults, Orpheus paradoxically became identified with Dionysus whose beauty and ability to charm wild beasts with his music was equal to that of Orpheus and who was represented as a wild-spirited youth who knew no bonds. Like Orpheus, Dionysus suffered death by dismemberment and was subsequently reborn. Robert Graves gives evidence of Orpheus' and Dionysus' interchangeability in his study of Greek mythology: "This [Thracian] Orpheus did not come in conflict with the cult of Dionysus; he was Dionysus. . . . Thus Proclus (Commentary on Plato's Politics: p. 398) writes: 'Orpheus, because he was the principal in the Dionysian rites, is said to have suffered the same fate as the god,' and Apollodorus (i.3.2) credits him with having invented the Mysteries of Dionysus."

More must be said about the Dionysus myth and the freedom theme later, for they are related to still another aspect of Williams' use of myth, and the effects of the theme can be considered only in relation to the total myth usage. In the meantime, however, there is another characteristic which is traditionally associated with Orpheus and which Williams has attributed to Val, and that is gentleness. That gentleness so characteristic of his music was characteristic of Orpheus also; according to Guthrie it was "his outstanding quality." Like Orpheus, Val has an aura of gentleness and calmness about him. It is the tenderness with which Val sings that enables Lady
to enter the alcove after the music has drawn her to it and to Val, and in his stage directions, Williams continually emphasizes the softness and tenderness of his speech and mannerisms, even when he is rejecting the women's advances. He moves slowly, speaks quietly, and reacts almost passively throughout the play. Referring to Orpheus' manner and his rejection of the women whose husbands he lured away by his music and his teachings, Guthrie notes that this gentleness amounted "at times to softness," and he notes the charges of homosexuality which were a part of the Orpheus legend: "After the loss of his wife . . . Orpheus shunned entirely the company of women, and so did not avoid the report which so often attaches to those who live celibate lives, of having another outlet for his passions. He became for some the originator of homosexual love." This, continues Guthrie, is mentioned by the poet Phanokles and by Ovid, for the Alexandrians "active misogyny was a part of Orpheus' character." His refusal to worship Dionysus, as one legend has it, is likewise interpreted by Guthrie as a "very natural corollary of anti-feminism," and it is interesting that Williams should select such a figure for his ideal protagonist. Indeed, Stanley Edgar Hyman has claimed that the "Albertine-strategy" runs throughout Williams' plays and stories, the strategy employed by Proust (whom Williams considers the genius of our century)
in which "Albertine" is substituted for "Albert" in order to portray a homosexual relationship more discreetly and in order "to put the experience of tormented love in more conventional heterosexual terms and thus make it more readily accessible to the majority of his readers."¹³

That homosexuality is an important theme in Williams' work is obvious--Sebastian Venable and Lot, two of the characters who will be discussed at length in a later chapter, are either clearly homosexual, asexual, or bisexual (Lot is a transvestite also), while numerous others, Brick Pollitt (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), Christopher Flanders (*The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*), Kilroy (*Camino Real*), and even Shannon (*The Night of the Iguana*) have curiously passive attitudes toward sex. When they do act as lovers they invariably play the more feminine role of submissive lovers, while the women play the role of aggressors. They are in direct contrast to Serafina del Rosa's virile husband and lover and to Stanley Kowalski, and they appear frequently in Williams' short stories and in his novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*. Like Val, they are gentle, frequently with an artist's sensitivity; like Val, they either reject sex (and thus women) altogether, or they find it ultimately without meaning; like Val they are dispassionate when sexual overtures are made, and if they do submit, it is with a passivity uncharacteristic of the
male. Even Williams' openly homosexual, bisexual, and otherwise abnormal characters play passive roles. The poet, in the story of that title, finds "the sexual hunger of strangers . . . visited on him. This would occur when bodily exhaustion had overtaken him after some great expansion of vision and when he had crept for refuge into an areaway." In "Desire and the Black Masseur," the little man finds sexual satisfaction in the sadism of the masseur and discovers that "the only need is to surrender, to take what comes and ask no questions about it: and this was something that Burns was expressly made for." In "One Arm" Oliver Winemiller submits to "the fingers of others, hundreds of stranger's fingers," but finds that "the excitement he stirred in others [is] incomprehensible and disgusting to him." Val Xavier reacts much the same way to heterosexual love and he may even be another bisexual example. He may have "run with" the B girls of all-night bars and "been on a Goddam party" since he was fifteen (p. 22), but he is noticeably ambiguous in his remark that "I learned that I had something to sell besides snakeskins and other wild things' skins I caught on the bayou. I was corrupted!" (p. 49) In Williams' work, when a man sells himself, it isn't necessarily to women, as Oliver illustrates. Generally a Williams character--male or female--is "corrupted" not by sex, but by perverted sex--Chance
Wayne, Blanche Dubois, Catherine Holly, Serafina del Rosa, Carol Cutrere, Lady Torrance—to list only a few—all have sexual experience outside of marriage, some are flagrantly promiscuous, but none are presented as "corrupted" by their encounters when they are with the opposite sex.

If the sexual hunger of strangers has been visited on Val Xavier, however, he makes it clear that he is "done with all that." (p. 40) He tells Lady that "love is only the make-believe answer" and, with a misogynist's viewpoint, he claims seduction by the young girl on the Bayou who stood naked before him: she wasn't the "answer" but "she made me think that she was." (p. 48) He rejects Carol, the fragile, wild creature who sees her own wildness reflected in him; he is moved by Lady Torrance's impassioned outcry that she needs him, yet she must make the initial advances and she makes the final advances also while he waits passively for her to come to him. This varies considerably from the 1940 version in which Val is strongly attracted to Myra—his voice is "hoarse" with passion and he breaks open the back room which Myra has locked in order to prevent them from making love there. In the 1940 version Val and Myra are both intense and passionate; in the 1957 version Lady is intense and passionate while Val is soft and passive. The reason for the change of character must partially be a matter of characterization and plot
expediency—if Val encouraged Myra, then he would be thrust into a villain's role when he insists on leaving. In the final version his resistance to Lady's advances helps to free him in the audience's eyes of any obligation to her—he has acted out of "a natural sensibility of heart" (p. 105) and when he must leave he must leave. Yet the same passivity which makes him less a villain also gives Val much more in common with Sebastian Venable, the homosexual poet created the same year, with the later Christopher Flanders, an essentially asexual poet, and with the earlier homosexual or passive bisexual protagonists of the short stories and the novel.

It is important that we ultimately view these homosexual and asexual predilections of Williams' characters in relation to the total meaning of his plays; for the moment, however, it is sufficient that this is another tendency which Val has in common with Orpheus, another characteristic which may have had a direct effect on Williams' characterization of his myth-inspired protagonist.

The final aspect of the Orpheus myth to be considered involves the death of Orpheus-Val, another major departure from the simple Orpheus-Eurydice legend commented on by the critics. According to Guthrie there are several versions of his death, of what form it took and how it came about. All involve violence: Orpheus committed suicide after his wife's death; he was killed by a thunderbolt of the god Zeus.
for an offense similar to Prometheus'— for having taught men, in his mysteries, things unknown to them before; he was murdered by his own countrymen who did not accept his religious teachings; he was murdered by the women of Thrace. The reasons in this last, most traditional, version (it is the popular one told in Bulfinch) vary. Aeschylus depicts Orpheus as a dedicated worshipper of the Sun-god Apollo, thus angering Dionysus, who was attempting to win the Thracians to his own religion. It is said that in his rage, Dionysus sent his women converts out, and in Bacchic frenzy they tore Orpheus to pieces, just as they had destroyed King Pentheus. Konon, on the other hand, accepts the version of the women's frenzy, but he attributes a different motive to it, claiming that they were angered at Orpheus' refusal to initiate them into his mysteries. Virgil introduces another interesting point. He tells us that after Eurydice's death, Orpheus ignored—even disdained—all women. Pusonias adds to this the fact that he was reputed to have drawn all the warriors to him by his music, which had magical powers, and that he had in fact enticed them away from their wives. Ovid and Phanakles follow Pusonias in his story that in their anger and resentment at this, the women destroyed him. Guthrie notes that most Grecian vase paintings depict Orpheus at the mercy of angry women and that some vase-paintings also suggest the
enticement of men and disdain of women in their scenes of Orpheus charming the Thracian warriors with his lyre.

In paralleling these several versions to Williams' play, death by suicide and death by Zeus—or any other god—can obviously be ruled out. Two of the legends, however—murder by men who refuse to accept his teachings or murder by those he disdained and who hated him for drawing their spouses from them—merit serious consideration. Although Val does not preach a religion as Orpheus did, he represents a kind of religion, if "religion" can be understood on a natural level, as a conception and way of life based on certain principles. The central principle, indeed the only one, of Val's religion is, as has been seen earlier, freedom. Freedom from conventional morality; freedom from human ties—freedom to move on after one has "got in deeper than [he] meant to" (p. 106); freedom to desert the woman who is pregnant with his child. But this is not what the townsmen resent in Val. He has not preached his Dionysiac principle or his freedom-from-the-corruptions-of-earth theory to them. He does share it with some of the women—Vee, Lady, and Carol. But Vee would not crucify her Christ, and Carol would take him away from the danger in Two Rivers County, and although she would try to bind him to her, she has no part in his death. Likewise, if we argue that it is Lady's attempt to hold Val that causes his death we are
overlooking the fact that Val does not leave immediately but willingly remains to tell her he loves her. It is his own momentary surrender of his freedom, then, that brings about his death.

Nevertheless, although rejection of his teachings is not immediately responsible for his death, the actions resulting from Val's teachings do predispose the men to resent Val, for Val, in spite of his denunciation of sex and in spite of his passivity toward women, consciously or unconsciously attracts every woman in the town by his magical power, i.e., his sexual magnetism and not his lyre-guitar (unless we accept the interpretation offered by many critics that the guitar is intended as a phallic symbol and that his music, therefore, is his sexuality). Be that as it may, in sharing his ideas about corruption and freedom and life with Vee, Carol, and Lady, Val nevertheless affects the women more by his animal magnetism than by his philosophizing, and he brings on the rage of Sheriff Talbott and Jabe, as well as the envy and sadism of the husbands of the other women of the town. His death is the consequence.

Still, placing Val's death beside the Orpheus myth, we must note that it is the women and not the men who are enticed by Val's power, and it is the men who resent their wives' attraction to Val rather than vice versa as in the
myth. It is the men who take up the blowtorch in sadistic frenzy: they "cry out together in hoarse passion . . . their faces lit . . . like the faces of demons as the flame of the blow-torch "stabs the dark." (pp. 116-117) And it is the men who burn Val to death. Yet their violence is committed for the same reasons that the Thracian women were said to have dismembered Orpheus. Apparently recognizing the extremism of a mob of female sadists and seeing a substitute in the sadistic Southern sheriff and poor-white-trash stereotypes, Williams simply inverts the Orpheus account for the sake of probability, a necessary modification, although because of its reliance on a stereotype it is a melodramatic one also. In his other versions of the Orpheus myth, however, Williams does adhere more closely to the frenzied-women tradition. In the poem "Orpheus Descending," Orpheus is "dismembered by Furies,"18 while in the Battle of Angels version of the play Val is hunted down by the demented woman from Waco. In her fury at having been spurned--she had gone to Val's room one night when he was drunk, and he had then become disgusted by the incident--she had charged him with rape, and a warrant is out for his arrest. He is tracked down by her and his death is a result of her vengeance. But in the revision, Williams omits this incident. He uses Vee's more credible obsession with Val instead as the catalyst for the final action, thereby simplifying the plot.
One other aspect of Orpheus' and Val's deaths should perhaps be mentioned here, and that is the manner of their destruction. The traditional legends hold that Orpheus was dismembered, although some scholars also indicate a tradition of crucifixion. In the original version of the play, Val was hanged from a cottonwood tree (being hanged from, bound to, or nailed to a tree are all crucifixion equivalents). In the final version there is some confusion as to the manner of death. The men talk of getting a rope, which suggests lynching, but they are diverted by the blowtorch, and in the end we hear Val's screams. Being burned to death has no direct relationship to crucifixion, but it is a classical as well as an Old Testament form of sacrifice. Originally, Williams intended to create a kind of holocaust, but attempting to stage the confectionery blaze was so disastrous on opening night (the first ten rows of the audience were smoked out) that he abandoned this idea, and resorted, in classical manner, to the off-stage burning. In The Fugitive Kind, the movie based on Orpheus Descending, however, Williams reverted to the original theme of holocaust and purification or baptism by fire. The confectionery is blazing out of control, and the camera moves away as Val, arms outspread in crucifixion style, is being forced backward into the flames. Thus, whether by fire or crucifixion, Val, like Orpheus, dies in
the manner of a sacrifice, and his death thus involves a suggestion of classical and Christian atonement of suffering for the sins and for the salvation of others. Yet, like Orpheus, Val is an object of his slayers' wrath and not merely a random victim of a Bacchic orgy. Val is destroyed for what he represents just as Orpheus was destroyed for what he represented. In this respect the Orpheus-Val parallel is related to the Christ-Val parallel in which crucifixion and sacrifice figure even more prominently.

Let it be noted, however, that immolation—even crucifixion—has its classical counterparts, although the full significance in terms of myth-usage cannot be determined until it has been seen in conjunction with the Old Testament and Christian meanings.

Likewise, the fact that Orpheus was "reborn"—or at least could not be entirely destroyed—should be mentioned in relation to the classical as well as the Christian myth. The suggestion of Val's "resurrection" is stressed even more in the revision than in the original, the action being moved from Good Friday to Easter Saturday, with constant emphasis on the risen, rather than the crucified, Christ. As Vee says—"I mean Crucified and then RISEN!" (p. 92)

Although this is obviously a reference to the Christian myth, Williams gives Orpheus his proper homage by suggesting the Orphic associations with magic by means of the old Negro
Conjure Man and by the aura of mystery surrounding the "relics" of Battle and the snakeskin jacket of Orpheus. This suggestion of magic can also be interpreted, in a limited sense, in terms of the Orphic as well as the Christian religion, for if Williams does not permit Val's head to go on singing as Orpheus' did, he does make a point of the Conjure Man's elevating the snakeskin jacket to be revered in either Christian or classical fashion. (In Battle, the jacket reposes in the temple of the Val Xavier "museum" where it miraculously gathers no dust and where the Conjure Man likewise elevates it for all to see.) The point apparently is, as Guthrie remarks, that "the end of Orpheus was the beginning of Orphism."19

This is a valid enough observation, for Orpheus was, for the Greeks, a founder of a religion. And Val's concern with corruption, purification, alienation, and his longing to be free from the corruptions of the earth constitute the essence of Orphism. "The Orphic . . . believed that the source of evil lay in the body with its appetites and passions, which must therefore be subdued if we are to rise to the heights which it is in us to attain."20 Certainly Val's denunciation of his "corruption" by sex, and his vow that he has "done with all that" parallels this basic precept of Orphism. "The belief behind it [Orphism] is that this present life is for the soul a punishment for previous
sin, and the punishment consists precisely in this, that it is fettered to the body. This is for it a calamity, and is compared sometimes to being shut up in a prison. . . . 21 Val's longing to be like the bird that never lights on the earth until the day it dies expresses his longing to be free of the earth, the source of corruption, and, although he does not say that he believes it to be a punishment for previous sin, Val's despair at the imprisonment of the soul in the body is similar to the Orphics' concept, and his reference to that imprisonment as a "sentence" suggests a punishment: "Nobody ever gets to know no body! We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! . . . I'm tellin' you it's the truth, we got to face it, we're under a life-long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!" (p. 47) And finally, according to Gurthrie, "the Orphic life aims at the exaltation and purification of our Dionysiac nature in order that we may in the end shake off the last trammels of our earthly selves and become actually, what we are now potentially, gods instead of mortals." 22 Val declares, "I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted" because the guitar, "my life's companion, . . . washes me clean when anything unclean has touched me," (p. 37) and later says that he was "corrupted" by his life in New Orleans, (p. 49) but he is,
like the Orphics, trying to "shake off the . . . trammels of our earthly selves and become . . . gods instead of mortals." Perhaps this is what the final holocaust and emphasis on resurrection signifies—that Val has succeeded in his efforts. It is a success which we must take on faith, however, for Williams has not been able, for practical reasons of probability, to depict literally the resurrection of his mythic model anymore than he has been able to have Val dismembered by a band of frenzied women. It may be that Williams intends only to depict the effort and not the success. At any rate, he has only been able to leave Carol as apostle of the religion Val has founded, with his snakeskin jacket as a relic of the god and a symbol of his religion.

What, essentially, does this show? In the first place we have seen precisely to what extent Williams has adhered to his classical myth: that he has followed, in a general sense, the outline of the Orpheus-Eurydice legend; that in injecting the Dionysus theme, he has altered Orpheus' kinship with wildness but maintained close parallels to his artistry and qualities of gentleness and passivity (the latter tending toward homosexuality or bisexuality); that in Val's death he has conjoined the reasons for and the manner of Orpheus' death, modifying them on the plot level for the sake of probability; and that he has suggested a
resurrection and establishment of a religion insofar as his intentions and the principles of realism and probability will permit. In short, we have seen that there is a good deal more of the Orpheus myth in Williams' play than is recognized by the critics and, more than likely, by the audience. Needless to say, this does not in itself imply merit—that is a problem which must be dealt with after the presence of the Christian myth has been discussed. Nevertheless, it is important that we recognize the parallels between the Orpheus myth in its totality and Val's story and character, for it is impossible to determine the value a myth has in a play without having determined the extent to which the myth has been used.

That this myth has been used consciously has been generally established in the first chapter. Williams' extensive knowledge of the Orpheus legend and character in its entirety is also clear, as evidenced by a reading of the poem "Orpheus Descending" in which he alludes not only to Orpheus' descent into Hades, but to Eurydice's death by a snake-bite on her foot, to Orpheus' renown as a musician with unusual powers, and to his death by dismemberment. His acquaintance with Rilke's work has also been noted, and it is highly unlikely that he was not familiar with the poet's Orpheus Sonnets. With this much detail of the legend clearly known to Williams, then, it must be assumed that he
was well aware of the parallels I have pointed to. At any rate—apart from his awareness or lack of it—the parallels exist.

Having discovered, at least superficially, the extent to which a dramatist has employed a specific myth, we would generally turn at once to a consideration of the effect such a usage has on plot, character, theme, technique, staging, etc. Orpheus Descending, however, is not so simple; it is complicated by the fact that it draws upon not one but two specific myths and, despite some critics' claims to the contrary, that these myths are carefully interwoven, adding further to the complexity of the usage and its effects.

The second major myth of Williams' play is the Christian myth, and it acts as a kind of reinforcement of the classical myth—and vice versa. In the 1940 version, the Christ-Mary myth is presented more obviously and is perhaps more nearly central to the play. Lady was named Myra as a variant of Mary, and much is made of Val's stumbling exclamation "God, I--! Lady, you--!" Myra's amused pick-up, "God you an' lady me, huh" (p. 149) becomes a private joke; meanwhile, she accepts the Mary, Mother of God, role, dressing in blue, naming herself Queen of the May (p. 195) and describing herself when she is pregnant as a Christmas tree to be hung with ornaments. (p. 222)
(Dickinson sees a classical significance in "Myra" in addition to the Christian, suggesting that her name is derived from Myrrha, the mother of Adonis who had an unnatural love for her father and was changed into a myrtle tree as punishment. "This recalls to mind," Dickinson adds, "Robert Brustein's comment: 'The real theme of these plays is incest.'"23 Of course, if we regard Val as God the Father as well as Christ the son, then the incest theme is suggested in Christian terms also. It is likewise suggested if we consider Mary as the Mother of God--i.e., of Christ--and Val as Christ--i.e., her son.)

In Orpheus Descending, however, Myra's role as Virgin Mary is made a good deal less obvious, although it is still clearly suggested. The "God you, lady me" line is omitted, but Myra's name has become "Lady," and the Christmas tree image is still there. The focal point of the Christian myth, however, (in both versions) is Val. According to the playwright's mother, Valentine Xavier was the younger brother of St. Francis Xavier, a sixteenth century Basque and an ancestor, on the paternal side, of Tennessee Williams. Much has been made by most critics, and rightly so, of the Xavier-Savior play on words and its combination with "Valentine" in a reference to St. Valentine, a third century saint and Roman Catholic patron of love who
is alluded to in Val's incident with the "pink-headed" woman (she bought a valentine from Val and delivered it to him moments later signed with a lipstick kiss). That St. Valentine was also a martyr, thus sharing a fate similar to that of Orpheus and Christ, has been noted by only one critic. In terms of background, many of the Christian elements of Battle of Angels have been deleted in Orpheus—Good Friday with its power-failure, thunder and storm; the talk of floods; Vee's Christ-Val painting; and the cottonwood tree on which Christ-Val was to be crucified-lynched. But the action still extends from "late winter" (February) to "early spring" (Easter week), and the Church of the Resurrection, the "mysteries of Easter" and the Risen Christ—"Not crucified but Risen! I mean Crucified and then RISEN!"—(p. 92) are still emphasized again and again throughout the play, indicating that Val is clearly Christ as well as the "wild-spirited" Dionysus and his descent into hell and immolation may be compared to Christ's Easter Saturday harrowing of Hell.

But a Christ-figure who has an affair with a Mary-figure, a Christ-figure whose youth has been spent "on a Goddam party," and whose very movements are, in Lady's words, "suggestive" (p. 45) can prove offensive to those for whom
the myth still lives. A "slew-foot" Orpheus is one thing; a "slew-foot" Christ is quite another. Williams was made aware of the difference when he presented his first version to the Boston city fathers in 1940. The severe censure he received for his irreverent religious symbolism led him to observe ruefully that "you can't mix up sex and religion." This observation, in turn, most likely led him in his later versions to omit some of the more melodramatic religious elements and the final "crucifixion," substituting the blowtorch death for the blowtorch-lynching combination. Nevertheless, the Christ parallels are still obvious and still strong, and the critics are still objecting. Only a year ago Dickinson sternly denounced Williams' use of the Christian myth: "It is surely not a case of a convinced Christian who sincerely turns to Christian symbols to draw a reverent comparison. . . . Christianity is only a beautiful allegory to Williams--literary raw material (however inaptly) for appropriation. It is a case, rather, of a Nietzschean transvaluation of values." We might question, of course, the necessity of a playwright embracing his myth with the "sincerity" of a "convinced Christian," especially since Dickinson has no objection to a sexualized Orpheus. He does not demand that Williams embrace his classical myth with the sincerity of a convinced Orphic. Sincerity, even reverence, for myth, is irrelevant to the value of myth as
a device. Aptness, or inaptness, however—which Dickinson sees as being only parenthetically relevant to his denunciation—is a very different matter. It is also a matter which cannot be judged until the full extent of the myth usage has been determined. Dickinson objects vehemently to Williams' "wholly spurious attribution of Christ-like qualities," although he admits that some of his major questions concerning Val's corruption have been clarified—at least Val's concept of his own innocence has been clarified—and we must note that Val has been made less culpable in his lack of Christian commitment by his insisting on staying when he discovers that Lady is pregnant. Nevertheless, Dickinson remains unconvinced that Williams is not still displaying an "almost unbelievable ineptness in making the Christian identifications."^25

Dickinson has done precisely what other critics have done—he has failed to see beyond the Christian passion and death, or sacrifice, theme, which he finds ultimately invalidated because Val is unaware of his imminent death. Just as he recognizes only the Orpheus-Eurydice aspect of the Orpheus myth, so he recognizes only the crucifixion-resurrection aspect of the Christ myth. But if Orpheus is the son of Apollo, a gentle, ascetic bard, who gathered wild creatures to him, who preached his ascetic beliefs and the worship of Apollo to a society which lived the religion of Dionysus, and whose death—a violent one followed
by a rebirth—was the beginning of Orphism, so is Christ the son of God, a gentle, ascetic teacher who gathered wild creatures—both animal and human—to him, who preached his ascetic beliefs and the worship of God to a society which lived the religion of Dionysus, and whose death—a violent one followed by a rebirth—was the beginning of Christianity.

Christ's teaching had the power of Orpheus' music, and if he did not use charms and spells, he worked miracles nevertheless. Likewise, in making the barren fig tree, Lady, bear fruit, Val has worked a miracle, albeit a sexual one. In drawing wild creatures—animal or human—Christ, like Orpheus, gentled them, made the wolf to lie down with the lamb, as the Book of Isaiah would have it. As with Orpheus, Williams has altered Christ's identity as tamer of wild beasts and made Val a Dionysiac free spirit rather than adhering to his Christian model. Ultimately, of course, we can regard Christ and Orpheus both as free spirits to an extent, for they are wanderers with no home and no human ties. And Val is still the ascetic in his denunciation of the other aspects of the Dionysiac life. This parallel, too, is strained, however, for the romantic free-love concept is in direct opposition to the Christian teachings on fornication and adultery, "true love" or no. Val's gentleness, on the other hand, is drawn directly from the quality of his prototypes. Gentleness is a major attribute of both Christ and Orpheus. As with Orpheus, Christ's gentleness was evident in his manner and philosophy; and, as with
Orpheus, it amounted at times to softness and passivity. These factors coupled with his celibacy have led to suggestions, if seldom of active misogyny and even of homosexuality as in the Orpheus legend, at least of an asexuality similar to that which Williams depicts in Val and, later, in Chris Flanders. Nor have these suggestions been discouraged by Christian art. For decades popular art has offered children and adults alike paintings and statues of the "Lamb of God," the "Good Shepherd," the "Sacred Heart," etc. which portray Christ with sad eyes and gentle smile; soft, feminine hands; womanish feet; small bones, garbed in graceful, flowing robes; and a slender body in equally graceful postures, even when nailed to the cross. It is little wonder that Williams portrays "the Christus Guadalajara" as "the Rose of the World," "sweet with musk and pale as pearl" in his nakedness, with "womanish fingers twitch[ing] at a silvery crucifix," his "fluttering speech" "whisper[ing] love" in his "silken," "mothlike garments." Val's passivity in his role as Christ-figure is an understatement when compared with the increasingly feminized Christ being offered by modern Christianity. This is not, of course, to explain Williams' homosexual and asexual Christ-figures--there are far more important thematic concepts involved that remain to be considered--but it does justify the surprisingly passive characterization of a man cast in the role of Christ.
Nor is Val's death unlike that of Christ. Val dies at the hands of sadistic and vindictive townsmen who have rejected his way of life; Christ was murdered by a mob of bloodthirsty men who rejected his way of life. It is only the manner which differs—in the original version Val is lynched (an equivalent of crucifixion) and burned, whereas in the final version the lynching has been omitted and he is burned to death by the blowtorch. Although being burned to death, as I noted earlier, is not directly related to crucifixion, it is nevertheless an Old Testament, as well as a classical form of sacrifice, and, in spite of theological flaws in the parallel, it emphasizes the concept that Val was destroyed for what he represented just as Christ and Orpheus were destroyed for what they represented. It likewise suggests Christ's harrowing of hell as well as Orpheus' descent into Hades. Finally, Williams attempts to convince us that Val is reborn as Christ was reborn. His change in emphasis (in Battle of Angels to Orpheus Descending) from the Crucified to the Risen Christ, is a change in emphasis in Williams' theme—man may suffer and die, but he still may experience the glorious resurrection, and this resurrection is the focal point of his life—or death. Since practicality, credibility, and possibly Williams' own uncertainty about immortality prohibit an on-stage resurrection in Christian (or classical) style, Williams
envelopes the snakeskin jacket (the serpent is a symbol of rebirth and, in John iii:14, Christ is identified as a serpent) with an aura of reverence and mystery. In the closing scene the Conjure Man elevates the jacket as a symbol of Val's continued or "renewed" life, much as the host is elevated by the priest to signify Christ's "real presence" in the Mass. Carol Cutrere reinforces the symbolic value of the jacket in her final speech:—"Wild things leave skins behind them . . . and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind." Williams is attempting to establish Val in the pattern of Christ's death, resurrection, and continued life within Christianity just as he established him in the pattern of Orpheus' death. Val's philosophy—vague as it is—is not so unlike Christian, as well as Orphic, thought—the idea of a soul fettered to a mortal, corruptible body, the idea of corruption by earthly things, the need for purification, Christ as the second Adam, the longing for freedom from corruption—these are all ideas associated with Christianity, and aside from the acceptance of "free love"—essentially a legalistic interpretation and an acceptance which is necessary to a certain extent to Williams' plot—Val's attitudes are not as unChristian as many critics would have them.

Thus we can say that Williams has adhered to certain general aspects of the Christian myth—he has
employed the death and resurrection theme loosely but obviously, he has altered Christ's qualities in regard to absolute freedom, i.e., freedom from the law, but he has been essentially faithful to the power, magnetism, gentleness, and basic asceticism attributed to Christ even when he has had to adapt these qualities to fit the needs of a particular plot, character, or theme. Certainly he has been more faithful to his Christian myth than most critics will admit, and if he has been more free in his adaptation of the Christ myth than in that of the Orpheus myth, he has at the same time been more obvious.

But there is still the fact that some critics, Benjamin Nelson among them, regard the Christian and pagan symbolism in Orpheus Descending as a "conglomeration . . . which obliterates almost all else in its intensity and confusion," and Nelson suggests that the incompatibility of Orpheus and Christ may be the cause of the confusion. In pointing out the play's parallels to the separate classical and Christian myths, however, it must also be clear that Orpheus and Christ were a good deal alike. Both were born of a divine father, both possessed divine powers, both were gentle, even passive, ascetics who gathered wild creatures about them, both descended into hell for the salvation of others, and both died violently, were reborn, and lived on in their respective religions. Even the
inclusion of the Dionysiac freedom theme is not irrelevant, for Dionysus is not unlike Christ in many respects. As Guthrie and other scholars have noted, Dionysus and Christ were both sons of gods; both were rejected and suffered at the hands of temporal sovereigns; both died violently and were resurrected; both ascended into the heavens; and both their religions have, as central aspects of their worship, a communion service patterned after the savage omophagia, i.e., a partaking of the qualities of the worshipped god by means of devouring his flesh— or food which is symbolic of their flesh. And, of course, both were free spirits. The parallels end here, however, for the religion of Christ and the religion of Dionysus are essentially quite different.

This is not true, however, of the religions of Christ and Orpheus— Orphism may even have been, at one time, a disguise for Christianity. According to some scholars, the early Christians were so deeply impressed with the Orpheus legends and personality that Orpheus was frequently depicted in paintings in the catacombs and on various Christian artifacts. Thus the ceiling of the Domitilla Catacomb depicts Orpheus in the central panel in place of Christ, while the surrounding panels present scenes from the Old and New Testament alternating with scenes of pagan and Old Testament sacrificed animals such as the bull and
the ram, the underlying theme being life transcending death. Likewise, an Orphic sacramental bowl depicts Orpheus as a fisherman, suggesting Peter, the Fisher King, and baptism in which the neophyte is drawn from the water, like a fish, to freely surrender his freedom in order to be reborn, thus providing a model for the depiction of Christian neophytes dressed as fish, and for the adoption of the fish as a Christian symbol of rebirth.

There are still further examples of Orpheus' impact on Christianity. In addition to Orpheus the Fisherman, there is Orpheus the Good Shepherd and Orpheus the Savior. The latter is depicted on an enigmatic Christian seal, now in the Berlin Museum, on which is carved a human figure nailed to a cross. Above the cross are seven stars and a crescent moon, and around and beneath it are the words "Orpheos Bakkikos." Whether this merely illustrates a Christian precaution in a time when Christianity was considered subversive and was under severe persecution, or whether it signified a means of transition from one religion to another, simplified by the essential similarity of the two religions, is uncertain. It is certain, however, that Orphism and Christianity were sufficiently alike to encourage the early Christians to borrow, artistically at least, from their pagan counterparts. And according to Guthrie it is entirely
understandable, for "the adoption of Orpheus by the Christians was only a continuation of a previous adoption by Jesus. It was easy to see in the characteristic picture of Orpheus not only a symbol of the Good Shepherd of the Christians . . . but also parallels to the love of the Old Testament. . . ."28 Doubtless a Christian theologian would find irreconcilable differences between Orpheus and Christ, but just as Williams was only approximate in his parallels between Val and his mythical prototypes, so he is only approximate in the similarities of the myths he chooses to employ. The similarities exist, nevertheless, and, on the surface at least, the classical and Christian myths blend nicely. Williams apparently recognized this fact also, although his critics have not.

But there is yet another mythic aspect of Orpheus Descending which involves a concept far more ancient than the Orpheus or Christ myths--i.e., the archetypal myth of the vegetation god and goddess, in which the young god--the incarnation of the powers of spring--fulfills the role of son, lover, and consort to the goddess--the incarnation of fertility in general. As E. O. James (The Cult of the Mother-Goddess) explains it, the ritual pattern required by an essentially agricultural and pastoral society involved a union of the earth goddess and a young god chosen by her
specifically in order that he might "reawaken the dormant earth and the process of fecundity" which had ceased during the long winter months. As representative of the sequence of vegetation, once he had fulfilled his function of impregnating the goddess, the young god was doomed to die—always a violent death and frequently at harvest time. Yet, in order to continue the cycle, he was reborn annually. Thus his death and resurrection "became the archetype of all deaths and of all resurrections,"29 and such vegetation gods and goddesses could be found honored in all parts of the world, each of them with their individual legends, yet each of them essentially the same: the Sumerian Shepherd god and goddess Dumuzi and Ishtar; Inanna and Tammuz, their Assyro-Babylonian counterparts; Isis and Osiris (Egyptian); Kybele and Attis (Phyrigian); Adonis and Astarte (Syrian); Adonis and Aphrodite (Cyprian); Dionysus and Semele (Thracian). Although Frazer discusses only Attis, Adonis, and Osiris, all of these alliances are vegetation myths in which the young gods reawaken the fertility of the mother-goddess, die in sacrifice to her, and are resurrected, their deaths and rebirths being dramatically represented at festivals in their honor, reminding men, as myth-theorist Mircea Eliade points out, "that every defeat is annulled and transcended by the final victory."30
In *Orpheus Descending*, Lady is clearly an embodiment of woman's generative powers. Her name, signifying Christian motherhood, also signifies womanhood in general, and her preparations and determination—even before Val's appearance—to reopen the confectionery in the spring, on the Saturday before Easter, in order to fulfill her own function of generation and not to be defeated by Jabe's death-hold suggest Williams' conception of her as a fertility goddess. The confectionery is a major symbol throughout the play. With its vines and blossoming fruit trees it represents, in Williams' own terms, some "shadowy and poetic . . . inner dimension of the play" (p. 3)—and of herself. It is a kind of Garden of Adonis in honor of and signifying the annual renewal of life (gardens and lush vegetation also figure prominently in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *The Night of the Iguana*). At the same time it is a symbol of her own generative powers which have been reawakened by the young god who has impregnated her and given her the new life represented by the confectionery. Her long, impassioned speech about the barren fig tree of her childhood which had "won the battle" and which she had hung with Christmas ornaments in her rejoicing at the return of its fertility and her retreat into the "ghostly radiance" of her orchard-confectionery to die—this is the dramatic center of the play, and in it
Lady alone is the focal point while Val, his function fulfilled, is put to death in sacrificial flames by the same men who send dogs out to tear fugitives to pieces. In the end, Val's jacket is almost more important than Val himself, and many critics have complained that Williams' symbolism has detracted from the reality of the individual--that Williams is so intent upon creating an Orpheus-figure or a Christ-figure he fails to create Val, and, consequently, that Lady becomes the dominant character, the life-force of the play in spite of the play's title.

We might argue, of course, that Williams was merely using the passionate, volatile Italian woman as a foil to a hero whose passivity requires a contrast and whose character is thus merely a matter of sound dramatic technique. This does not seem to be the case, however. Although Lady is, most certainly, a foil, her dominance can be better explained by her role as earth goddess, for in spite of the necessity of the young god and in spite of the festivals in honor of his resurrection, he was clearly subordinate to the goddess who was regarded as an absolute power and the absolute source of generation. As the understanding of the male role in generation grew, she was assigned a male partner; nevertheless, it was she who was the dominant and initiating force in the act of renewal. "It was she who invited him to share her couch,
and she embraced him in the guise of the Young God. "She was the embodiment of creative power in all its fullness [and] he was the personification of the decline and revival of vegetation and of all generative force"; she was the source of regeneration, and he was the agent. Only after the inception of a patriarchal society did the young god become an entity distinct from his mother-lover and the focal point of the vegetation cycle, and even then, his name remained permanently linked with the goddess. The dominance of the goddess and her advances toward the young god explain much of Lady's dominance of the action and her aggression toward Val. The talk of her preparations for the reopening of the confectionery well before Val enters the action indicates that, on one level, it is Lady's regeneration—however temporary—and not Val's death that is the focal point of the play. Nor does that regeneration involve love. The plea that breaks Val's resistance and moves him to an affair with Lady is a declaration of need, not love: "NO, NO, DON'T GO . . . I NEED YOU!!! . . . TO LIVE . . . TO GO ON LIVING!!!" (p. 81) And that Val is the agent and not the source of her regeneration is made clear in the final scene when Lady tells Val to leave: "You've done what you came here to do. . . . I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body, has burst in flower! You've given me life, you can go!" (p. 113) Lady's fertility is
the issue here, not love or Val's paternity, and Lady's attitude is in keeping with that of the fertility goddess as characterized by Erich Neumann: "The young men whom the Mother selects for her lovers may impregnate her, they may even be fertility gods, but the fact remains that they are only phallic consorts of the Great Mother . . . who are killed off as soon as they have performed their duty of fecundation." "The phallus of the young god is sacred to the Great Mother," Neumann continues, yet "originally she was not concerned with the youth at all, but with the phallus of which he is the bearer. Only later, with secondary personalization, is the primary sacrament of fertility with its gruesome castration rites replaced by the love motif." Thus, for the Great Mother in her original, archetypal form, the divine youth brings "happiness, glory, and fertility," but she in turn brings "nothing but misfortune,"32 imperiling him and bringing him death, just as Val brings life, fertility, and joy to Lady while she brings him destruction.

But if sex and not love is the motive of the union, and if the goddess and not her consort is the dominant personality, the consort is nevertheless a necessary figure with certain basic qualities which Williams attributes, in varying degrees and modifications, to Val, thereby affecting Val's as well as Lady's portrayal. To begin with, the
vegetation god shares certain general characteristics with all young gods—or, in modern terms, "heroes." He is first of all a divine being derived from the Primordial Child of an earlier reign, and as such he is an orphan, a wanderer, and "a wonderchild, a divine child, begotten, born, and brought up in quite extraordinary circumstances, and not--this is the point--a human child. Its deeds are as miraculous or monstrous as its nature and physical constitution." Williams says nothing of Val's birth, refraining from accompanying it with shooting stars, comets, and the coming of wise men, but he does give Val an unusual background. Orphaned when his "folks [were] all scattered away like loose chicken's feathers blown around by the wind," Val stayed alone on the bayou, hunting and trapping, a solitary wanderer. (p. 47) Adapting his young god's unique nature and physical constitution to the demands of realism, Williams--half-seriously, half-ironically--distinguishes Val with a temperature that "is always a couple degrees above normal the same as a dog's." (p. 35) Added to this is Val's testimony that "I can sleep on a concrete floor or go without sleeping, without even feeling sleepy, for forty-eight hours. And I can hold my breath three minutes without blacking out. . . . And I can go a whole day without passing water." He adds that he can also "burn down a woman." (p. 40) Amused at Val's confidences of his
"perfect functions," (p. 42) Lady remarks wryly, "You're a peculiar somebody all right, you sure are!" (p. 35) As a result of his deviation from human norms, the young god, or hero, archetype "feels himself like one 'inspired,' altogether extraordinary and the son of a god," and as a result of this sense of exaltation, "he feels himself a stranger to the community."34 "Yet," Kerenyi, collaborator of Jung, notes, "it is just their symbolical orphanhood which gives them their significance: it expresses the primal solitude which alone is appropriate to such beings in such a situation, namely in mythology."35 Val's speech about man's "solitary confinement" (p. 47) and the constant recurrence of the theme throughout all of Williams' work suggests that the playwright is putting the theme to a dual use—to express the alienation of man in general, and, paradoxically, to set his godlike young men apart, since only they are sensitive enough to be concerned with the condition.

In addition to his uniqueness and his solitude, the child god and the young god may also be associated with water: "The child god, . . ." continues Kerenyi, "feeling quite at home in the primal element, reveals his full significance when the scene of his epiphany is water."36 Water frequently plays a part in Williams' plays, sometimes only as a backdrop, more often for symbolic purposes— the
water—frequently ocean, is the setting for much of the action, past and present, of Sweet Bird of Youth, Suddenly Last Summer, The Night of the Iguana, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and Kingdom of Earth, and it figures in a number of the stories. In Orpheus Descending, Witches' Bayou is the scene of Val's "epiphany" in the modern literary sense: "I met a girl on the bayou when I was fourteen. I'd had a feeling that day that if I just kept poling the boat down the bayou a little bit further I would come bang into whatever it was I'd been so long expecting." (p. 48) It turns out that the girl is an "expedient adaptation" rather than "the answer," yet, in terms of Val's life, this is also his first "manifestation" of himself to society—it is the beginning of his wanderings and all of the subsequent events, including those presented directly in the play. The subsequent events in Val's life involve danger, violence, and finally murder, and this is likewise loosely parallel to the Jungian concept of the child archetype and the young god: "It is a striking paradox in all child myths that the 'child' is on the one hand delivered helpless into the power of terrible enemies and in continual danger of extinction, while on the other he possesses power far exceeding those of ordinary humanity . . . and, despite all dangers, will unexpectedly pull through." Val does not, of course, "pull through" physically, but Williams assures
us of his ultimate indestructibility by persistent resurrection allusions.

These, however, are only the general characteristics of the young god; there are still others which pertain specifically to the vegetation gods—who are also divine youths, frequently arrayed in white garments, and sharing certain physical features. These consorts of the Mother Goddesses are best described by Erich Neumann in his *Origins and History of Consciousness*:

They are all youths whose beauty and loveliness are as striking as their narcissism. They are delicate blossoms, symbolized by the myths as anemones, narcissi, hyacinths, or violets, which we, with our markedly masculine—patriarchal mentality, would more readily associate with young girls. The only thing we can say about these youths, whatever their names may be, is that they please the amorous goddess by their physical beauty. Apart from that they are . . . devoid of strength and character, lacking all individuality and initiative. They are, in every sense of the word, obliging boys whose narcissistic self-attraction is obvious.36

We think of Lot, the frail, exotic young transvestite of *Kingdom of Earth*, who, garbed in a gauzy white dress, worships his mother's memory and takes the earthy prostitute Myrtle as his wife only in order to prevent his half-brother from inheriting his farm when he dies; we think of Sebastian Venable of *Suddenly Last Summer*, the impeccable poet in white linen suit who acts as his imperious mother's consort while she procures young men to satisfy his homosexual needs; we might think of Chris Flanders, faint from
hunger and the assault of the dogs, in white shirt with his white sack of mobiles who allows himself to be dominated by a grotesque, dying "witch." We do not think, however, of handsome Val Xavier, Chance Wayne, or the locked out Shannon—until Neumann continues:

Those flower-like boys are not sufficiently strong to resist and break the power of the Great Mother. They are more pets than lovers. The goddess, full of desire, chooses the boys for herself and rouses their sexuality. The initiative never comes from them; they are always the victims, dying like adorable flowers. The youth has at this stage no masculinity, no consciousness, no higher spiritual ego. He is narcissistically identified with his own male body and its distinguishing mark, the phallus. Not only does the Mother Goddess love him simply for his phallus, and, in castrating him, take possession of it to make herself fruitful, but he too is identified with the phallus and his fate is a phallic fate.

Now we recall Chance Wayne, blond god in white silk pajamas, slave to the ageing Princess Kosmonopolis, victim of actual physical castration; and Shannon in his crumpled white linen suit arriving at the Coste Verde Hotel in a state of physical and spiritual collapse to become the prisoner of its "rapaciously lusty" proprietress. And now Val, striking in his beauty and his mottled white, black and gray snakeskin jacket, washed clean from corruption, taken possession of by Lady until he has served his purpose. Then he, too, must suffer the fate of all vegetation gods, who "with their weak egos and no personality, only have a collective fate, not a fate of their own; they are not yet
individuals and so they have no individual existence, only a ritual one. Nor is the Mother Goddess related to an individual, but only to the youth as an archetypal figure."

Even the women who pursue Val are essentially impersonal on this level, for "the nymphs who vainly pursue Narcissus with their love are simply aphrodisiac forces in personalized form." And finally, Val's resurrection is likewise transpersonal: "Rebirth is a cosmic occurrence, anonymous and universal like 'life.'"

Neumann tends to depersonalize the consort to a greater degree in his analysis than is perhaps necessary (in spite of their dominance by the great mother, the consorts, not the goddesses, provide the names of the ancient religions). Nevertheless, Williams has created in Val a young innocent who pleases the amorous goddess with what the playwright describes as "a kind of wild beauty" (p. 16) but who lacks the aggressiveness to approach her and the strength to resist her; thus he becomes her fecundating agent and her victim, participating in a ritual death with the promise of rebirth. In re-enacting the primitive rite in which the dying but resurrected god or god-substitute brings fertility and salvation to a barren world, Williams has drawn upon not merely the content of the myths but the whole ritual structure of the vegetation god, or Year-Daimon, archetype. Delineated early in the century in Gilbert
Murray's "Excursus on the Ritual Form Preserved in Greek Tragedy," the ritual pattern is clearly present in the structure of *Orpheus Descending*. There is first the *Agon*, or Contest, of the Year against its enemy—Light against Darkness, Summer against Winter. We might recall Vee and Val discussing how they live in "a world of--light and--shadow. . . . (p. 92) Jabe is the symbol of the dying, sterile Winter and Death, while Lady, through Val, is struggling to bring the confectionery into bloom. There is the *Pathos* of the Year-Daimon, "generally a ritual or sacrificial death," and there is also the announcement of the death by the Conjure Man, the *Messenger*. This leads to a *Threnos* or Lamentation—in this case by Carol, but it is characterized by the clash of contrary emotions in which the apparent defeat of the year god (in death) is also a triumph (thus the emphasis on the "Risen not Crucified" Christ). And finally, there is the *Anagnorsis*, the discovery or recognition and gathering up of the slain and mutilated Daimon (the Conjure Man enters with Val's garments which he has gathered up) followed by his Resurrection or *Apotheosis*, or his Epiphany in glory (Murray refers to them generally as the *Theophany*)—in which Val is honored as a god and Carol has become his votary. The *Theophany*, says Murray, naturally goes with a *Peripeteia*, the extreme change of feeling from
grief to joy, and it is on this triumphant note that the curtain closes. Murray's summary of the Bacchae is essentially applicable to Orpheus Descending: "The daimon is fought against, torn to pieces, announced as dead, wept for, collected and recognized, and revealed in his new divine life.\textsuperscript{42}

Nor is this vegetation god and goddess concept incompatible with either the Orpheus or the Christ myth. Guthrie speculates on the possibility that Orpheus himself was a vegetation god and that, in spite of his calling for an end of all violent sacrifice, Orpheus' own death was a ritual of the savage communion called omophagia.\textsuperscript{43} We might likewise note that Dionysus, whose wildness is a major element of Val's character, was also a vegetation god and that his annual resurrection was celebrated every spring when the trees suddenly burst into bloom, thus earning him the title Dendrites, "tree youth." He was a beautiful, effeminate young god, and in the earliest myths, he was dominated by his earth or moon-goddess mother, Semele. His epiphanies were in the form of a lion, bull, and serpent--the calendar emblems of the tripartite year--the serpent being the sign of his winter birth. It would seem that Williams was well aware of Dionysus' relevance when he created Val, even if the freedom theme does cause difficulties. As for Christ, we have already seen how the
early Christians equated him with Orpheus to the point of even using Orpheus as a disguise for their underground religion. The parallels of Christ to the vegetation gods specifically, while not connected in tradition, can, nevertheless, be drawn: like Dionysus, Adonis, Osiris, and the other vegetation gods, Christ brought fertility (spiritual) to the world, suffered, died, and was reborn, and in his worship, "the Christian communion service resembles the pagan communion by eating the god." The Roman Catholic service parallels the omophagia even more closely in its doctrine that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of the savior-god. There are differences between Christ and the vegetation gods also, of course. The main objection to the comparison is the fact that Christ's death was a matter of conscious and voluntary self-sacrifice, while the deaths of Orpheus, Dionysus, Adonis, Osiris, etc. were not; likewise, the death and resurrection of Christ was an historical event and not repeated annually as were the deaths and resurrections of the nature gods. Nevertheless, loose as they are, the parallels are there, and, as Eliade points out:

It is clear that for Christians of all creeds the center of religious life is constituted by the drama of Jesus Christ. Although played out in History, this drama first established the possibility of salvation; hence there is only one way to gain salvation— to reiterate this exemplary drama ritually and to imitate the supreme model
revealed by the life and teaching of Jesus. Now, this type of religious behavior is integral with genuine mythical thought. It is also parallel to the annual death and rebirth of the vegetation gods and the festivals in their honor.

Lady, in her role as earth goddess, on the other hand, does not appear to be as consistent with the Orpheus and Christ myths, although she is not necessarily in conflict with them either. In relation to Eurydice, it is primarily her metaphoric existence in the underworld which she has in common. And in relation to the underworld, Lady is still more like the earth goddesses, especially Persephone (although a fertility goddess, she is also known as "Bringer of Destruction") who had been abducted by Hades, king of the underworld, and became associated with the fig tree when she taught Phylatus how to cultivate it. Surprisingly, it is the Christian myth which is more in keeping with the goddess-consort archetype, for although she was born of mortals, as "Queen of Heaven," Mary is said to reign with "God the Father"--the "King of Heaven," suggesting a goddess-consort relationship. Yet she is also the "Mother of God," "Mother of Christ," and "Mother of Men," thus becoming a Christian counterpart of the matriarchal mother-goddess. Likewise, as the symbol of the "Holy Mother Church," encompassing the whole corpus of Roman Catholicism--she acts both as mother and spouse, with her nun-priestesses becoming
"brides of Christ" when they dedicate themselves to the Church. Thus there are suggestions of an incestuous relationship which, Jung argues, is hidden by her role as "Blessed Virgin." Jung—with whom Williams, as noted previously, was familiar—is very interested in Mary's dual role as mother-lover, and he discusses it at some length in The Psychology of the Unconscious. He concludes that

in the Christian legend the relation of the son to the mother is extraordinarily clear. Robertson ("Evangelical Myths") has hit upon the relation of Christ to the Marys, and he conjectures that this relation probably refers to an old myth "where a god of Palestine, perhaps of the name of Joshua, appears in the changing relation of lover and son towards a mythical Mary." This is a natural process in the oldest theosophy and one which appears with variations in the myths of Mithra, Attis, Adonis, Osiris, and Dionysus, all of whom were brought into relation (or combination) with mother goddesses and who appear either as a consort or a feminine eidolon in so far as the mothers and consorts were identified as occasion offered.

In another parallel of the earth goddess (also known in mythology as the "mountain mother" symbolized in psychology by the city) and her consort with the Christian myth, Jung cites some passages from the "Book of Revelation" which speak of the marriage of the Lamb, or Son:

(9) "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife."

(10) "And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."

"It is evident from this quotation," Jung argues, "after all that goes before that the City, the heavenly bride, who
is here promised to the Son, is the mother." Thus the goddess-young god alliance is suggested by Christian terminology and, as a result, can be considered at least superficially compatible with the earth goddess-vegetation god pattern.

In terms of the archetypal pattern, then, Lady and Val are the modern fertility goddess and her passive young consort. They are modeled, not on any one goddess-consort myth—although at times certain specific elements parallel one legend more than another—but on several fertility goddess-consort myths, in all of which the essential features are the dominant role of the goddess, and the sacrifice and rebirth of the young god. Blending these features with his particular classical and Christian myths, Williams has created in Orpheus Descending an archetypal work in which myth, both specific and general, is a prominent element—far more prominent than the critics have recognized. The Orpheus and Christ myths, as noted previously, have been only superficially treated, and the vegetation god and goddess archetype has gone largely unacknowledged. Henry Popkin refers to the recurrence of "Adonis and the Gargoyle" in Williams' plays, but he bases his label on the physical attributes of the pair and not the vegetation god and goddess as such. And in his chapter on Battle of Angels Hugh Dickinson, misquoting Popkin, refers to Popkin's
"Adonis and Aphrodite comparison," likewise basing the parallel primarily on the passive young man and ageing woman aspects. He does, at one point, however, remark that "at the allegorical level, [Battle of Angels], is the story of Dionysus, of Attis, or Orpheus and Eurydice, or Persephone and Pluto, or Adonis and Aphrodite, made to parallel at points the passion and death of Jesus Christ." For Dickinson, however, the archetypal and classical parallels are few, fuzzy, and of little consequence, as are the "unbelievably inept" Christian identifications mentioned earlier. Nor does he find much change or improvement in Orpheus Descending, despite the fact that a comparison of the two plays reveals that the goddess-consort archetype is not truly present in Battle of Angels at all, but is introduced in the revision.

Nevertheless, with or without recognition, the vegetation god and goddess archetype with its sacrifice-rebirth theme is present in the play and is as extensive as the specific Orpheus and Christ myths. It also recurs, along with much Christian myth, consistently throughout most of Williams' subsequent plays.
NOTES


2 Orpheus Descending, in Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 105. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.

3 Battle of Angels, in Orpheus Descending with Battle of Angels (New Directions, 1958), p. 135. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.

4 Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 38.


6 The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Madison, Wisconsin: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 74.


11Guthrie, p. 40.

12Ibid., pp. 31-32; 49.


15"Desire and the Black Masseur," One Arm, p. 90.


17The legends and references cited here are all referred to in Guthrie's study, pp. 32-33; 54-55.

18"Orpheus Descending," In the Winter of Cities, p. 20.

19Guthrie, p. 20.

20Ibid., p. 156.

21Ibid.

22Ibid., p. 154.

23Myth on the Modern Stage, p. 294.

24Ibid., pp. 296-97.

25Ibid., p. 297.


27Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams, pp. 230; 229.
28Guthrie, p. 264.

29E. O. James, The Cult of the Mother-Goddess (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), pp. 48; 228; 237; 238; 237.


34Neumann, Origins, p. 136.


36Ibid., p. 40.


38Neumann, Origins, p. 50.

39Ibid., p. 51.

40Ibid., pp. 89; 51.

41The pattern discussed here is based on Murray's "Excursus on the Ritual Form Preserved in Greek Tragedy," in Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis (London: Merlin Press, 1963), pp. 343-44.

42Ibid., p. 346.
43 Guthrie, p. 53.
44 Ibid., p. 268.
45 Myth and Reality, p. 168.
48 Ibid., p. 134.
50 Dickinson, p. 292.
THE DECADE FOLLOWING THE ARCHETYPE

After *Orpheus Descending*, Williams produced over a decade of myth-infused dramas. No longer attempting to correlate a specific classical myth with the Christian myth as he had done with the Orpheus tale, Williams nevertheless continued to permeate his plays with Christian myth and classical allusions and—underlying all—the ritual death-rebirth pattern of the vegetation god and goddess archetypes. *Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, The Night of the Iguana, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, and Kingdom of Earth* all revolve—either explicitly or implicitly—around vegetation gods and goddesses, and their suffering, death, and resurrection. Each play reflects the *Orpheus Descending* prototype, yet each has its variations, and the nature and extent of these similarities and variations will add to our ultimate understanding of the meaning and function of the playwright's use of myth.

In all of the plays, the Christian myth is the most obvious—primarily because it is the most familiar. The allusions to saints, various biblical figures, and Christian ceremonies are numerous, and the parallels
frequently suggest Christ as well as the lesser Christian figures. This is true of Suddenly Last Summer, first performed in 1958 as one of a double-bill entitled Garden District. During her story Catharine Holly calls attention to her cousin's Catholic "namesaint," St. Sebastian¹ (Williams had earlier written a poem about the saint-martyr which he called "San Sebastiano de Sodoma").

In keeping with the Greek meaning of his name Sebastian was an "august" man, constantly surrounded by his "entourage," his "court of young and beautiful people." (p. 22) He lived in the grand style, "an attitude toward life," his mother declares, "that's hardly been known in the world since the great Renaissance princes. . . ." (p. 26) Sebastian Venable is worshipped, by his mother at least, as more than a prince: she attests to his ascetic habits--his "discipline," "abstention," and "chastity" (pp. 23-24)--and she elevates his "gilt-edged" volume of poetry "as if elevating the Host before the altar." (p. 13) Sebastian has died, but he has been reborn through his art, and his art has become the center of a religion, much as does Val's jacket as it is elevated by the Conjure Man. The number of followers, in both cases, is insignificant. It is important only that he lives on. A poet's life is his work, Mrs. Venable explains. "Here is my son's work. . . . Here's his life going on!" And "her face suddenly
has a different look, the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse." (p. 12)

But just as his surname, Venable, is ambivalent, so was Sebastian. He was both venerable and venal, he was both pure and corrupt (again much like Val). It is incongruous that a man who used, who figuratively "devoured" young boys to satisfy his perverted needs, should be depicted in terms of a god. Perhaps in order to soften the effect, Williams offers an "apology" for Sebastian. In her emotional recounting—under the influence of the truth drug—of the events of that summer, Catharine explains Sebastian's drive to sacrifice himself, and, at the same time, she offers an excuse for what Williams could be certain the audience would view as immorality: "He!—accepted!—all!—as—how!—things!—are! . . . And even though he knew that what was awful was awful, that what was wrong was wrong, and my cousin Sebastian was certainly never sure that anything was wrong!—He thought it unfitting to ever take any action about anything whatsoever!—except to go on doing as something in him directed. . . ." (pp. 88-89)

If he was "never sure that anything was wrong," Sebastian was not, of course, immoral—he was at the most amoral, and, Williams is telling us, he believed he was acting in the only way possible when he allowed himself to be "directed" and driven by his own instincts. If he lived
in a "world of light and shadow," as Mrs. Venable remarks (Vee Talbot's words also), "the shadow was almost as luminous as the light." (p. 21) Or as Catharine expresses it, "We're all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks!" (p. 40) (Cassandra had also commented in the early Battle of Angels that passion is "the only one of the little alphabet blocks they give us to play with that seems to stand for anything of importance.") [p. 215] Thus Sebastian was not corrupt, but confused (in psychological terms he was ill). And thus Williams is careful to suggest, but not insist upon, Sebastian's role as a Christ-figure.

Much more prominent is Sebastian's role as the handsome young god (he looked as young at forty as he did at twenty). He was the consort of the mother-goddess, and his death was a sacrifice to in some way ensure the continuity of life. Encouraged by his mother, Sebastian plays the role of divine child. He is talented and beautiful; he is unique and alienated. Already impressed by his separateness, he becomes more apart when he witnesses God in his ocean epiphany. God is revealed to him in the various birds devouring the baby turtles in their race to the sea. Watching "this thing on the beach" from the crow's nest of the schooner under the blazing equatorial sun, he is filled with a sense of ecstasy "and for several
weeks after that, he had a fever, he was delirious." (p. 19) Almost an orphan (for all practical purposes he has no father and his mother, by her incestuous feelings for her son, is more lover than mother) he wanders throughout the world. Beautiful, weak and submissive, he pleases the "amorous goddess" to whom he is tied by "that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like a--sort of ... umbilical cord." (p. 77) If, as mother goddess, Mrs. Venable is the embodiment of fertility, Sebastian is the agent by which her fertility is made possible. It would seem that in preventing Mrs. Venable from overshadowing Sebastian's role as protagonist (as Lady did Val's role in Orpheus Descending), Williams has very nearly denied her role as fertility goddess at all, for without her young consort she has lost her strength and, figuratively, her life. Added to this is the fact that in emphasizing Sebastian's role as the agent of fertility, Williams presents Sebastian as a creator who "delivers" his poem each year after nine months' preparation, thus detracting further from Mrs. Venable's power as a fertility goddess and thereby lessening her dominance in the play. (It also suggests that Sebastian--acknowledged as a homosexual--is figuratively bisexual, or androgynous, as well, a point that may have some significance later when the meaning of the mythic elements is considered.)
But if Sebastian is the dominant character in the play, he is nevertheless the consort of the mother-goddess, accompanying her—as if still living in a matriarchal world—to every fashionable place throughout Europe. There the two of them eclipse everyone and everything when they make their entrance. "Sebastian and Violet, Violet and Sebastian..." "We were a famous couple" (p. 25): Sebastian, or Adonis, beloved of Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess known as "Life in Death" for whom the Venus fly-trap was named; Violet, or Aphrodite, who, after her stroke, can no longer lavish care on the plant in the lush jungle garden Sebastian had created because the "effort" is too great; Violet, or Kybele, whose beloved Attis died, violets springing up where his blood was shed; Sebastian, or Adonis, whose sacred grove was symbolized in the gardens of Adonis that were a part of his worship; Sebastian, or Adonis, whose body lay crushed "against the blazing white wall" looking like "a big, white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses" (p. 92) just as the blood of Adonis became the red anemone or the red rose; Sebastian, or Christ, once believed to be a vegetation deity who is, for Williams, "the Red Rose of the World"; Sebastian, or Attis, Adonis, Osiris and any number of vegetation gods who were slain, torn to pieces, devoured annually at the summer solstice in a frenzied orgiastic ceremony enacted against
the sound of flutes and cymbals not unlike the "music" that formed the background to Sebastian's ritualistic death. Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Christ; Kybele, Aphrodite, Isis—Williams has drawn upon the most familiar elements of myth to create his own contemporary composites of the vegetation deities, and the issuance is not unlike Neumann and Jung's concept: Sebastian is the handsome but weak youth beloved by his mother-goddess who dominates and binds him to her in an incestuous mother-lover relationship. His death is a sacrifice which he does not will, yet submissively accepts, thereby completing, as Catharine haltingly explains it, "a sort of!—image!—he had of himself as a sort of!—sacrifice to a!—terrible sort of a—" "God?" the doctor asks. "Yes, a—cruel one...." (p. 64) Sebastian's self-conscious image of himself as a sacrifice (like Christ's) is a departure from Neumann and Jung and the mythical concepts, but it is also a means of emphasizing the sacrifice there. As for rebirth, Sebastian, like the vegetation gods, lives on, although we have only Mrs. Venable and the myths to assure us of that rebirth. Thus essentially the same Christian myth and vegetation god pattern of Orpheus Descending is repeated in Suddenly Last Summer. In Orpheus Descending, however, the dominant figure is ultimately Lady, because of her mother-goddess nature, rather than Val, whereas Suddenly Last Summer most often centers about
Sebastian—in spite of the fact that he is dead—rather than the imperious Mrs. Venable. Williams' success in making the essentially secondary role of Sebastian the dominant role in the play is achieved partially, as was seen above, by emphasizing Mrs. Venable's dependence on Sebastian for her fertility and by emphasizing Sebastian himself as a generative agent. In addition to this, Williams' handling of the plot, structure and theme ensure the play's unity. Rejecting the traditional ritual pattern of Agon, Pathos, Messenger Threnos, Anagnorsis, Theophany, and Peripeteia followed in Orpheus Descending, Williams opens the curtain only after Catharine has carried home the news of Sebastian's death. The lament, the gathering up of the victim, the resurrection and the change of feeling from grief to exaltation in the worship of the dead poet has been completed. It is only the details of the Agon, or contest, and the sacrificial death which remain to be exposed. We know that something, apparently something unspeakable, happened to bring about Sebastian's death that summer, and we know that his death was an awful one. A kind of morbid curiosity and mounting sense of horror force us to focus not so much on Catharine's struggle with the truth or even Mrs. Venable's struggle against the truth, but the truth itself—i.e. Sebastian's story. This modified frame device is similar to the one Williams first used for Val's story.
in Battle of Angels. Discarding it in Orpheus Descending for the traditional ritual pattern--perhaps in order to produce a less static play--Williams tended to lose the sense of the play as Val's story. As a result, some of the emphasis on Val's role as sacrifice was likewise lost and Lady's renewed fertility became the focal point of the play. Val Xavier, in spite of his being a god and a savior, is not fully a character. Sebastian Venable, on the other hand, through the emphasis away from the goddess figure and toward the young god, is as alive to us after his death as he was to Catharine and Mrs. Venable before his death.

Another reason for Williams' success in creating his passive vegetation deity may be, as noted above, the fact that Williams made Sebastian's death a major theme of the play. By presenting Sebastian's vision of God in the poetically vivid, terrible destruction of the young sea turtles by the voracious black birds, by insisting on Sebastian's vision of himself as a sacrifice, and by making Sebastian's ritual death parallel to that of the sea turtles, Williams was establishing the death and mutilation of the vegetation deity--the sacrifice of the young god--as the focal point and primary theme of the play. And by emphasizing Sebastian as a sacrificial victim, he makes the usually dominant mother-goddess the secondary character
even though her power and dominant nature is still significant and still recognized. It is as if, once he has clarified his theme, Williams succeeds in making his submissive victim more real. And by centering the action around the god rather than the goddess, his focus is no longer divided and Sebastian emerges as a living figure. The play, static in structure, is dynamic in effect. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, Williams has used the same mythic pattern that underlies *Orpheus Descending* and, through his handling of this pattern, he has created a tightly-visioned, stunningly dramatic work.

*Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) is another of Williams' effective dramas which opened to rave reviews from the New York critics and ran well over two hundred performances. Much has been written about what William Roulet terms the "redemptive ethic" of *Sweet Bird of Youth* in which Chance Wayne, repenting his sins, accepts castration in an act of atonement and finds in it regeneration. Robert Brustein, on the other hand, complains that the play is essentially dishonest. He argues that incest, rather than sex, is the real theme of the play and that Williams' evasion of the issue confuses his attitude toward his protagonist. Observing that the playwright alternately exalts and exacerbates his hero and feels nausea at his
actions, Brustein concludes: "Thus Chance Wayne ends up both as the purest and most corrupt character in the play, and there is even a suggestion, through some fancy Easter Sunday symbolism borrowed from Orpheus Descending, that he is to be identified with Christ." Like it or not, however, there are at least superficial parallels to be drawn between Chance and Christ, while the Easter Sunday Hallelujah Chorus is used as another device to emphasize the triumphant resurrection of the dying god. It is also noteworthy that Williams seems to be aware of the possible misunderstanding of and objection to such a usage, and that he appears to make a distinction in the usage of such symbolism by introducing it in a blasphemous context in Boss Finley's campaign speech. Finley declares that his Good Friday took place Friday when he was burned in effigy on the campus of the state university, but that "today is Easter Sunday and I am in St. Cloud." It is clear, however, that Finley is no Christ-figure. In contrast, Chance Wayne's identification, regardless of conventional morality and even, at times, the author's own ambivalence, is not to be overlooked.

Part of the difficulty of the play is that while the audience demands probability—that Finley be given a motive for ordering Chance castrated—the thematic pattern demands that Chance still be given sufficient dignity and
essential goodness to enact the role of the Christ-like sacrificial victim. Chance's eligibility for such a role depends to a great extent on Heavenly, whose purity—in spite of her previous relationship with Chance—is unquestionable as Williams presents it. She pleads Chance's innocence, telling her father that Chance had been driven from St. Cloud by him, her own father, and that when he "tried to compete, make himself big as these big-shots you wanted to use me for a bond with," he failed. "The right doors wouldn't open, and so he went in the wrong ones..." (p. 396) Nor does she appear to blame Chance for the disease which required a hysterectomy, and Chance himself is apparently exonerated because he didn't know until he had left that he had the disease. The lack of credibility here is obvious, yet if the Christ-identification does not hold up, the resurrection theme cannot exist, for the vegetation-god archetype is not familiar enough for the audience to assume the rebirth.

But despite the lack of audience familiarity with the myth, Chance Wayne is nevertheless clearly a vegetation deity, and the Princess is no less clearly a mother goddess in the same basic pattern that informs Orpheus Descending and Suddenly Last Summer. Unique and Apollo-like in his exceptional good looks, his "gold hair... wreathed with laurels," (p. 448) Chance was born with "some kind of
quantity 'X' in [his] blood, a wish or a need to be different." (p. 374) Chance, like Sebastian and Val, plays the role of the divine child. He is both orphan (only his dead mother is mentioned) and wanderer, alienated from his hometown by his sense of being different (both inferior and superior) and by his awareness of his unusual beauty. His love having been awakened on the beach with Heavenly, he returns to the ocean to regain it. But love-making, not love, is his "vocation," "maybe the only one I was truly meant for." (p. 375) Coupled with his introduction against the background of Easter Sunday, Chance Wayne is the incarnation of the powers of Spring, the agent of fertility. He is a phallic god fulfilling a phallic function, pleasing the demanding Princess Kosmonopolis, Goddess of the Earth, with his sexual prowess and acting as her sexual savior. Already castrated by her demands (p. 448) he is Attis to her Kybele. Led by "that invisible loving steel chain," (p. 442) he is the beautiful, submissive consort of the imperious matriarch who, in spite of her dominance, is dependent on him for her life: "I have only one way to forget these things I don't want to remember and that's through the act of love-making. That's the only dependable distraction so when I say now, because I need that distraction, it has to be now. . . ." (p. 372) Like all fertility goddesses,
she must have her demands satisfied, and when she no longer needs her boy-god, when he has fulfilled his function, however temporary, she discards him. Thus when the Princess learns that her comeback was not a failure, Chance is dismissed despite the fact that the Princess knows it will be only a short time before she will need him, or another like him, again.

Essentially, Chance Wayne, like Val and Sebastian, is a composite of vegetation deities. His physical beauty is that of any and all of the youthful consorts of the mythical goddesses, and it is this by which the Princess is attracted. Touching his bare chest with her finger tips, she observes: "It feels like silk. . . . Hairless, silky-smooth gold." (p. 354) (Again we must note the effeminacy and the reversal of male-female roles in appearance and aggression.) In a brief but interesting study by Peter L. Hays, a number of parallels are drawn between Sweet Bird of Youth and the Adonis myth, but while some of his points are significant, they are not, as shall be seen, elements characteristic solely of Adonis. Basing his evidence on The Golden Bough, Hays claims that Chance Wayne was named after Frazer's favorite term for the sacred king who presides over nature, the "waxing and waning god." Although it has been suggested by some authors that the waning moon is the sign of Adonis, Adonis
is not the only sacred king under discussion in Frazer's work. Likewise, citing the castration theme which runs throughout the play (Chance, Heavenly, the Princess, and an unnamed Negro are all either literally or figuratively "castrated," and Boss Finley is said to be impotent) Hays cites the work of Frazer and Jessie Weston to argue that ritual castrations were performed in various vegetation festivals "in imitation of Adonis' death," and that the play, therefore, specifically reflects the Adonis rites. Adonis was not the only vegetation god, however, to maintain a tradition of death by castration—there were at least Attis, Osiris, and Tammuz, in addition to Adonis, and even the greatest scholars are undecided as to the specific worship in which the castration rites arose. Considering the fact that a god who was worshipped in one part of the world was often merely a counterpart of a god whose worship had already been established in another part of the world, and that Adonis was not the god from whom all other vegetation deities originated, it would seem more reasonable to conclude simply that the castration theme strongly suggests Williams' generalized use of various vegetation god elements in Sweet Bird of Youth. The Mid-Eastern motif of the setting of the play which Hays points to (everything from the decor to the hashish is Moroccan) likewise suggests the Attis-Adonis-Tammuz et al. worship which spread throughout the Middle East.
It is true also that, as Hays notes, "Adonis was reputedly the son of King Cinyras of Cyprus, and Cyprus is the first of several exotic exiles mentioned by the Princess, . . . and characterized by her as places of 'palm gardens by the sea and olive groves in Mediterranean islands' through which pass a lament for whatever has been loved." He similarly notes that Williams' musical theme, "The Lament," which recurs throughout the play for Chance and the Princess--they are the two major "castrated" characters--suggests the laments and lamentations cited by Frazer and Miss Weston which were so notably a part of the ritual of Adonis. The laments, however, like the castrations are also connected with other vegetation festivals as well. And finally, as Hays points out, the Royal Palms Hotel with its grove of palms--"the most important and constant" projection, Williams tells us, on the cyclorama backing the stage, (p. 339) is highly suggestive of the sacred groves of fertility kings and the traditional garden of Adonis. But sacred groves, as Hays himself observes, are general to all of the fertility kings, and the palm tree was sacred particularly to Isis and Osiris. Adonis, Attis, Tammuz, Osiris--in all of these Chance is clearly a part of the whole vegetation god pattern, and this is the important point.
So much for Chance Wayne and his mother-goddess: a new, mythic element has been added in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Contrasting her to the grotesque, almost hellish, figure of the ageing screen goddess, Williams introduces the celestial Heavenly, the "divine maiden." In placing his young god in a love relationship with a maiden goddess, Williams has drawn upon the Jungian concept of the divine maiden so popular in Greek mythology. Pure in spite of the disease Chance has caused in her, revirginized in typical Williams fashion, and celestial in her white garments, Heavenly is the female counterpart of the vegetation god. Like the young god, she is a sacrificial victim in the annual renewal of life. Pure and passive, she is "the maiden doomed to die." Neumann expresses the role as "the young girl who receives the god in an ecstasy of longing, . . ." and it is a role which is, in many respects, similar to that of Catharine Holly. Catharine is likewise a maiden figure (in spite of her incident at Duelling Oaks) in her love for, and submission to, Sebastian, although Catharine's role is of little importance in terms of the real action of the play, i.e., Sebastian's story. Both, however, are ideals of fidelity--Catharine loved her cousin because he liked her, and Heavenly is "something permanent in a world of change." (p. 378) Both are highly vulnerable. "The maiden's helplessness," Jung observes,
"exposes her to all sorts of dangers, for instance of being devoured by reptiles or ritually slaughtered like a beast of sacrifice. Often there are bloody, cruel, and even obscene orgies to which the innocent child falls victim." If Catharine is struggling at Lions View against the knife, Heavenly has succumbed to it, just as Chance is about to. In Williams' view, however, it is her own father who demands of her the greatest sacrifice. His offering up of his daughter in a succession of near marriages to wealthy men more than twice her age is intended to assist his political career and is culminated by her final devastation on the campaign stage. Her humiliation is televised to the world, and she "is suddenly escorted down the stairs, sobbing, and collapses..." (p. 437) She is yet another victim in this play of death and sacrifice.

In presenting the sacrifice theme, Williams once more modifies the ritual structure of the Greek drama first used in Orpheus Descending, but it is far less modified than in Suddenly Last Summer. He presents the first four phases of the ritual pattern in the usual order. There is the Agon, the contest of Chance and Heavenly, against Boss Finley and his world. It is the traditional contest of the forces of light against darkness, good against evil, spring against winter. There is the
Pathos, the ritual death or death equivalent of the god (Heavenly and even the Princess share in the death to an extent, although the structure is based on Chance's sacrifice and not theirs). There is likewise the announcement of the death, for Tom Jr. is both agent and messenger. And, there is the Threnos, in which the lamentation of the death is mingled with the sense of triumph at the imminent rebirth. (Williams was not being inconsistent when he prefaced his sorrowful strains of "The Lament" with the startling burst of the Hallelujah Chorus.) The final three phases of the ritual pattern, however, are omitted altogether. Since Chance has not yet undergone the castration (except at the hands of the Princess), there can be no recognition and gathering up of the slain, no resurrection, and no formal Peripeteia, although all three are clearly implied. The audience and Princess recognize the death of the god, the resurrection is implicit in the Easter symbolism, and the Hallelujah Chorus supplies the sense of joy to counteract the sorrow and suffering of the death. Somewhat modified, the ritual structure of the sacrifice of the vegetation god has nonetheless been fulfilled—if not explicitly, at least implicitly.

But the play is, like Orpheus Descending, faced with the problem of divided focus. Chance's representation as a vegetation deity has permitted the Princess to become,
by her very nature as mother-goddess, a dominant force. Her dominance could have been reduced, however, much as Mrs. Venable's was reduced--by her limited role in the action. But in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, there are two themes rather than one, as in *Suddenly Last Summer* and in the less successful *Orpheus Descending*. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, some of the repetition of theme is prevented or at least reduced ( *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Suddenly Last Summer* were produced within a year of each other, and Williams appears to have been working on various phases of the two plays simultaneously) by Williams' presentation of his protagonist as a double victim, with Heavenly and the Princess as Chance's partners in the respective sacrifices, but with the Princess sharing and, at times, dominating the spotlight. If Chance and Heavenly are victims of the dark forces of the universe, Chance and the Princess are victims, now or in the near future, of "the enemy time" ("The Enemy Time" is the title of the one-act play on which *Sweet Bird of Youth* was based; it was published in the March, 1959 issue of *Theatre*). And if Heavenly is the sweet, passive maiden in her role, the Princess is a fighter--arrogant, forceful, at times grotesque, yet, on rare occasions, compassionate in her sharing and understanding of Chance's fate. In the early version of the play and in the working-script, the Princess was named "Ariadne," after
the maiden who offered Theseus an escape from the labyrinth. Deserted by him, Ariadne became the bride of Dionysus. Possibly recognizing the impossibility of alluding to a maiden figure in the form of a strong, self-seeking mother-goddess who shows only brief flashes of compassion, Williams changed her name to the more dramatic and more masculine Alexandra del Lago (perhaps suggestive again of the Albertine strategy, although in Freudian and Jungian psychology "Del Lago" would suggest the dark, feminine principle). She is also, of course, the Princess Kosmonopolis, very much in keeping with her earth-goddess role. Thus deprived of her maidenhood, she nevertheless represents a route of escape. Offering herself to Chance as a way out of the castration he faces if he remains in St. Cloud and moved by the similarity of their situations, she pleads with him to go with her: "The only hope for you now is to let me lead you by that invisible loving steel chain through Carltons and Ritzes and Grand Hotels and. . . ." (p. 442) When she learns of the success of her comeback, however, she becomes the "monster" again and reneges on her promise to "talk about" Chance and Heavenly to the producers. "Talk about a beach-boy I picked up for pleasure, distraction from panic? Name? When the nightmare is over?" (p. 447) But recognizing that "her future course is not a progression
of triumphs," (pp. 448-49) the Princess offers her beach-boy one last chance.

Princess: I'll send a boy up for my luggage. You'd better come down with my luggage.

Chance: I'm not part of your luggage. (p. 449)

Chance prefers to end the corruption of his life in a purifying sacrifice and his Easter death is a reflection of the time cycle of the vegetation god: "I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding--not even that--no. But for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all." (p. 452) Time is a major motif of the play, and the Princess is very much a part of the motif. When the time-sacrifice themes reach their climax in the final scene and the final speech, the Princess—in spite of Chance Wayne's dramatic sacrifice—is still a major figure, and the play, unlike Suddenly Last Summer, suffers from the lack of singleness of vision in terms of the protagonist. Chance Wayne, the handsome young god, must share the spotlight with his mother-goddess much as Val Xavier did in Orpheus Descending. And, as with Val, there are times where the spotlight is not large enough to encompass them both.

The Princess' dominance is a serious problem, then, but the fault is not in the myth usage itself (although it compounds the problem by making the danger that much
greater). The fault is in Williams' failure to determine his protagonist and then to focus fully upon him or her. The relationship of the double-vision time-sacrifice theme has emerged more clearly in *Sweet Bird of Youth* than in any of the previous plays, but until the meaning of the vegetation-deity sacrifice in a modern world has been examined, the full effect of this relationship remains to be seen.

In *Orpheus Descending*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Williams' males are the victims of violent death and torments—of immolation, dismemberment, castration. Such torments are mythic, befitting the young vegetation gods on whom Williams' protagonists were modeled. They are not, however, common occurrences in the modern world, and this fact has raised questions concerning the validity of such violence. "Sensational" or "Gothic": the plays succeeded or failed by these judgments. *Suddenly Last Summer*, to which "Gothic" can best be applied, is in many respects the most completely successful of the three plays, and it should be noted that its story is also the least realistic of the three and—perhaps because of this—the most obviously mythic. Having declared, after his psychoanalysis sessions in 1957 and 1958, that his preoccupation with violence was over (he had achieved his
catharsis, he said, with *Suddenly Last Summer* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*), Williams appears to have borne-out his claim in *The Night of the Iguana*. The play had been promised for the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy in 1959. Well-received in Spoleto, it was then performed in New York by Actors Studio in the winter of 1960. Williams saw the studio's production, liked it, and decided to develop and revise the play for Broadway production. It opened on December 28, 1961, to predominantly favorable reviews and was selected by the critics as the best American play of the 1961-62 Broadway season. It was perhaps Williams' most realistic work since *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, his 1955 Pulitzer Prize winner. Realistic in its setting, structure, plot, and staging, it is a play depicting psychological, rather than physical torments (psychological anguish was never absent from the violent plays, but it was eclipsed to a great extent by the shock of the violence). Nevertheless, *The Night of the Iguana* retains the mythic archetype of the dying god and his mother-lover goddess along with a certain amount of Christ symbolism. The non-realistic impact of these elements is softened, however, by Williams' translation of the archetype and symbolism into primarily psychological terms.

For a Christ-figure, the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon, the minister locked out of his Church, would
appear at first glance an unlikely candidate. Having
been barred from active ministry for fornication and
preaching atheistical sermons, Shannon has only his
clerical garb (the button of the collar pops off when he
attempts to wear it for his "Baptist Female College School-
teachers") and his gold cross (recently redeemed from a
Mexico City pawnshop) as evidence of his calling. He is
an alcoholic with a strong penchant for under-aged girls
whom he punishes after seducing them (or after they seduce
him), and he is, Williams tells us in the stage-directions,
"a young man who has cracked up before and is going to
crack up again--perhaps repeatedly."13 Guilt-ridden and
tormented, he is a man searching for God, desiring to become
God-like, at least Christ-like, in his search for freedom
from his mortality. The striving for freedom from mortality
is a characteristic of all religions from Dionysiac to
Orphic to Christian, and Shannon represents this striving
as he stands in the tropical rainstorm:

Everything is silver, delicately lustrous. Shannon
extends his hands under the rainfall, turning them
in it as if to cool them. Then he cups them to
catch the water in his palms and bathes his fore­
head with it. The rainfall increases. . . .
Shannon lowers his hands from his burning forehead
and stretches them out through the rain's silver
sheet as if he were reaching for something outside
and beyond himself. Then nothing is visible but
these reaching-out hands. (p. 78)

There is "a pure white flash of lightning," the
power is cut off, and "a clear shaft of light stays on
Shannon's reaching-out hands until the stage curtain has
fallen slowly." (p. 78) Shannon is not presented as Christ, but as a man striving to become Christ. He is a minister—apparently of the Episcopal Church—and he sees himself even when he is most self-disparaging as more than a representative of Christ. He sees himself in the Roman rather than English tradition as Christ himself, albeit a sinful Christ. Mocking Hannah and the poppyseed tea she is making for her grandfather, Shannon tells her to be merciful and put in some hemlock. Launching a tirade, he tells her to "put in the hemlock and I will consecrate it, turn it to God's blood... I'll say, 'Take and drink, this, the blood of our--." (p. 98) She interrupts him, but the words are those spoken at the focal point of the Mass celebration, the moment in which the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine becomes the blood. Without quibbling over consubstantiation and transubstantiation, Williams has shown his protagonist in the context of Christian sacrifice the ceremony in which Christ's death is commemorated.

Not only his clerical garb and his allusions, however, show that Shannon conceives of himself as Christ; Shannon, like Christ, suffers crucifixion. As Shannon continues striving to become Christ, his suffering is self-imposed and largely psychological. His is, Hannah points out as he lies roped and struggling in the hammock, a "Passion Play performance." (p. 97) And as Hannah asks: Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a
hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Mr. Shannon? There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock—no nails, no blood, no death. Isn't that a comparatively comfortable, almost voluptuous kind of crucifixion to suffer for the guilt of the world, Mr. Shannon? (p. 96)

She takes his desire to sacrifice himself seriously to some extent, however. Half-believing his threat that he will "swim out to China," she ignores his demand that she untie him: "Not quite yet, Mr. Shannon. Not till I'm reasonably sure that you won't swim out to China, because, you see, I think you think of the . . . 'the long swim to China' as another painless atonement." (p. 99)

In all of this, the play avoids the charges of blasphemy of the kind leveled against Val and Chance Wayne as Christ-figures. Shannon, as Williams presents him and Hannah describes him, is not a Christ-figure, but a man trying to become one. The Christian imagery, however, has served its purpose. If Shannon can succeed in becoming a sacrifice, he can, it would follow, be reborn. That the sacrifice is not completed, that Shannon disappears in happy compromise with the Widow Faulk, is a new variation for Williams and an important one. First, however, the sacrifice theme must be seen in its entirety, and this involves the vegetation god-goddess archetype once again.
Shannon is young, handsome, generally submissive even in his rantings, and alienated—exalted—both by his sins and by his view of himself as Christ-like sacrifice. With mention only of a mother whose influence is referred to but whose present existence is never indicated, Shannon, like Val and Chance Wayne, is the orphan-wanderer. To the "rapaciously lusty" (p. 7) Widow Faulk, he is, as were the young vegetation gods, the incarnation of the powers of fertility, and his function is a phallic one. Maxine—even her name suggests dominance and aggressiveness—is the incarnation of fertility itself, the mother-goddess demanding to be reawakened after the death of her husband (the young Mexican boys have been temporarily serving the purpose, but they are desirable only in Shannon's absence). Shannon, with his self-declared compulsion for seducing teenage girls, is apparently repelled by this earth mother; nevertheless, he comes to her and her husband whenever he is about to undergo another "crack-up." Making the demands of a lover, she is also a mother to him, and Shannon submits to the "loving steel chains" which she, like the Princess Kosmonopolis, would bind him with, and which he, unlike Chance Wayne, accepts as a temporary escape from the painful atonement. She tells him that she wants him to stay with her to "help manage" the hotel, that "I've got five more years, maybe ten, to make this place attractive to the male clientele. . . . And you
can take care of the women that are with them. That's what you can do, you know that, Shannon." Shannon "chuckles happily," and accepting her suggestion of a swim in "that liquid moonlight," he goes down the path with her, Maxine "half-leading half supporting him." (p. 126) The goddess-consort relationship here has only begun. The sacrifice in which it must ultimately culminate is unacknowledged. Unable to suffer an actual, physical crucifixion, Shannon has learned from Hannah to accept the lack of punishment for his sins and the impossibility of his becoming god-like; he has learned to endure his own mortality. Because the modern world, the "second history," does not offer the violent sacrifice and actual rebirth witnessed by Nonno's "orange bough" of the golden age, Shannon must pray for Courage--the courage to bargain with "mist and mould" and to accept the only sacrifice it does offer, which is the acceptance of life--to Shannon an even greater compromise than death, the "painful atonement."

Shannon's relinquishing of his intent to become a sacrifice is also depicted in symbolic terms. The iguana is, like Shannon, "one of God's creatures at the end of his rope." (p. 125) The gold chain of his cross cutting into his flesh as he struggles in the hammock, Shannon is the iguana struggling against the rope around his throat, and Williams presents his symbol in an appropriately mythic context. Shannon is the reptile, the symbol of rebirth,
awaiting his agony and death. "Poking out their eyes . . . and burning their tails with matches" (p. 120), the Mexican children torture, slaughter, and ultimately devour the iguanas. In *The Night of the Iguana*—the title states the symbol—Williams makes much of the boys' frenzied scrambling to catch the shy lizard, and he translated for his readers their shouts of "We're going to have a feast! We'll eat good." (p. 59) In their grotesqueness, the children are like the dark, bird-like savages of *Suddenly Last Summer*, swarming after and devouring their prey. They are enacting the pagan *omophagia*. When Shannon is induced by Hannah with her poppyseed tea and Maxine with her rum-coco to abandon his determination to become a sacrifice, however, he is also persuaded by Hannah to cut the iguana loose, to free it of its fate as victim of the awful feast. Thus the iguana escapes into the jungle at the moment that Maxine appears to claim Shannon as her lover, and Shannon escapes into the mother-goddess' embrace. As Hannah had explained, "We all wind up with something or with someone, and if it's someone instead of just something, we're lucky, perhaps . . . unusually lucky." (p. 117) And in spite of his need to suffer, Shannon is not unhappy about his forced compromise. The life—without the death—of a vegetation god, it would seem, is an accepted existence.

In *Sweet Bird of Youth* it was noted that Heavenly introduced a new mythic element. The same can be said of Nonno and Hannah. Nonno is a kind of Tiresias or Jungian
"wise old man" figure combined with the mad, or "inebriate," poet, and in spite of the "little cerebral . . . incidents," (p. 38) Nonno accepts and endures life with an ancient wisdom. Likewise Hannah, an artist, has learned to endure, if only for the sake of one moment of communication between people. Hannah is depicted as a spinster with the fragility and spirituality of an Emily Dickinson (whom Williams quotes in his epigraph to the play), but she is also a mythic figure. Unlike Maxine, the fertility goddess who, in spite of her masculine aggressiveness, is predominantly feminine, Hannah is essentially sexless in her appeal. She is, like Heavenly, a divine-maiden, but she is also a divine androgyne. Williams describes her at her entrance: "Hannah is remarkable-looking--ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine, and yet androgynous-looking--almost timeless." (p. 18) In his description, Williams makes use of an archaic mythic figure whose meaning has played an important role in philosophical and psychological studies from the Middle Ages to the present day. As a sexual deviation androgyne is a concept necessarily related to the homosexuality, bisexuality, and transvestism of a number of Williams' protagonists, and it is a concept, which, along with these others, must be ultimately considered for its meaning and
function in the whole body of Williams' mythic plays. For the moment, however, its function in *The Night of the Iguana* can be explained in terms of mythology alone, in which divine androgyny represents, as Professor Eliade explains in *Myths, Dramas, and Mysteries*, "more than a state of sexual completeness and autarchy. Androgyny is," rather, "an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries," in effect, the divine androgyne symbolizes "the perfection of a primordial, nonconditioned state."¹⁴

Hannah's perfection is suggested even by her name—spelled forward or backward, it is the same either way. (Perhaps it isn't wholly coincidental that the names "Nonno" and "Shannon" are unusual in their combinations of letters, and that "Shannon" combines "Hannah" and "Nonno.") Hannah, like Shannon, has been the victim of a crack-up, but she has found the way to escape her fate, she has emerged victorious. Having made the "subterranean travels, the . . . journeys that the spooked and bedevilled people are forced to take through the . . . unlighted sides of their natures," (p. 105) she has recognized, like Vee Talbott and Mrs. Venable, that the world is a world of light and shadow: "Everything in the whole solar system has a shadowy side to it except the sun itself—the sun is the single exception." (p. 106) Hannah is saying that she has recognized the
light and shadow in her own nature and come to terms with it. It is this which Shannon, despising and punishing himself for his human nature, must likewise learn to do, and it is this which Hannah teaches him through courage and endurance and acceptance of life.

With all of these figures—earth-goddess, divine maiden, divine androgyne and blind seer, it is interesting that, unlike Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth, the protagonist in Night of the Iguana is never eclipsed. In spite of her natural dominance, Maxine as a character is nevertheless secondary to Shannon, as are Hannah and Nonno, both of whom are major figures in their mythic roles and their functions within the play. In The Night of the Iguana, Williams has achieved a success even greater than that of Suddenly Last Summer. He has avoided the weaknesses of Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth in which the mother-goddess figures play too great a part in the action of the play. Denied the fruits of her fertility role, Maxine, like Mrs. Venable, fulfills her function without overshadowing Shannon as protagonist. But in addition to this, it should be noted that Shannon is the only character whose psychological torments are expressed on stage. Nonno is primarily an off-stage figure, Hannah has mastered her fear and panic, and Maxine knows how to resolve her problems. Shannon is given the greatest psychological dimension, and his mental anguish is presented in
physical and verbal terms. Writhing and twisting, groaning and ranting, Shannon is always present, always in motion, always spotlighted. He is soothed, pacified, physically led and supported, but it is he, and not Hannah—the soothing and pacifying supporter—who dominates the stage. Through skillful craftsmanship, Williams has mastered the myth, and found the key to making the male dominate the stage and fulfill his assigned role as protagonist.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore closed its curtains after two abortive attempts at production—one in 1963 and the other 1964—the second one starring Broadway drawing cards Tallulah Bankhead and Tab Hunter. In 1968 Kingdom of Earth, in spite of Estelle Parsons' award-winning performance, likewise suffered an early, although less abrupt, demise. And the following year, In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel closed after a brief off-Broadway run. The latter—although Williams' New Directions publishers had promised the play, together with seven other short works, in a volume due to be published in the "Early Spring" of 1970—has not yet seen print. This is because, perhaps, of the same perseverance of revision which had repeatedly set back publication of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore six years before. Without a published text, it is impossible to examine the work closely. It might be noted, however, that in the falcon-like voraciousness of Miriam
(another "Mary" variant and the name of Paul Morel's intense, ego-devouring girlfriend in D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, played effectively by Anne Meacham) to the tense, near-hysterical portrayal of the weakened and dying painter Mark--created by Donald Madden--Williams is still working with the goddess-consort relationship in which the goddess destroys her lover once he has fulfilled his phallic role. Nor has Williams deviated from that pattern in Milk Train or Kingdom of Earth, his last two major publicized and published plays--which will be examined in some detail, and which are, once again, variations on a theme.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore derives its name from the final scene of the play in which Chris, the "Angel of Death" poet, has just pulled a bottle of milk from the canvas sack in which he carries all of his personal belongings, including his highly symbolic mobiles. The stage directions read: "Chris opens the milk bottle and sips the milk as if it were sacramental wine. . . . He catches some drops . . . that have run down his chin, licks them almost reverently off the palm of his hand."\(^{15}\) Shortly after, Mrs. Goforth emerges from her bedroom. She is now close to death and Chris has told her that "you need somebody or something to mean God to you," (p. 111) and
that he is there to bring it to her. He has brought her "the love of true understanding," (p. 12) and the message that the meaning of life is acceptance—acceptance "of how not to be frightened of not knowing what isn't meant to be known, acceptance of not knowing anything but the moment of still existing, until we stop existing—and acceptance of that moment, too." (pp. 113-114) In fear and panic, Mrs. Goforth angrily declares that she doesn't want to be escorted to death, that she will "go forth alone. But you, you counted on touching my heart because you'd heard I was dying, and old dying people are your specialty, your vocation. But you miscalculated with this one. This milk train doesn't stop here anymore." (p. 115) She is deceiving herself, of course, for she does need Chris, and when she tells him to "be here when I wake up," (p. 116) it is clear that, regardless of her anger, he does "mean God" to her. The fertility goddess demanding sexual reawakening in the myths is now demanding spiritual reawakening, and Chris Flanders, a poet, is the agent of her spiritual fertility. But in his role as agent, he is dependent on the mother-goddess for his own nourishment (symbolized by Williams in the sacramental milk). His vocation is to bring someone "to mean God" to dying, demanding, old women, and he cannot fulfill his function without the goddess-consort relationship.
That Mrs. Goforth is the mother-goddess of mythology is indicated by Williams' imagery as well as the relationship itself. She is "a legend," (p. 65) the "mountain" goddess in her villa atop a cliff, inaccessible except by the sea which is "the cradle of life," connected by "that old water snake, the Nile." (p. 94) As a symbol of the matriarchal goddess, the ocean is treacherous, "the sea is full of Medusas." (p. 77) Mrs. Goforth is likewise a griffin, "a mythological monster, half lion, and half eagle and completely human." (p. 5) She is surrounded by her "lupos," the dogs which she calls wolves (p. 61) and she and the others like her are variously described as "witches" (the Witch of Capri), monsters, and bitches. Yet, like Kybele, Aphrodite, and the other earth goddesses, she is beautiful and a symbol of fertility. She is both "good" mother and "terrible" mother, the terms generally ascribed by mythologists--and psychologists--in analyzing the nature of the mother goddess. (This would also explain the Princess Kosmonopolis' frequent reference to herself as "monster.") She is the "bitch-goddess."

As Chris asks in the play: "How is it possible for a woman of your reputation as a patron of the arts and artists, to live up here, with all this beauty about you, and yet be--" "A bitch?" She interrupts him. "A swamp-bitch, a devil? . . . a female devil." (p. 83) The symbols are
all those used in mythology and psychology to represent
the beautiful and ugly, the good and terrible earth goddess,
whose demands are voracious and, ultimately, destructive to
the beautiful, submissive youth who must answer her
demands.

The relationship in _The Milk Train Doesn't Stop
Here Anymore_, however, is not the physical one of
mythology. Chris is a lover in a sense, but only
figuratively. Making a point of rejecting her sexual
demands, Chris is concerned with her emotional—perhaps
spiritual—needs. But regardless of whether the relation­
ship is physical or emotional or spiritual, it is essentially
the same as that found in all of the plays after _Orpheus
Descending_. Like Shannon, Chris Flanders has suffered
from the awareness of his own mortality. With "the spectre
of lunacy at my heels," (p. 113) he has sought out a Hindu
teacher, helping a man to die along the way. Told that in
that incident he had found his vocation, Chris had suddenly
felt "that sudden feeling of quiet"; he felt "peaceful."
(p. 113) Like Shannon, he had learned that violent physical
sacrifice cannot be elected in the modern world and that
the meaning of life is acceptance. In accepting his own
mortality, he has become god-like to the point that the
play closes with Chris taking a "medieval goblet" of wine,
drinking from it, and passing it back to Blackie, Mrs.
Goforth's secretary. He has become a priest, a representative of Christ. Like all of Williams' protagonists in the plays discussed, he is a Christ-figure and a beautiful youth. And like most of these same protagonists, he is a wandering poet with no home and no family, who brings comfort and pleasure—generally physical but in this case spiritual—to lonely, ageing women who have nothing or nobody to believe in.

The allegorical nature of the play is obvious; Williams calls it a "sophisticated fairy tale." (p. 1) As seen in some of Williams' plays—Suddenly Last Summer, for example—this is not in itself a flaw. But Williams commits many serious blunders in his handling of the play. Conscious symbolism and myth usage can be good, but self-conscious symbolism and myth, exaggerated to the point of the bizarre and directed to appeal to fashionable psychology and theatricality (Williams added two fashionably nonrealistic, Kabuki-style stage-hands to the second production who added little to the play) can only end in failure. The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore does this. Aside from his handling of myth and symbol, Williams' craftsmanship fails him in much the way it did in Orpheus Descending and Sweet Bird of Youth. The mother-goddess is once again not only dominant in meaning, she is a dominant character. Because the plot centers about her rather than Chris, and because Chris is too allegorical to survive on the real level, he is totally eclipsed by the bitch goddess (in spite of his
two or three brief flashes of authority). Possibly Williams intended this time to write a play about the goddess and not the god, but the reader is never certain that this is the case, and the play remains a divided work which has little claim to success.

Kingdom of Earth (The Seven Descents of Myrtle) fails in a similar way. Selecting the warring brothers motif to express his theme, Williams combines it with the myth of the flood, the symbol of the destruction of the old world and the birth of the new. The flood theme is inverted to suggest the passing of the golden age in which the great mother, Miss Lottie, reigned from her gold and crystal parlor, and the birth of the new—the "kingdom of earth."

The two half-brothers, Chicken (dark-complexioned and born of Negro blood) and Lot (Miss Lottie's exotic blond youth born of "pure" blood), are cast in roles similar to those of the mythological Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Horus and Set, and Osiris and Set. The Christian myth of the murder of Abel by his jealous brother and the race which Cain produced is well-known, as is the treacherous rivalry between Jacob and Esau. The stories of Osiris and Set and Horus and Set are less familiar. Osiris, son of Earth and Heaven, the Egyptian vegetation god beloved by the moon goddess Isis, was murdered by his twin brother, the jealous Set. Desiring Isis, Set disguised himself as a boar and castrated Osiris. Set then murdered Horus, son of Isis and Osiris, and set out in the hottest days of summer in pursuit of Isis. Horus,
however, was revived and avenged the death of his father, but not until Osiris' death had come to signify the end of the bright half of the year and the rule of the evil Set, or, as Theodore Reik in *Myth and Guilt* expresses it, the "end to the Golden Age in which Osiris righteously reigned in both kingdoms of Egypt."¹⁶ Neumann explains: "The great antagonist of Osiris was symbolized by Set, the black boar, whose emblem is the primeval flint knife, the instrument of dismemberment and death. This Set is the epitome of darkness, evil, destructiveness; being twin brother to Osiris, he is the archetypal 'antagonist'. . . ."¹⁷

Williams has joined the Christian and pagan allegories of the warring elements in man's nature and created Lot and Chicken, half-brothers jealously vying for possession of the kingdom of earth. A hard, crude, primitive man, "strange-looking . . . but also remarkably good looking,"¹⁸ Chicken represents for Williams the dark, but strong side of human nature and of life. With his "darker than olive skin, and the power and male grace of his body," (p. 3) he is lined up with the physical versus the spiritual, the mortal versus the immortal, the destructive versus the creative. He is shadow versus light and evil versus good, whereas Lot, in his fairness, his delicacy, and his asexuality suggests all the traditional forces of light, goodness, and immortality. Chicken's symbol is his
knife, and Chicken is the victor in the death-struggle. Thus his philosophy stands endorsed: "I think that life just don't care for the weak. Or the soft. A man and his life. Like I said, a man and his life both got to be made out of the same stuff or one or the other will break and the one that breaks won't be life." (p. 92) With Lot dead in his mother's parlor, and Chicken and Myrtle climbing to the roof to sit out the flood after having made love and talked of children, the race of Cain (Myrtle's maiden name to which she implicitly reverts when she desires her marriage to Lot is Myrtle Kane) is about to be begun. Lot has fled the city of Sodom, but Sodom is not doomed.

The parallels in *Kingdom of Earth* to the stories of Cain and Abel and of Set, Osiris, and Horus are already clearly mythological, but it is important to recognize that the Set-Osiris-Horus myth is also clearly within the context of the great mother motif and that in dramatizing the end of the Golden Age and the onset of the "bargaining" with "mist and mould," Williams continues to work within the goddess-consort framework. In *Kingdom of Earth* the goddess is the dead Miss Lottie, a small blond woman "who liked violets and lace and mother-of-pearl and decorative fringes on things," (p. 37) whose little gold
and crystal parlor is the mysterious center of her worship. It is this to which Lot—who has begun to die in the spring, only a month after his mother's death—withdraws in his death agony. The son of Miss Lottie and a Greek fruit-dealer—her lover—Lot suggests an Attis to Miss Lottie's Kybele. Violets are the symbol of the castrated Attis from whose blood they sprang up, and Williams alludes to the vegetation god and goddess in his reference to Lot's "violet-lidded eyes" (p. 8) and Miss Lottie's love of violets. And just as the earth mother was originally a moon goddess, Miss Lottie is likewise connected with the moon. As Lot sits in the darkened bedroom the moonlight plays about him in "a faint and fitful streak," (p. 55) and "once in a while the moon comes out of those fast-moving clouds, and it—says things to me in the soft voice of my mother." (p. 67) In total submission, Lot has dedicated himself to her worship.

Lot's role as flower-like youth is emphasized throughout the play. Williams describes him at his entrance: "He is a frail, delicately—you might say exotically—pretty youth of about twenty." (p. 4) Lot points out that he resembles his mother, and Myrtle replies, "To me you resemble just you. The first, the most, the only refined man in my life. Skin, eyes, hair any girl would be jealous of. A mouth like a flower. Kiss me!" (p. 14) Later, Williams describes
him again. He sits in a rocker, watching Myrtle at the rose-bud-printed washbowl (the rose is the symbol of Adonis and Christ), "and Lot's fair head, delicately pretty as a girl's leans against a souvenir pillow from Biloxi." (p. 37)

But it is in his death-scene that Lot is most clearly the beautiful young consort who, like Attis, Adonis, Dionysus, Osiris, and all the other delicate, effeminate young vegetation gods, devoted himself wholly as lover (spiritual in this play) and handservant to the worship of the great mother:

Lot appears like an apparition in the pool of cool light at the stair-top. He has put on the gauzy white dress to conjure an image of his mother in summer. As he stands above the stairs he puts on a translucent, wide "picture hat"; the crown is trimmed with faded flowers. The effect is both bizarre and beautiful. . . . Then Lot starts his descent of the stairs. With each step his gasping for breath is louder. . . . As he staggers into the bizarre little parlor, the room is lighted with a delicate rose light. There he stands swaying for a few moments; then sinks into one of the little gold chairs, facing the window. . . . Lot, in his transfiguration, stares blindly. (pp. 107-108)

Unable to serve his mother goddess in life, he will serve her in death. In his total dedication to her worship, Lot has become like Dionysus and Attis, who assumed the raiment of their earth goddesses. Still further, he is like the priests of the great earth goddesses who, in an effort to become one with the goddess, commonly dressed in her image and even castrated themselves as a symbol of their worship.
In addition to his effeminate looks but masculine function, it is likewise notable that Lot, in his transvestic "transfiguration," (p. 108) is represented, much as the "androgy nous" Hannah had been, as "sexless." He is impotent as a result of his illness, but he denies that he is a homosexual. He explains his attitude toward sex to Myrtle, declaring that she has married "someone to whom no kind of sex relation was ever as important as fighting sickness and trying with his mother to make, to create, a little elegance in a corner of the earth we lived in that wasn't favorable to it." (p. 43) As representative of the immortal and spiritual, Lot is both asexual and bisexual; he is both sexes and neither sex. In his death "his agony is transfigured by the sexless passion of the transvestite. . . . Even in death he has the ecstasy of the transvestite." (p. 108) A familiar figure in ancient religions, the transvestite was both priest and goddess. Through his exchange of masculine garb for feminine raiment—and sometimes through the sacrifice of his own masculinity—he could become more like the goddess, thereby achieving communion with her more readily. Through his communion he becomes the goddess, and thus, he himself becomes the center of worship. As Myrtle assures Lot, "I . . . understand. And I'm going to devote myself to you like a religion, mystery as you are, back of that ivory holder and Mona Lisa
smile." (p. 43) Hermaphrodite, androgyne, transvestite—all are familiar figures in ancient myth, many of them divine figures whose worship became the focal point of whole cultures. Symbols of completeness and harmony, they were looked upon as positive forces to be revered and emulated.

Lot, however, is not destined for this end. He must die in the ultimate sacrifice to the great mother, and there is little hope of resurrection. As the flood is about to sweep over the land, Chicken and Myrtle climb to the roof, Chicken crying exultantly: "Sing it out, frogs an' crickets, Chicken is king!" (p. 111) Chicken has become the sacred king of the new world, and the new world is a patriarchate. Lot had brought Myrtle home to take the place of his mother as mistress of the home and heiress of the land. She is the amiable, "fleshy," dominating young woman (p. 4) named after the tree sacred to Aphrodite, and as she herself had understood, "I'm not just your wife, I'm also your mother, and I'm not daid, I'm livin'." (p. 8) Calling him "precious" and "baby" throughout the play, she promises to love and protect him and to thwart Chicken's plan to maintain possession of the farm. But Myrtle is weak and easily frightened, and she succumbs to Chicken's primitive power and his masculinity. Forgetting, in her fear, her resolve to act the mistress of the house, she makes way for the ascendency of the
patriarchate and the passing of the Golden Age and the beginning of a "second history," the "bargaining" with "mist and mould."

In spite of the goddess-consort pattern, Williams would appear to have avoided the dominance of the earth mother as a character. Miss Lottie is dead, and Myrtle shows little promise of succeeding her, leaving Lot and Chicken to struggle for the stage. Thematically, the play is the conflict of light and dark, spiritual and physical, etc., with Lot and Chicken as protagonist and antagonist. But in making Lot too exotic and bizarre to be accepted on the psychological level, Williams has made him unreal, leaving the stage to Myrtle and Chicken. Ultimately, Chicken should be the dominant force. Crude and primitive, and distasteful, he is the victorious antagonist to Myrtle, whose descents to the kitchen and Chicken are an ironic rendering of the seven stages in achieving the oriental nirvana and whose loyalties determine the outcome of the play. But just as Lot is too bizarre, Chicken is too primitive. He is too crude, too distasteful—he is, in effect, unreal. It remains for Myrtle, in her sometimes pathetic, often amusing, and totally human responses to her situation, to capture our interest and sympathy and to emerge as the dominant character. Myrtle is an earth mother in a patriarchal society. In this she differs from
Lady Torrance, the Princess Kosmonopolis, and Mrs. Goforth. But *Kingdom of Earth*, like *Orpheus Descending*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, nevertheless presents a mother-goddess—in this case a mother-goddess substitute—who dominates the action and the stage. Thematically, Myrtle is secondary to Chicken. Artistically, however, she is the protagonist. Perhaps this is what Williams intended—it is difficult to tell. As with *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, the divided quality of the play is the true fault.

Gods and goddesses, sacrifice and rebirth—these are the primary materials of myth which have been, to varying degrees, a part of Williams' art since his first published story in 1928. Essential elements of his work from 1957, they have been for Williams a source of stories, symbols, and themes, although the last major play, *Kingdom of Earth*, is not the last play in which Williams makes use of the mythic materials. The combinations and variations are endless. Determining that they exist, of course, in whatever combinations or variations, is not the final goal, but it is the first step to that goal. The final goal—determination of the ultimate meaning and function of the myth usage—is the next step.
NOTES

1Suddenly Last Summer (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 78. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.


3"Sweet Bird of Success," Encounter 12 (June, 1959), 60.

4Sweet Bird of Youth (New York: New Directions), p. 436. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.


6Ibid., p. 256.

7Ibid.

8Ibid., p. 257.

9Ibid., p. 256.

10Psychology of the Child Archetype, p. 139.

11Neumann, Origins, p. 137.

12Psychology of Child Archetype, p. 158.

13The Night of the Iguana (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 8. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.

15 *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 105. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.


17 * Origins*, p. 227.

18 *Kingdom of Earth* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 3. All subsequent page references to this edition will be given immediately after the quotation.
THE DEVICE AND THE METAPHYSICS

That Tennessee Williams has permeated his plays of the past decade with mythical elements— that he has adapted the mythical symbols, patterns, and motifs to his own artistic needs, fitting them to plot, structure, character, theme and language--is clear. That these elements must necessarily affect the meanings of the plays is likewise clear. Yet, because his critics have failed to recognize the extent of the mythic elements, they have failed to recognize their impact. Even when the more obvious Christian allusions to sacrifice and resurrection are recognized, they are nearly always condemned as inappropriate and having little or no organic relationship to the meaning. That the Christ symbolism reinforces the vegetation god themes of sacrifice and rebirth in terms more familiar than those of ancient myth cannot be understood when the vegetation god element itself is not recognized. But once this element has been recognized, we must ask the ultimate question: what do the mythic elements mean outside of their mythic context, after they have been displaced from their mythic origins? More specifically, what do the sacrifice and
rebirth of the vegetation god mean in a modern world? What does the goddess-consort relationship mean in a modern world? And finally, what of the sexual abnormalities of Williams' young god-like protagonists—how are the "mutilated" and the "fugitive kind" related both to the mythic elements and to the modern world as Tennessee Williams presents it?

In answering these questions, we must likewise consider what sacrifice and rebirth and the god-goddess relationship meant in their original contexts, for it is these meanings on which Williams bases his own conceptions of reality—that is to say, it is the past myth from which he constructs a present myth, a "true story of our time and the world we live in. . . ." (Suddenly Last Summer, p. 47)

For Williams, sacrifice generally entails death. Val Xavier, Sebastian Venable, and Lot undergo the ultimate sacrifice; Chance Wayne suffers a death-equivalent; Shannon is obsessed with the desire for death; and Chris Flanders makes it a vocation. It will be further shown that in all of the plays examined, death is related, implicitly or explicitly, to suggestions of rebirth. Death is the means to the ultimate goal of becoming freed from the corrupting bonds of mortality;
it is the means to becoming immortal and god-like. This linking of death and rebirth is a characteristic of the great religions from ancient to Christian times. It is not, however, a characteristic of the modern existential view of life. Mircea Eliade notes that "Anguish before Nothingness and Death seems to be a specifically modern phenomenon. In all the other, non-European cultures, that is, in the other religions, Death is never felt as an absolute end or as Nothingness: it is regarded rather as a rite of passage to another mode of being; and for that reason always referred to in relation to the symbolisms and rituals of initiation, re-birth or resurrection.\textsuperscript{1} In the early religions, he explains, "Death is the Great Initiation." This is true also of Christianity, but, as Eliade continues, "a great part of the modern world has lost faith, and for this mass of mankind anxiety in the face of Death presents itself as anguish before Nothingness."\textsuperscript{2}

Varying the theme only slightly, Tennessee Williams presents "anxiety in the face of Death" as anguish before Time—and Time is Nothingness. "Whether we admit it to ourselves," the playwright tells us, "we are all haunted by a truly awful sense of impermanence."\textsuperscript{3} This sense of impermanence likewise haunts Williams' plays. Thus, in Sweet Bird of Youth, Chance Wayne asks the question: "Time— who could beat it, who could defeat it ever?" (p. 451) Nevertheless, his acceptance of the castration
which is death is an act of optimism and not despair. If the Princess' life—and, implicitly, his own—has meant nothing, "something's got to mean something. . . . Something's still got to mean something." (p. 449) "The enemy time" can be conquered if "something means something." As Chris explains it to Mrs. Goforth, "Finally, sooner or later, you need somebody or something to mean God to you, even if it's a cow on the streets of Bombay, or carved rock on the Easter Islands. . . ." (p. 111) And if somebody or something means God, then death becomes birth, preparing the way—as it did originally—to that God and to immortality: "Death," Eliade continues, "prepares the new, purely spiritual birth, access to a mode of being not subject to the destroying action of Time." Escape from Time is escape from mortality, and immortality is god-like; death is the way to immortality, and thus death is the way to becoming one with God.

In restoring to death its primitive significance as a rite of passage, Williams gives particular attention to the mode of death or the death-equivalent. Most often it takes the form of an ancient ritual sacrifice—i.e., crucifixion, dismemberment, immolation, cannibalism, or castration. These are present or suggested in all but two of Williams' later plays—in Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer, Sweet Bird of Youth, and The Night of the
Iguana. In the other two plays—The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore and Kingdom of Earth—the death, if it is not ritualistic in itself, is accompanied by ritual. Chris Flanders drinks from the wine goblet and passes it to Blackie moments after Mrs. Goforth has died, while the dying Lot, dressed in his mother's gown, stands "transfigured" in religious ecstasy, a votary of the goddess to whom, in his effort to become one with her, he has surrendered his own identity. In every case, the sacrifice or ritual involves a surrendering of the individual identity in an effort to achieve rebirth. Crucifixion, Val's original mode of death and the mode referred to in relation to Shannon, is a return, as Jung expresses it, to "the birth-giving branch of the tree of life." Trees are interpreted mythically and psychologically as signifying rebirth through the feminine, maternal principle, and crucifixion is the central symbol of sacrifice in Christianity as well as an occasional one in the vegetation god myths. Dismemberment, another sacrificial mode and the traditional mode of Orpheus' death, is mentioned in Orpheus Descending and is an aspect of Sebastian's death. It is likewise related to fertility and rebirth. Dionysus, for example, is dismembered, gathered up by the goddess, and produced anew. Dismemberment is an integral part of countless sun myths and many vegetation god myths, in which
it is interpreted as "the inversion of the idea of the composition of the child in the mother's womb." 6

Immolation, another form of ritual sacrifice and the means by which Val's death was apparently carried out, is a universal symbol of purification and procreation and was a common primitive, ancient, and Old Testament form of sacrifice. It was the purifying and generative powers of fire on which the Greeks based their concept of "the cosmic fire (ekpyrosis) that periodically puts an end to the universe in order to renew it," 7 and it was fire in which the phoenix, one of Williams' major symbols of resurrection, was both destroyed and reborn. Although regarded by many as a masculine principle, because of its association with the self-generating fire, the phoenix is also regarded as an androgynous symbol. It is often the symbol of the creative powers and holds special significance for the artist. In Williams' work immolation is used to suggest both the creative and purifying forces, with special emphasis on the latter. Val is burned to death, thus being purified and therefore becoming god-like—both victim and victor.

Frequently related to both dismemberment and immolation is cannibalism, the devouring of human flesh and the mythic device (generally regarded as "gothic") of Suddenly Last Summer. Cannibalism often followed
dismemberment in the vegetation god myths, and it is the basis of the immolation of animals as a sacrifice to the gods. Once purified by the flames, the animal was looked upon as the god himself, and in the act of eating the purified animal, the worshipper was partaking of the "life" or "soul" principle, the "mana" of the god. As for cannibalism in Christianity, "it only remained to identify Christ with the Paschal Lamb of the New Covenant for the eating of the flesh and the presentation of the blood of the divine Victim to become integral in the sacrificial eucharistic action." Like the other sacrificial modes, cannibalism is also related to rebirth: "It was instituted by divine beings. But they instituted it to give human beings the opportunity to assume a responsibility in the cosmos, to enable them to provide for the continuity of vegetable life." Thus the vegetation gods were sometimes devoured after they were dismembered, thereby maintaining the continuity of the seasons. But Erich Neumann notes that the concept of sacrifice and food symbolism sometimes becomes distorted, until "the relation between the world and God is equivalent to that between food and the eater of food and God, once glorified as the world-nourisher, is now seen as the world devourer, for the world is God's sacrificial food." This is Sebastian's vision of God—the ugly black birds devouring the vulnerable baby turtles. And Sebastian, himself a kind
of vegetation god, thinks of the young boys he exploits in terms of food: "Fed up with dark ones, famished for light ones: that's how he talked about people, as if they were--items on a menu.--'That one's delicious-looking, that one is appetizing,' or 'that one is not appetizing.'" ... (p. 39) Ultimately, of course, it is Sebastian who becomes the sacrificial food of the young boys who had run after him crying "pan," the Spanish word for "bread." This identification of Sebastian with bread and the idea of the boys' cannibalism as an attempt to partake of the god's spirit and immortality adds to Sebastian's role as a sacrificed god, especially when we recall Mrs. Venable's lifting Sebastian's volume of poems "as if elevating the Host before the altar." (p. 13) In Suddenly Last Summer, Williams has created a world in which sacrifice, in the form of cannibalism, is the dominant theme.

Sweet Bird of Youth employs another ancient mode of sacrifice as a central theme. In addition to the theme of Time, which is also related to death, the play develops the castration motif of the vegetation god myths. Pointing out that ritual castration originated in the Mother-Goddess cults, Neumann goes back to the vegetation gods in explaining the sacrificial mode:

The youths, who personify the spring, belong to the Great Mother. They are her bondslaves, her property, because they are the sons she has borne. Consequently
the chosen ministers and priests of the Mother Goddess are eunuchs. They have sacrificed the thing that is for her the most important—the phallus. Hence the phenomenon of castration associated with this stage appears here for the first time in its proper sense, because specifically related to the genital organ. The castration threat makes its appearance with the Great Mother and is deadly. For her, loving, dying, and being emasculated are the same thing. Only the priests, at least in later times, escape being put to death because, by castrating themselves, they have voluntarily submitted to a symbolical death for her sake.  

This symbolical death is, as all death is in myth, the "precondition of spirituality," and the resultant eunuch is a "not uncommon symbol of spiritual generation which occurs again and again in the mystery religions and secret teachings." It is in this sense that Chance Wayne is a Christ-figure as well as a vegetation god; his castration is his "purification" (see the short play entitled "Purification" in which castration is more clearly the means to the washing away of sins). It is his "symbolical death," and thus spiritual rebirth, as emphasized by the Hallelujah Chorus and the Easter symbolism. This spiritual regeneration, like many of the ritual sacrifices, is based on the feminine principle. Like crucifixion, dismemberment, and cannibalism, castration involves the worshipper's surrendering his identity and returning to the maternal principle through death (death as a return to the womb is a generally accepted concept). And just as death is the beginning of immortality, thus enabling man to become
god-like, castration likewise involves the worshipper's taking on the characteristics of the worshipped. The sexual mutilations are performed, as E. O. James explains, in order that the priest may "secure complete identity with the Goddess." Or, as Neumann expresses it: "By surrendering himself, the devotee becomes the property of the Great Mother and is finally transformed into her."

In the process of transformation through castration, however, another ritual becomes involved. Generally regarded as a sexual deviation, transvestism can also have a highly symbolic spiritual significance, and it is this religious significance which Williams attempts to express in Kingdom of Earth. In The Cult of the Mother Goddess, E. O. James observes of the Phrygian priest: "By sacrificing his virility he assimilated himself to her [the goddess] so completely that he shared in her life-giving power. Henceforth he adopted female attire, having consecrated himself to her service even at the cost of his manhood." (Neumann adds the observation that the priest attired in the dress of the goddess and thus identified with her had not necessarily sacrificed his masculinity in castration, but that male prostitution was commonly a variant.) The religious identification with the goddess is clearly depicted in Kingdom of Earth. Dressed in his mother's garments, Lot descends the stairs. "With each step his gasping for breath is
louder, but his agony is transfigured by the sexless passion of the transvestite. He has a fixed smile which is almost ecstatic." (p. 108) Attired in the goddess' garments, Lot has become "transfigured"; he has become Miss Lottie. Meanwhile Myrtle, "in a state of mental shock," has retreated to the kitchen and opened the icebox as if it were a place of refuge. "Pan?—Pan!--Knife?—Knife!" (pp. 108-109) Lot has undergone the ultimate sacrifice, and in his death, Williams is telling us, he has achieved new life. Myrtle, in choosing between "bread," (the "pan" of Suddenly Last Summer and the way to the spiritual life) and Chicken's symbol, the phallic knife, is at the same time underlining Lot's role as a victim of the knife--his spiritual castration and his sacrifice in general.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore is the only play in which actual or symbolical death for the consort is not present. Nevertheless, Chris Flanders has dedicated himself to death, assisting others through their "rites of passage." For Chris, acceptance has replaced the ritual forms of sacrifice and, by making others see God in himself, he has achieved his own spiritual regeneration. Mrs. Goforth, in being the victim of death, symbolizes death itself, while Chris is the worshipper of life, administering to those whose life is nearly over. He suggests a forsaking of the death mysteries for the life mysteries, although death and sacrifice remain integral aspects of his life mysteries. In every sacrifice--physical or symbolical--in which communion or union with the god is the goal, there is a re-enactment
of the original sacrifice with the victim as a god-substitute and thus the god. "The victim is first sanctified, sacrificed, then divinized." Thus the sacrifice and death are creative in the sense that "the life which is sacrificed manifests itself in a more brilliant form upon another plane of existence."

In taking the sacrifice motif of the vegetation gods and placing it in a modern context, Williams, unlike many contemporary writers, has made a point of retaining the intimate relationship of sacrifice and rebirth. Without sacrifice—preferably physical and preferably violent—there can be no rebirth, and without rebirth man, because he is corruptible, cannot achieve union with God. Thus sacrifice becomes an optimistic, desirable act, and thus Sebastian Venable, Chance Wayne, Shannon, and the other cosmic males submit to and desire some form of sacrifice. For most critics, however, the concept of sacrifice as union or communion is overlooked. Although atonement is generally discussed, it is always in terms of guilt and appeasement rather than its true sense of union, i.e., "at-one-ment," with God. In arriving at their definitions of "atonement," the critics inevitably turn to a passage in the short story "Desire and the Black Masseur": "the principle of atonement [is] the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the
idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt."19
Taken out of context, the passage suggests only a punishment for sin, with possible forgiveness. Man, who is corrupt, is punished and perhaps forgiven for being corrupt. There is no suggestion in this concept that, once forgiven, he will become less mortal, that he will be restored to his original innocence, or that he can become God. Nor is there any acknowledgement that atonement is actually man's unconscious compensation for his lack of god-likeness, his solace in the absence of the element which can be achieved only through death. Yet, if we read carefully, this is what Williams says in the story. The paragraph from which the passage is taken explains the principle in its entirety:

For the sins of the world are really only its partialities, its incompletions, and these are what sufferings must atone for. A wall that has been omitted from a house because the stones were exhausted, a room in a house left unfurnished because the householder's funds were not sufficient--these sorts of incompletions are usually covered up or glossed over by some kind of make-shift arrangement. The nature of man is full of such make-shift arrangements, devised by himself to cover his incompletion. He feels a part of himself to be like a missing wall or a room left unfurnished and he tries as well as he can to make up for it. The use of imagination, resorting to dreams or the loftier purpose of art, is a mask he devises to cover his incompletion. Or violence such as a war, between two men or among a number of nations, is also a blind and senseless compensation for that which is not yet formed in human nature. Then there is still another compensation. This one is found in the principle of atonement, the surrender of self to violent treatment by others
with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt. This last way was the one that Anthony Burns unconsciously had elected.

Atonement for Williams, then, is not primarily a question of appeasement for or forgiveness of sins. It is man's unconscious compensation "for that which is not yet formed in human nature"; it is man's compensation for his lack of perfection. And through this compensation, in his "surrender of self to violent treatment by others," it is not merely guilt that is cleared--although this may be the desired psychological effect--but it is also perfection which is achieved. In sacrifice man can find the missing god-like element. Williams reiterates this in the story's closing paragraph: "And meantime, slowly, with barely a thought of so doing, the earth's whole population twisted and writhed beneath the manipulation of night's black fingers and the white one's of day with skeletons splintered and flesh reduced to pulp, as out of this unlikely problem, the answer, perfection, was slowly evolved through torture." 20 That the torture of Anthony Burns is carried out against the background of the evangelist preacher's Crucifixion sermons is significant, but just as significant is the fact that when the masseur completes the ritual by devouring the little man, "the passionate services at the church were finished," "quiet had returned and there was an air of completion." 21 The
completion is the rebirth, and thus perfection, of the sacrificed Burns.

Beginning with Orpheus Descending, Williams has presented, in all of the plays discussed, modern man searching—like ancient man—for completion. In all of the plays man believes the completion can be achieved through sacrifice. In The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, man is faced, however, with the problem of finding no one to carry out the sacrifice, of finding that there is no violent sacrifice in the modern world. Renouncing his vision of a world only too willing to act as executioner, Williams renounces violent sacrifice as the means to perfection. Gradually, he replaces it with what he presents as the even greater sacrifice—acceptance of the incompleteness. Ultimately, Williams calls for violent or "quiet" sacrifice to be combined with devotion to the worship of the goddess who is the source of all fertility and thus of rebirth. And thus the ancient goddess-consort relationship is a major theme in Williams' work.

Throughout his history, man has been preoccupied with death. For the man without faith, death marks the end of all life; for the religious man, it is the beginning of a higher life. Either way it is man's ultimate
concern. For Tennessee Williams, nothing can be created without sacrifice, and the sacrifice and rebirth of the Cosmic Male is, as we have seen, Williams' major theme in the later plays. The plays are centered around what were known in ancient times as the "Death Mysteries." Characterized by the worship of a goddess, the death mysteries stood in contrast to the mysteries of birth and generation, which were devoted to the worship of a god. Because the goddess was regarded as the source of all fertility and birth and the god the agent of that fertility, it was the goddess who was worshipped as supreme in the mystery of death and rebirth. It was she who was responsible for life rising renewed from the grave, for it was she who symbolized the earth, the mortal part of nature. The masculine principle, the immortal part of nature signified by the sun, was the object of the Earth Goddess. According to ancient myth, the Earth swallowed up the sun nightly in the west, only to see it rise again in the east. Williams had portrayed this myth and this relationship of the sun and the earth early in his career in the short play depicting D. H. Lawrence's death. Written in 1941, the final scene of I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix presents Lawrence watching the sunset moments before his own death. "When first you look at the sun," he declares, "it strikes you blind—Life's—
"The sun's--going down. He's seduced by the harlot of darkness. . . . Now she has got him, they're copulating together! The sun is exhausted, the harlot has taken his strength and now she will start to destroy him. She's eating him up. . . . Oh, but he won't stay down. He'll climb back out of her belly and there will be light. In the end there will always be light. . . ." 22

It is the same concept which is implied in The Night of the Iguana when Shannon, speaking of God, suddenly declares to Hannah, "That's him! There he is now!" The stage directions tell us that "he is pointing out at a blaze, a majestic apocalypse of gold light, shafting the sky as the sun drops into the Pacific." (p. 57) That the sun is sinking towards the ocean and not the earth is not an inconsistency, for, like the earth, the ocean is a feminine principle, a symbol of containment, the maternal womb, and death is the return to the womb. In The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Chris Flanders puts forth his theory of the sea and its relationship to rebirth and the feminine principle: "This sea called the Mediterranean Sea, which means the middle of the earth, was the cradle, of life, not the grave, but the cradle of pagan and Christian—civilizations, this sea, and its connecting river, that old water snake, the Nile." (p. 94) Ocean or earth, the Goddess is the center of the death mysteries which ultimately become
life mysteries. As Eliade explains it,

When the Earth becomes a goddess of Death, it is simply because she is felt to be the universal womb, the inexhaustible source of all creation. Death is not, in itself, a definitive end, not an absolute annihilation, as it is sometimes thought to be in the modern world. Death is likened to the seed which is sown in the bosom of the Earth-Mother to give birth to a new plant. Thus, one might speak of an optimistic view of death, since death is regarded as a return to the Mother, a temporary re-entry into the maternal bosom.23

Because the primordial concept of the earth involved features both of nourishment and famine, the Earth Goddess was an ambivalent figure. She was both nourisher and protector and ensnarer and devourer; she was both Good Mother and Terrible Mother. Neumann tells us that the death mysteries are mysteries of the Terrible Mother for they are "based on her devouring-ensnaring function, in which she draws the life of the individual back into herself. Here the womb becomes a devouring maw and the conceptual symbols of diminution, rending, hacking to pieces, and annihilation, or rot and decay, have their place. . . ."24 And thus "because ritual killing and dismemberment are a necessary transition toward rebirth and new fertility, the destruction of the luminous gods in the journey through the underworld appears as a cosmic equivalent of the birth of the new day."25 The basis of Williams' metaphysics and the ancient religions was the maternal principle. Kybele, Aphrodite, Isis and
the other earth goddesses were both beautiful and destructive, both good and terrible. Thus Lady Torrance, Mrs. Venable, the Princess Kosmonopolis, Maxine Faulks, Mrs. Goforth, and Miss Lottie are both the maternal and devouring figures who dominate the son-lovers. All are endowed by Williams with the positive symbols of their sex which are based on their functions as containers, nourishers, and protectors. Symbols such as the city (Princess Kosmonopolis), the mountain (Mrs. Goforth), and the ocean (Maxine Faulks) indicate the "good," protective nature of the mother goddess, while the crucifixion, immolation, dismemberment, cannibalism, and castration, on the other hand, are all evidence of the devouring nature of these mother goddesses to whom the beautiful young gods are bound by the "invisible loving steel chains" of the umbilical cord, the ultimate female symbol.

Good or Terrible, positive or negative, the Earth Goddess is the center of the death mysteries of which sacrifice and rebirth are integral aspects.

In the goddess cults the worship and devotion—like the sacrifice which was a part of the worship—had as its end the votary's union with the earth goddess. Whether the union was achieved through frenzied abandonment in the form of dancing or an orgy, or whether it was achieved through ritual castration or transvestism was of
little consequence. The important thing was that, through a union with the feminine principle, the male rose "to a sublimated, intoxicated, enthusiastic, and spiritualized existence of vision, ecstasy, and creativity, and to a state of 'out-of-himselfness' in which he is the instrument of higher powers, whether 'good' or 'evil.'"26 Certainly Lot in his "transfiguration" is an example of the looking forward to the perfect union with the goddess, as was Sebastian's vision: "My son was looking for God, I mean for a clear image of him. He spent that whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's-nest of the schooner watching this thing on the beach till it was too dark to see it, and when he came down the rigging he said 'Well, now I've seen Him!, and he meant God.--And for several weeks after that he had a fever, he was delirious with it.--" (p. 19) It was then that Sebastian saw himself as a sacrifice. That Williams is speaking here of union with a masculine god rather than the feminine principle is not irrelevant to the goddess worship, for even his gods appear at times in terms of the maternal as well as the masculine. As negative female symbols, the voracious black birds of Suddenly Last Summer are more Kybele than Zeus. The storm of The Night of the Iguana which, like the sun, is Shannon's strong, angry god, also contains a feminine element: it appears "with its white convulsions
of light, ... like a giant white bird attacking the hilltop of the Costa Verda." (p. 77) Likewise Mrs. Goforth's "angry old lion, the sun" (p. 11) is ambivalent, for, while the sun is a masculine symbol, the lion is often a feminine symbol of the Terrible Mother. The suggestion is that God, like the young gods of the plays, is both masculine and feminine; that "He" is the union of the two principles of life and of death; and that the two principles together equal perfection.

The same dual principle can be seen in Christianity as well. The Mother Church is understood as the Mother of the living and it is through her that the spiritual life was mediated from Christ—the second Adam—as well as the bride of Christ, and much of the earth-goddess and goddess-consort imagery was employed by the early fathers. As a return to the maternal tree of life, Christ's crucifixion could be said to have the meaning of a Hierosgamos with the mother, and Jung cites a passage from Augustine to this effect: "'Procedit Christus quasi sponsus de thalamo suo, praesagio nuptiarum exiit ad comptum saeculi; pervenit usque ad crucis torum . . . et ibi firmavit ascendendo conjugium: ubi cum sentiret anhelantem in suspirium creaturam commercio pietatis se pro conjuge dedit ad poenam et copulavit sibi perpetuo iure matronam.' "As a bridegroom from his chamber, Christ advanced to meet the
world, looking forward to his nuptials; as far as the bed of a cross he walked, and there, by mounting on it, he strengthened his marriage bond. As soon as he heard his creature heavily breathing and yearning, through an interchange of love he submitted himself to pain, and was one with his woman with rights everlasting!"27 Through the incestuous principle, then, Augustine has made Christ's death parallel to the sacred marriage of the Adonis festival in which Venus and Adonis were laid upon the nuptial couch, where god and goddess united to become one eternal entity. In joining the two principles of the masculine and feminine in his images of God, Williams is not only suggesting that the god thus becomes both masculine and feminine, but that the "incompleteness" in man with which Williams is concerned is, perhaps, man's unconscious desire and inability to return, in life, to the original state of unity with the maternal principle, i.e., the embryonic state. A statement by E. O. James concerning the votary's attempt at union with the goddess bears this out: "Whether or not this was prompted by some unconscious desire to return to the maternal womb, either of the actual mother or of that of a symbolic womb of the earth, it would seem to have been an urge to return to a biocosmic unity inherent in the maternal principle in order thereby to acquire a renewal of life at its very source and centre. . . ."28
In psychological terms, the idea is an especially interesting one since Williams has said much about his strong childhood ties with his mother, and since he has publicly acknowledged his homosexual tendencies (on the *David Frost Show*). Brustein's comment that the plays are mostly about incest may not be unfounded, although the plays clearly are not merely parables of possible incestuous drives on the part of the author or even of Jung's universal instinct toward uroboric or matriarchal incest. Rather, they are parables of man's search for a kind of cosmic unity. Like Christ and, in a sense, like the young vegetation gods, Williams' Cosmic Males are Second Adams, the first of whom is commonly thought of as androgynous. Thus, in depicting the Cosmic Male in a matriarchal universe, Williams is depicting man's "incompleteness"—his separation from the source of life and creativity, from the great feminine principle and his attempt to return to it through sacrifice and worship. The mythical goddess-consort relationship offers Williams a means of expressing this attempt.

Homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, transvestism—all are judged in the modern world as oddities to be wondered at or deviations to be condemned or cured. Yet in all of his later plays, Williams presents his
protagonists—god-like young men searching for completion through sacrifice and rebirth and the worship of the Eternal Feminine—as verging on one or more of the sexual abnormalities.

Homosexuality has been defined as "a female soul in the frame of a male." Bisexuality is the physical presence of both male and female characteristics in one individual, and asexuality is either a figurative lack of any sex or the ability to reproduce without the union of male and female. In a sense, the homosexual is a kind of spiritual bisexual, while the asexual creature, capable of reproduction without dependence on another, can likewise be thought of as bisexual. Closely related are hermaphroditism and androgyney. The former—named after the bisexual child of Hermes and Aphrodite—is essentially a synonym for bisexuality, while the latter is distinguished from bisexuality by the fact that the androgynous individual, while having some of the characteristics of the opposite sex, is predominantly either male or female. Finally, transvestism is the act of symbolically assuming, in addition to one's own nature, the nature of the opposite sex. That the sexual themes, generally described as "sordid," are an integral aspect of Williams' work, can be seen by only a brief sketch of each of the protagonists of the plays under consideration.
Learning that he had "something to sell besides snakeskins . . . ," (p. 49) Val Xavier became a male prostitute. Val possesses an animal magnetism and a kind of "wild beauty," (p. 16) making him extremely attractive to women, yet he is, for the most part, passive in his relations toward them. Submitting to the female aggressors, Val is, in a sense, both male and female.

Sebastian Venable is handsome, impeccable, and homosexual. Unresponsive to women excepting his mother, he is described as giving birth to his poems every year after nine months of preparation. As a poet, Sebastian represents fertility. "My son was a creator!" (p. 32) Mrs. Venable declares, further emphasizing Sebastian's feminine aspects. Creator and homosexual, Sebastian is, in a sense, bisexual.

Chance Wayne is a male prostitute whose first and last encounters with sex are both reluctant. Like Val, he is beautiful and apparently virile. Reluctant to touch Heavenly because she was too pure, he is reluctant to make love to the Princess because she is too corrupt:

CHANCE: Aren't you ashamed, a little?
PRINCESS: Of course I am. Aren't you?
CHANCE: More than a little. . . . (p. 372)

In both instances referred to in Sweet Bird of Youth, the woman is the aggressor in the sexual relationship.
Chance is at no time seen in the usual masculine role, even to the extent that both relationships—that with Heavenly and that with the Princess—are initiated and ended by the woman. In his passivity and castration, Chance Wayne is more feminine than masculine.

Shannon, the protagonist in *The Night of the Iguana*, is modeled on the young homosexual poet in Williams' short story of the same name. Seduced or having been seduced by two "teenage Medea[s]," (p. 46) Shannon's mental torments—his "rage at Mama and rage at God . . . and rage at the everything . . ." (p. 95)—and his ultimate decision to stay with Maxine as her lover and as a male prostitute are the play's focal point. As reluctant as Chance Wayne, Shannon is persuaded to accept the role by Hannah, who is herself described as "totally feminine and yet androgynous-looking—almost timeless." (p. 18) In repressing his instinct for self-destruction, Shannon is on his way to becoming, in his prostitution, more like Hannah who has achieved completion and mastered her fears. He is totally masculine, yet in his submission to the earthy Maxine—she is described as "rapaciously lusty" (p. 7)—he is likewise feminine.

Chris Flanders is the young poet who comes to "mean God" to Mrs. Goforth. Figuratively asexual, he rejects physical love altogether, submitting himself
emotionally and spiritually to the domination of grotesque and dying women, and in his submissiveness, he, too, is more feminine than masculine.

Lot is a transvestite. He has submitted himself to the domination of Miss Lottie, his mother, and in assuming her dress he is symbolically assuming her nature. Transvestic and impotent, he nevertheless affirms his masculinity: "Don't imagine you have married a fairy." (p. 43) Lot has, like Chris, rejected sex in favor of what he considers a higher existence—devotion to beauty and devotion to Miss Lottie. His passion is like Hannah's and, as Williams describes it, "sexless." (p. 108)

It is interesting that of the six protagonists one is homosexual with suggestions of bisexuality, one is asexual with suggestions of bisexuality, a third is asexual and a transvestite—the symbolic equivalent of castration, and thus of death in the maternal principle—while the remaining three are male prostitutes, symbolic in the goddess cults of castration, death, and submission to the feminine principle. If the incestuous goddess-consort relationship was for Williams the means of expressing man's attempt to return to the original unity of masculine and feminine, the sexual theme is likewise an expression of man's awareness of "incompletion" and his attempt to overcome that incompleteness by uniting himself
with the missing feminine element. Severely condemned by many critics as sensationalism and exploitation, the sexual abnormalities are nevertheless an integral part of Williams' metaphysics just as they were an integral part of myth and the cultic rituals. Homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, transvestism—all represent, in Williams' work as well as in primitive and ancient cults, a religious ideal founded in myth and holding a sacred and trans-personal significance. The essential feature common to all of these sexual concepts is the union—in varying forms and to varying degrees—of the two sexes. Primarily male, primarily female, or both equally, the individual represents a union of the masculine and feminine principles. The ancient cults regarded such a union as a return to the primordial time of the hermaphroditic round from which all creation was thought to have emerged. As Neumann explains, "The round is the calabash containing the World Parents. . . . The World Parents, heaven and earth, lie one on top of the other in the round, spacelessly and timelessly united, for as yet nothing has come between them to create duality out of the original unity. The container of the masculine and feminine opposites is the great hermaphrodite, the primal creative element who combines the poles in himself. . . ."30 The symbol of self-creation with the power and beauty of both male and female, the hermaphrodite
or androgyne—the terms are used interchangeably by most psychologists and myth theorists—became a divine figure in most primitive cults, especially in those of the goddess and vegetation god. Discussing the concept at length, Jung considers the theory that divine hermaphrodisim may have originated as the product of "primitive non-differentiation" in which differences and contrasts were "either barely separated or completely merged." However, if . . . the hermaphrodite were only a product of primitive non-differentiation, we would have to expect that it would soon be eliminated with increasing civilization. This is by no means the case; on the contrary, man's imagination has been preoccupied with this idea over and over again on the high and even the highest levels of culture, as we can see from the late Greek and syncretic philosophy of Gnosticism. The hermaphroditic rebis has an important part to play in the natural philosophy of the Middle Ages. And in our own day we hear of Christ's androgyny in Catholic mysticism.31

The latter, Christ's androgyny, is particularly important when dealing with Williams, for if a sexualized Christ-figure can draw criticism, a bisexualized Christ-figure can draw twice as much. E. O. James cites a passage from St. Paul to explain the basis for the mystical concept:

"The Lord Christ, the fruit of the Virgin, did not pronounce the breasts of women blessed, nor selected them to give nourishment; but when the kind and loving Father had rained down the Word, Himself became spiritual nourishment to the good, O mystic marvel! The Universal Father is one, and one is the universal Word; and the Holy Spirit is one, and the same everywhere, and one is the Virgin Mother."32
Kebele, Attis, Adonis, Dionysus, Tiresias, Adam, Christ—all have been interpreted as androgynous figures, and all represent an ideal. The ideal is a complex one, Eliade observes, for "it signifies more than the co-existence or rather coalescence—of the sexes in the divine being. Androgyny is an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries, or coincidentia oppositorum. More than a state of sexual completeness and autarchy, androgyny symbolizes the perfection of a primordial, non-conditioned state."33 Thus Williams' male characters are not searching for the missing feminine element solely by uniting sexually, nor are the female characters searching only for sexual union with the male. The physical union is merely the symbol of the spiritual union of the two principles. For Williams, the absence of the physical union is even presented as the true ideal, for it is ultimately the androgynous individuals—Hannah and Lot (and the symbolic phoenix)—who are presented as the most perfect in their attainment of the missing principle. To cite Eliade once more, "Androgyny has become a general formula signifying autonomy, strength, wholeness; to say of a divinity that it is androgyne is as much as to say that it is the ultimate being, the ultimate reality."34 Thus Hannah and Lot are presented as having learned the secret of man's striving,
and the phoenix presides over many of the plays in which resurrection is a major theme. For Williams, as for both the ancient and modern worlds, "the primordial idea" (whether androgyny or hermaphroditism) "has become a symbol of the creative union of opposites, a 'uniting symbol' in the literal sense. In its functional significance the symbol no longer points back, but forward to a goal not yet reached. Notwithstanding its monstrosity, the hermaphrodite has gradually turned into a subduer of conflicts and a bringer of healing, and it acquired this meaning in relatively early phases of civilization."35 For Williams' tormented characters, the "mulilated" and the "fugitive kind," then, androgyny or bisexuality is an ideal by which their conflicts, their separateness, and their incompleteness are subdued and healed. Thus the sexual abnormalities actually reinforce the sacrifice-rebirth theme, for they bring Williams' protagonists even closer to the god-like perfection for which they are striving, the supreme union of masculine and feminine.

When asked about the theme of a finished work, Williams generally looks vague and answers, "It is a play about life."36 Then he explains: "I have never been certain of what my plays meant very precisely since I have always written mostly from the unconscious. . . ."37
Adrian Hall, director of the off-Broadway production of _Orpheus Descending_, supports this explanation, remarking that Williams works from some "dark metaphysical source," that "he writes out of some really subjective contact with his psyche. He is in contact with himself."38

Perhaps we should let this stand as an explanation for the flood of archetypal images, symbols, and themes which has made Williams' work rich ground in which to unearth mythic artifacts. Every artist is entitled to an artistic pose. But although mythic artifacts as artifacts are interesting and decorative, they are of less significance than the knowledge of their relationship to the individual or the society that created them, the spirit that informed them. The spirit which informs Williams' myth-infused plays is one of universal truth. Drawing upon the myths of the past Williams has created the "true story of our time and the world we live in. . . ." Finding a meaning for the modern world reflected in the mythic meanings, Williams has worked, reworked, and molded the myths until they have little outward resemblance to their archetypes; yet he has retained the essential meanings of those archetypes. In his search for a metaphor for man's struggle to attain his original unity, whether it be with his mother or the cosmos, Williams has discovered the language of myth, and he has employed this language fully
during the past decade. Divine androgyny, gods and goddesses, sacrifice and rebirth—Williams has found in these mythic elements a metaphysics, and through them he has transformed that metaphysics into theatre. He has used these elements to inform every aspect of his work—his plot and structure, his characters, his themes, his language, and even the frequently non-realistic staging of which he is so fond.

Creating his own Death Mysteries, Tennessee Williams has constructed them on the foundations of the past, and before them he has erected this monument: "It showed three figures of indeterminate gender astride a leaping dolphin. One bore a crucifix, one a cornucopia, and one a Grecian lyre."
NOTES

1Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 235.
2Ibid., p. 236.
5Psychology of the Unconscious, p. 162.
6Ibid., p. 147.
7Eliade, Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 122.
10Neumann, Origins, p. 29.
11Ibid., p. 53.
12Ibid., pp. 253; 249.
13The Cult of the Mother Goddess, p. 167.
14Origins, p. 59.
15Cult, p. 168.
16Origins, p. 59.
17Harrison, Epilogomena, p. 147.
20. Ibid., p. 94.
21. Ibid., p. 93.
23. Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, pp. 188-189.
25. Ibid., p. 192.
26. Ibid., p. 305.
27. Psychology of the Unconscious, p. 264. (Translated by Joseph Tusiani.)
32. St. Paul, Paedagogus, I, 6, 40f., as quoted in James, Cult, p. 197.
33. Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, pp. 174-175.
34. Ibid., p. 175.

38 Interview with Adrian Hall, May 14, 1964.
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______  "Meanings." Analysis of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, submitted to director Adrian Hall, September, 1963.


