Orpheus Introspecting: Tennessee Williams and Jean Cocteau

Jean Kontaxopoulos

To "Grand"

All life, all beauty results from being broken down
—Jean Cocteau, *Letter to Mary Hoeck* (190)

For you are not stars, sky-set in the shape of a lyre,
but the dust of those who have been dismembered by Furies!
—Tennessee Williams, *In the Winter of Cities* (28)

According to the teachings of methodology in social sciences, the acquisition of one kind of knowledge springs from the dialectical relationship between new information (stimulus) and the total of already existing knowledge; the incorporation, that is, of new knowledge results from the intellectual clash of the new with the old. The comparative method is for social sciences (and particularly for law and literature) exactly what the empirical method is for natural sciences—that is, a scientific process for the discovery of new knowledge or the verification of that already existing. The comparative knowledge of similarities and differences between two subject-matters is wider than the mere gathering of isolated items of knowledge about them (Owen Aldridge 1). The comparative approach to Tennessee Williams and Jean Cocteau aims exactly at not only this "new knowledge" of their works but also at delineating the psychography of these two significant twentieth century writers together with the discovery of the intellectual affinity of the two men.

For the choice of the comparative method to be justifiable and not arbitrary, the two writers should lend themselves to such a comparison. Thus, there should exist between them a common third factor *(tertium comparationis)* constituting the bridge of communication and the standpoint from which the comparison will start. For this first comparative study of Williams and Cocteau[1] we have selected as a departure point the myth of Orpheus, because both writers were only as a concrete rostrum from which the wider facets of the life and work of the two writers are examined.

Interaction of Glances

Before examining the Orphic myth closely, it is worth contrasting certain of these comparative elements, albeit general, concerning the life of both writers. Although both died in their seventies, Cocteau was born in 1889 and Williams twenty-two years later, separated by almost a generation. Chance, however, brought

them together in 1948 at the famous Paris bar "Le bœuf sur le toit" (The Nothing Doing Bar), as Williams mentions in his *Memoirs* (1975). In 1949 Cocteau adapted *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the French stage (Théâtre Edouard VII), but Williams was not too enthusiastic about it:

> I don't understand why Cocteau filled my work with crudities. I don't think it's enough to put a refrigerator on the stage or to make the actors speak like the common public so as to give a more vivid impression. Art is not a photograph. Truth and life cannot be expressed in their essence except when we transmute them (*Les Nouvelles littéraires,* 8 June 1950, qtd. in Dubois 134).

In fact, Cocteau staged the work in the most savage form it had ever known. Black belly dancers, naked from the waist up, gyrated in the background as Stanley raped Blanche (Kolin 70-76). On this occasion, Cocteau wrote two texts in which he praises Williams's drama (see appendix). In his program note, Cocteau further writes: "A literary work conveys its texture, and my fingers run through it like Braille. I tried my best not to lose any of its profound and twisted poetry." The "poetry" of Cocteau has, in its turn, been referred to as one of the general literary influences on Williams (Douglas Minyard 291). In 1952 Williams and Cocteau met again in Barcelona. Cocteau comments in his diaries (volume II), published posthumously as *Past Tense*:

> *July 10*: Tennessee Williams arrived this morning. We saw the flamenco troupe this evening. Williams always a little grasping—a little remote from whatever isn't sexual (164). *July 13:* With Tennessee Williams last night while he was being interviewed for the national radio. The wall of languages produced extraordinary misunderstandings. No one understood anyone else, but we ended by understanding each other very well. I then tried to explain what he had said. But I didn't do any better. Besides, it didn't matter, since in this kind of interview nothing remains of what one meant to say. They asked him who he felt were the two greatest American actors. He answered, Marlon Brando and Greta Garbo. He added that Garbo had never acted on a stage, but that she would be the greatest stage actress if she wanted to be. Then I said that Garbo had passed through the wall of fame and that she was desintegrating. That she would never appear again, either in a film or on stage. It was my bad luck that she wanted to do *The Eagle Has Two Heads* when Tallulah turned it into a disaster in New York. (165)

Much later (1962) during a conversation with William Fifield*,* Cocteau recalls this encounter:

> Ah! Tennessee is Somebody [. . .] When I asked him to name the hero of Spanish literature whom he liked most, he replied in a very American way "Don Quichotte's secretary." In this way we

> imagined Sancho Panza seated on his donkey with a typewriter! Tennessee doesn't want to see a town, only its inhabitants. What attracts his attention is people's appearances. (162-63)

Their literary outlook also differed. Although he was adept at virtually every genre, Williams wrote mainly drama (during the last years of his life he dabbled in painting), while Cocteau dealt equally and in depth with all "vehicles for poetry," expanding the frontiers of art: plays, ballet scenarios, novels, essays, cinema, journalism, critical manifestos, ceramics, sculpture, lithography, paintings and theatre set designs. For Cocteau, "poets don't draw. They untie handwriting and then knot it up again in a different way" (*Drawings* vi). Furthermore, the environments they were brought up in were dissimilar. Cocteau's was the upper middle-class Paris of the Belle Epoque, while that of Williams was the strictly puritanical fallen aristocracy of the American South. It is this puritanism that Cocteau criticizes in his *Lettre aux Américains* (84) in response to the reactions of the American public to *A Streetcar Named Desire.*

They nevertheless seem to have had a common love of travel and "long distances." While alive, both of them literally travelled round the world (Cocteau, at the beginning of the summer of 1936, with Marcel Khill; Williams, at the end of the summer of 1959, with Frank Merlo). Equally noteworthy is the fact that they wrote mainly psychological dramas that were essentially poetic rather than realistic, nostalgic rather than utopian (contra Villers 19). Although Williams's apprentice work reflects a concern with social issues, both writers disassociated themselves somewhat from the literature of social reform, unlike Sartre and the French surrealists (Breton, Eluard, Aragon) or Arthur Miller in America. If the latter group were Promethean avatars (the archetypal hero of the social principle), Cocteau and Williams were akin mostly to Orpheus. Via this symbol, their personages transfigure the vulnerability by showing perfectly that the human soul can be beautiful in its creepiness and its fragility.

The "Poète Maudit" and His Persecution

What most united Williams and Cocteau, apart from the deep autobiographical plots of their works and their recurring identification with some of their heroines (for instance, Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Belle in *La Belle et la Bête* [*The Beauty and the Beast*, 1946]) was the fact that they comprised the new generation of "poètes maudits." Their favourite male hero, Orpheus, in reality constitutes the first cursed poet of history, hated by gods and men—the gods because they feared him and men because they did not understand him. Orpheus, the archetypal artist, is an "idealized self-portrait" (Tischler, "Distorted Mirror" 158) or "a form of sublimated self-projection with a heavy touch of fantasy completing the portrait" (Evans 67) of both writers. The Surrealistic establishment in France and the unyielding puritanical hypocrisy in America constituted the Maenads of literary and cinematic criticism for the two updated characters of Orpheus. Cocteau, indeed, identified himself with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Voltaire and the Encyclopedists persecuted as their prey. The two writers did not, however, hesitate to transmute into art their personal "difficulties of being" if they were to be expiated. And

exactly because their work flowed from them spontaneously they were successful; because they are authentically French and American, they are universal. We have to come from somewhere in order to have an echo everywhere. In Cocteau's *Orphée* there is the following exchange:

> EURYDICE: Watch out, they're stoning you.
> ORPHEUS: I'll get my statue made from these stones! (play: 32; screenplay: 84)

While in the poem *Clair-Obscur* (freely translated as "*Something Cloudy, Something Clear*") Cocteau writes:

> Muses, in your dark factories
> Did I know you were making for me
> A wreath of laurels
> Thornier than thorns? (838)

Furthermore, both project heroes who are persecuted mainly by the establishment's scale of values. The adaptation of *Antigone* (1922) by Cocteau is not accidental since she is the first heroine in history who opposes the law in the name of freedom of conscience. Oedipus in *La Machine infernale* is persecuted by the gods (Hartigan 89). Michel in *Les Parents terribles* is persecuted by his family. In *Bacchus*, Hans the village idiot is persecuted by the Cardinal just because he is asking for his freedom.

For his part, Williams's works are inhabited by many hero-revolutionaries. Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* is persecuted by his own mother. Chance in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is persecuted by the patriarchal society which he calls in question through his actions. The same is true of the Reverend Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*; even more so in the case of Val in *Orpheus Descending*, whom the Sheriff drives out of town. The whole atmosphere of the latter work smoulders with the suppression of the "misfit" in the infernal town where the story is set. The culmination of the persecution is the point when wild howling dogs are heard and a brief dialogue ensues:

> LADY: The chain-gang dogs are chasing some runaway convict. …
> VAL: Run boy! Run fast, brother! If they catch you, you never will run again! That's for sure . . . [*The baying of the dogs changes, becomes almost a single savage note.*]—Uh-huh—the dogs've got him. . . . [*Pause.*] They're tearing him to pieces! [*Pause. Baying continues. A shot is fired. The baying dies out. . . . The wind sings loud in the dusk.*] (294)

And the Orpheus of Cocteau does not escape persecution, not so much because he *does* something which annoys but because he *is* different from the others (cf. Oxenhandler). If we examine in more detail the adaptation of the Orphic myth by the two writers, we will discover many common elements.

The Expansion of the Orphic Myth

Cocteau uses the myth in three works: in the play *Orphée* (1926), in the film of the same name (1950) in which he varies the stage version, and in his last film *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1960). Williams wrote *Battle of Angels* (1939), which later he developed into the play *Orpheus Descending* (1957) which was filmed twice, first by Sidney Lumet as *The Fugitive Kind* (1960)[2] and recently (1990), as a teleplay by Peter Hall with the original title. Williams's intense interest in the Orphic myth appears from the numerous corrections to the original text (Gunn 89-91, 353; Wallace 325):

> Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years, in fact? Well, nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call *Orpheus Descending* (Williams's foreword to *Orpheus Descending* 220).

O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra,* Cocteau in *Le Testament d'Orphée,* and Williams in *Orpheus Descending* keep the mythological name only in the title and drop every other direct allusion to the legend, as we will see later. Finally, in Williams's collected poems *In the Winter of Cities* (1964) there is a piece entitled "Orpheus Descending."

It is worth noting at this point that the Orphic myth has repeatedly inspired not only literature but also painting and music, a fact which is clearly explained by the poetical nature of Orpheus and the everlasting symbolic message which approaches all the great philosophical dilemmas: life and death, love and hatred, tolerance and intolerance, conformism and maladjustment, poetry and philistinism, violence and tenderness, freedom and slavery (cf. Strauss in *Descent*). Sometimes the modernization of the myth is so far away from the classical one that we could talk about a *metamyth* or even an *absence of myth* (Décaudin 217). Myths, after all, make truths visible we would not ordinarily see. But when the myths themselves are visible they impair the transparency of these mythic truths. The absence of myth would signify the evaporation of this medium and an opening onto unmediated experiences of unlimited and unexplored truths. Cocteau's myths exist innocently "in the white and incongruous void of absence"; Cocteau's myths "shatter" and are "no longer myth" (Carvalho 125).

The Orpheus of Cocteau

In the work of Cocteau the myth is varied considerably (cf. in detail Long). In the most modern screenplay (made by Cocteau himself in a seamless way which anticipates the self-destructive creativity of Andy Warhol), the story is set on the Paris left bank, at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where the young poet Orpheus becomes a witness to the kidnapping of an avant-garde poet, Cégeste, by a mysterious Princess in a luxury Rolls Royce. The Princess, by means of the car radio,

sends unintelligible messages to Orpheus ("the bird sings with its claws" 39), in this way initiating him into a strangely beautiful type of poetry. Fascinated and secretly in love with this peculiar creature, who comes in and out of mirrors,[3] and who is none other than his own death, Orpheus neglects his wife Eurydice and roams the streets of a deserted Paris to find her. Eurydice complains and attempts to keep Orpheus away from this new passion of his which has changed him into another personality:

> EURYDICE: Orpheus, you can't spend all your life in an automobile which speaks. Such things aren't serious.
> ORPHEUS: Aren't they serious? My life had started to stagnate, to stink of conventional success and death. Don't you understand that the most insignificant of these phrases is worth more than any of my poems? I'd give anything for one of these phrases. *I am stalking the unknown.*
> EURYDICE: Orpheus! our child won't be able to live on these phrases.
> ORPHEUS: Typical of women! Someone discovers a new world and they talk to him of stuff and nonsense. (40–41)

After that, Eurydice is mowed down by death's motorcade, and so Orpheus, without concealing his joy, decides to descend into "the zone" to look for her. There he consummates his love with the Princess-Death. The underworld Court allows Orpheus and Eurydice to return to life with the well-known condition that he should not look back to see her (73). Orpheus, dissatisfied, turns round on purpose, so losing his wife (84). Returning a second time to the shadows, Orpheus again finds his beloved Princess-Death; moved by love, she returns Orpheus and his wife back to "their muddy waters" (95): "The death of a poet must be sacrified in order to make him immortal" (90). And it matters very little that Orpheus, reunited with a Eurydice he little cares for, says unconvincingly "there is only one love that counts—ours . . ." (94), showing once more his resignation towards their earthly existence.

As readily appears from the story, the real reason for the descent of this Orpheus into Hades (or more accurately, the ascent of Hades to the world of the living and his meeting with Orpheus) is not his love for the conventional Eurydice, whom he indeed finds unbearable and overprotective (34-35) like the mother in *Les Parents terriblles* or *The Glass Menagerie*, but his love for the Princess-Death which becomes mutual; in this way the poet achieves immortality. The love of Orpheus for his Death is partly love for himself, or "the same," a narcissistic element closely linked with homosexuality. When Princess-Death and Orpheus lie next to each other in the underworld, their faces unite as if the one reflects the other. This attribute is accentuated by some fairly misogynous elements: all the female characters in *Orphée,* although seemingly vital players in the film's action, are ultimately restricted to the role of dramatic device—"serving solely to forward and ensure the completion of Orpheus's heroic quest for artistic immortality" (Conolly 146). In such a male-driven text, the woman in herself has not the slightest importance.

In *Le Testament d'Orphée* the narcissistic element is obvious: the protagonist is Cocteau himself, travelling with all poetic freedom to the places and times in which he lived. During his journey all the reminiscences of the poet unfold, including the people and the things he both loved and feared, unrealized desires, and the poet's unreal death at the hands of love (Emboden 83). In the end, he is led in to face a court presided over by Princess-Death, where he is charged with two crimes: innocence and his obstinacy in penetrating a world to which he did not belong, the world of the dead—that is, of poetry. The verdict is harsh; he is sentenced to be free and thus to suffer trials and tribulations. Although the film has a great æsthetic value, it is more of a narcissistic showpiece for Cocteau and some of his artistic endeavors (including the drawings) than a coherent adaptation of the Orphic myth (Strauss, "Jean Cocteau" 39). Its great merit consists in demonstrating that there are different positions of seeing and being, and that these positions can happen simultaneously. They are not limited to one container, one body (cf. in detail Hill).

The Orpheus of Williams

The plot of Orpheus is less surrealistic in Williams, and as could be expected, it has strong elements of the American South where the play is set. As a matter of fact, the American south as a backdrop to the works of Williams should not be limited in terms of place and time but should be seen more as a symbol of defeat and the inferiority complex that defeat has created. Williams somehow transposes the drama of the American Civil War to a sexual level. His "Southern heroes," societal outcasts who are weak and passive, are dominated by more well-integrated individuals who take on the dimensions, one could say, of the barbarians of Cavafy. Moreover, according to the myth, Orpheus himself came from Thrace and travelled to central Greece as a religious reformer of the Zarathustran type (Orphism).

Instead of a lyre, Orpheus-Val Xavier, a wandering troubadour, plays a guitar (obviously a phallic symbol), his "life's companion" (261) and sings jazz. Destiny leads him to seek work at the shop of Lady Torrance who lives in the hell of oppression dominated by her sick husband Jabe. The presence of Val (Valentine) will revive her, albeit temporarily; the final intervention of her husband will deprive her of any expectation of happiness and will cause both of them to die. In fact, Val is young, beautiful, good, brave, pure, in a word, all attributes that Death likes. As will appear from other details later, Williams Americanizes the external facts of the Orpheus myth. Thus, for example, the name Torrance, a paraphrase of the English word "torrents" refers us to the name of the ancient town of Leivithra in Pieria (Northern Greece) which also means "torrents" and where Orpheus met with his tragic death at the hands of the frenzied women, the Maenads. In *The Fugitive Kind,* Val is killed by a torrent of water, jetted from a hose by the townspeople. This play offers an interesting example of the whole of Williams's mythology, a fact that has allowed critics to say that the play is very dispersed. The cast is so huge that every character would be worth a protagonist's role in different plays (Fayard 91).

Orphic Symbolism in Cocteau

A partial analysis of certain elements of their works clearly welds the art and philosophy of both writers with the facets of their personal life. In reality, indeed, it is about autobiographical reshaping of the Orphic myth. For Cocteau in particular it would be no exaggeration to say that the exclusivity of his subject matter based on ancient Greek myths (cf. Boorsch) can be explained for the same reasons as those which similarly attracted the interest of Freud who, on discovering psychoanalysis, stated: "What I perceive brings to mind in a most strange way the plot of Oedipus Tyrranus." Cocteau, by adapting the Greek myths and freeing them of their superfluous and dead elements which conceal the deeper truth, attempts his own psychoanalysis. However, he was against Freudian psychoanalysis, which he believed could not explain the origins of an artist's sensibility: "Freud never accepted the abnormal as a transcendence. He did not salute the great disorders. He just provided a confessional for unfortunate people" (*Journal d'un inconnu* 39). Cocteau's oft-quoted statement, "I am a lie that always tells the truth" (*Opéra* 540), which is mysterious to many people, does not mean anything other than his own self-knowledge: the myth is a lie for the conscious but completed truth for the subconscious (cf. analytically Kontaxopoulos).

In the stage version of Cocteau's *Orphée,* Princess Death's automobile is replaced by a mysterious white horse which Orpheus meets by chance. This horse, by beating its hooves, dictates short-wave poetical messages, just as the lines of the car-radio of Princess Death in the film version. The symbolism seems evident: the source of the poetic inspiration of Cocteau is his communication with the other world (a fact for which he is condemned in *Le Testament d'Orphée),* which in the final analysis concerns his prematurely lost loved ones who, as we know, are two people who had untimely deaths: his lover, the writer Raymond Radiguet, and particularly his father, who had committed suicide. According to Cocteau, Radiguet (and the painter Christian Bérard), albeit dead, joins him in conversation during the making of *Orphée*: "I ask them for help and they give it to me as I know their ways and walk in them so that they push me forward" (Crosland 192). Moreover, it is not accidental that the symbolic vehicles which Cocteau utilises (horse, car) are psychoanalytically connected with male sexual symbolisms and fetishism (cf. analytically Milorad). In his effort to interpret the unintelligible messages of the horse, Orpheus cries out, "It's a poem, a dreamlike poem, a flower from the depths of death" (29). In *Le secret professionnel* Cocteau further writes:

> Poetry in its pure form gives rise to nausea. This moral nausea originates from death. Death is the other aspect of life. [. . .] The poet moves forward on quick sands and occasionally his foot sinks into death. [. . .] Poetry thus predisposes the supernatural. (53)

Cocteau puts himself in the service of the mysterious forces in the universe that can communicate with the living only through poets. In this way, Cocteau

confirms Jung's theory, according to which "the artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him" (101). Jung calls that an "autonomous complex" which "appears and disappears in accordancewith its own inherent tendencies, independently of the conscious will" (78). In Cocteau's works the setting alternates between this world and another world, which stands sometimes for the underworld and sometimes for the inner world where poetry is made. Thus the poet's task is to create works of art that will explain the next world to the inhabitants of this one (Popkin 510-11). Both Cocteau and Williams pattern their Orpheus upon the irresistible power of poetry and the all-compelling mystery of life, death, and rebirth. Perhaps because of this growing fixation on death, the myth and personage of Orpheus grew to be of major importance to them. "Inspiration" then, as Cocteau writes in his introduction to *Orphée* (film: 7), is utterly contingent upon "expiration."

The poetic inspiration provided by death is also a characteristic of Williams (Val's poetry springs from his communication with dead souls he meets in the Hades of the Torrance Mercantile Store). His much-loved sister Rose, condemned to a living death after the 1943 lobotomy, always reminded Williams of the traumatic childhood of the two siblings, a permanent source of inspiration to the writer. Indeed, Tennessee Williams used to say that after finding in New Orleans the kind of freedom he had always needed, it jolted his ingrained puritanism and gave him a subject, a theme, which he never ceased exploiting (Nelson 39). Furthermore, the almost romantic relationship between Tom and Laura in the short story "Portrait of a Girl in Glass" (1943) on which *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) was based, evokes the private world shared by the siblings Paul and Elisabeth in Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles* (*The Holy Terrors,* 1929): their room, a kind of underworld, is where the game is played, the game being their own bizarre version of life; likewise, the love affair suggested between Paul and his fellow student Dargelos is the same as that which Williams leads us to suppose exists between Brick and Skipper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: an intimate relationship which borders on forbidden love and leads to tragedy because of its emotional repression.

The Parallel Family Backgrounds: The Orphic and the Oedipal Complexes

It is very important to notice that when Williams develops his major characters, he employs archetypal figures such as the mother, father, son, brother and sister, an employment which is a quite dominant and distinctive artistic feature in the works of Cocteau also. As a matter of fact, the family history of the two authors shows certain characteristic similarities. The physical and the psychological absence of the father in combination with the domineering overprotective mother creates a suffocating family atmosphere from which the only way out is escape as far away as possible. Cocteau in his film *L'Eternel retour* (*The Eternal Return*, 1943) deals in a manner akin to Williams with the idea of escape and mainly the hope of recommencement of a new life where man becomes at last the architect of his own destiny. However, the physical escape is not enough; emotional liberation is also necessary, that is to say, the removal of guilt that the physical flight generates. This

can be achieved through poetic creation in which all the suppressed sensitivities of writers are channeled. The psychologically repressed emotions, instead of having a negative result, are transmuted into artistic creativity and thus is created the tragic irony of "the catastrophe of success" (Introduction to *The Glass Menagerie)* which means nothing other than the transmutation of psychological failure into artistic success ("sublimation").[4] Cocteau expresses exactly the same idea when he says that the ballads of the poet "spring from his wounds" (*La Corrida du 1er Mai* 153). The catharsis, however, which comes about as a result of complete self-knowledge, even after such hardships, is invaluable as is the salvation of the soul finally symbolized by the Orphic myth.

Moreover, the mixed feelings of love and hate which Cocteau has for his father are reflected in the conflicting emotions Orpheus has for Eurydice, who on the one hand he kills out of hatred and on the other resurrects out of love (Milorad 136). In contrast with the classical myth, Orpheus-Cocteau shows a detestation for Eurydice, and only with her death do his feelings change. More generally, in Cocteau's works the father appears weak and without initiative. He himself confesses: "We were a family in ruins" (qtd. in Lange 36). In *Les Parents terribles* "the father doesn't take control of things except as a last resort, being presented throughout as weak-willed, egoistic and violent" (180). Williams's mixed feelings towards his father are similar. In perhaps his best short story, "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair," he writes:

> [T]he ride downtown that my father and I would take every morning in his Studebaker [. . .] was a long ride, it took about half an hour, and seemed much longer for neither my father nor I had anything to say to each other during the ride. I remember that I would compose one sentence to deliver to my father, to break just once the intolerable silence that existed between us, as intolerable to him, I suspect, as it was to me. I would start composing this one sentence during breakfast and I would usually deliver it halfway downtown. It was a shockingly uninteresting remark. It was delivered in a shockingly strained voice, a voice that sounded choked. It would be a comment on the traffic or the smog that enveloped the streets. The interesting thing about it was his tone of answer. He would answer the remark as if he understood how hard it was for me to make it. His answer would always be sad and gentle. "Yes, it's awful," he'd say. And he didn't say it as if it was a response to my remark. He would say it as if it referred to much larger matters than traffic or smog. And looking back on it, now, I feel that he understood my fear of him and forgave me for it, and wished there was some way to break the wall between us (xiii-xiv). A psychiatrist once said to me, You will begin to forgive the world when you've forgiven your father (xv). [W]hile I was in Knoxville for Dad's funeral, [aunt Ella] showed me a newspaper photograph of him outside a movie house where a film of mine, *Baby Doll,* was being shown. Along with the photograph of my father was his comment on the picture. What he said was: "I think it's a very fine picture and I'm proud of my son." (*Collected Stories* xvii)

The father finally returns home. At first sight one could conclude that Williams loathes him. However, the opposite may, on a deeper level, be true; that is, he loves his father so much, even subconsciously, that he ends up suppressing and concealing his emotions and suffering, harming himself to avoid causing his father any anxiety.

In a similar way, the love of Orpheus-Cocteau for Princess Death is none other than his subconscious love for the father he has lost. Cocteau, as more of a surrealist, does not manage to describe his relationship with his father with the psychonalytical dramatic precision of a master technician of theatrical language (cf. Rave). Williams, on the other hand, conveys these emotions by means of delicate poetic symbolisms with possible Freudian interpretations.

This ambivalent relationship between father and son could be called an "Orpheus complex" along the lines of the prototype mother-son relationship conveyed by means of the "Oedipus complex," which equally exists in both Orphic versions, between on the one hand, Val and Lady (Nelson 210), and on the other, Orpheus and Princess Death (Conolly 160). Either the psychological absence of the father or else his harshness and his replacement by a tender mother results in the child's identification with the mother and his search for a father (i.e. male) substitute (survival of the father's image through the mother). This possible interpretation of homosexuality contrasts with the ordinary case where the son identifies with the father, literally takes his place, seeking the mother's (i.e. female) replacement, exactly as conveyed by Eugene O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra*: having killed his mother's lover, Orin (Orestes) Mannon, a former soldier in the American Civil War (1861-64), remains stooping over the body and says, as if talking to himself:

> By God, he does look like Father! [. . .] This is like my dream. I've killed him before—over and over. [. . .] Do you remember me telling you how the faces of the men I killed came back and changed to Father's face and finally became my own? He looks like me, too! Maybe I've committed suicide! [. . .] If I had been he I would have done what he did! I would have loved her as he loved her—and killed Father too—for her sake! (115-16)

Milorad, a close friend of Cocteau's, attributes the poet's apparent interfering in many activities and overdeveloped sociability to a desperate and childish need to be loved and admired, a desire which originated mainly from an inferiority complex and lack of affection during childhood (Epilogue to Cocteau's *Lettres à Milorad* 192). In the work of Cocteau the mother is depicted as "an insect which devours a male during sexual intercourse" *(Renaud et Armide* 351). Speaking especially about *Les Parents terribles,* Cocteau confesses:

> The mother, like Antigone, is an absolute person. She cannot bear the fact that her son, becoming a man with a personal life, withdraws from her tenderness and from the house which she believed could stop time in its tracks. She will go as far as killing herself in order to reach a higher

> reality which ignores disappointment and change. This is not egotism but a wild tendency towards immobility. (qtd. in Fraigneau)

Even after her suicide, the mother in *Les Parents terribles* continues to tyrannize her son, no longer with her capriciousness and illness but with the scruples which she causes by her death.

Likewise, in *The Glass Menagerie* the mother is presented as an overpowering, self-pitying and neurotic, shrewish termagant who wants to control her children's lives by having them on a string and, indeed, in order to disarm them completely, she burdens them with guilt feelings about their family duties. Deep down she is the greatest egotist but also the greatest victim of the situation. She has lived a life of self-deception without realizing it. The worst thing, however, is that she irrevocably destroys the children's mental make-up, in the same way as classical Orpheus kills Eurydice out of excessive love, illustrating Wilde's well-known statement: "Each man kills the thing he loves" (*The Ballad of the Reading Gaol* 1898). The more she tries to direct their conduct, the more she alienates them from her. The more she tries to transform her son Tom into an ideal version of her own husband, who left her due to her behavior, the more Tom approaches the real version of his fugitive father, whom the mother continually criticizes and undervalues in the eyes of her children.[5] At one moment Tom threatens to leave and finally does so, in this way at last identifying himself with his father.

The Concept of "Escape" as a Reaction to "Persecution"

To avoid insanity, escape thus seems to be Tom's only solution. It follows that Williams might have achieved self-knowledge through his work, but in fact he has not freed himself emotionally, because his early domestic trauma has permanently established an emotional detachment in his psychic make-up. This stance emerges clearly in his autobiographical short story "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair," although he himself tries to avoid admitting it:

> Sometimes I wonder if I have forgiven my mother for teaching me to expect more love from the world, more softness in it, than I could ever offer? [. . .] To the world I give suspicion and resentment, mostly. I am not cold. I am never deliberately cruel. But after my morning's work, I have little to give but indifference to people. I try to excuse myself with the pretense that my work justifies this lack of caring much for almost everything else. Sometimes I crack through the emotional block. I touch, I embrace, I hold tight to a necessary companion. But the breakthrough is not long lasting. Morning returns, and only work matters again. (*Collected Stories* xv)

However much Williams wants to change, his life and work remain indelibly stamped with his traumatic childhood years. This can also be seen in his confession in his story "Portrait of a Girl in Glass":

> I left Saint Louis and took to moving around. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. My nature changed. I grew to be firm and sufficient. In five years' time I had nearly forgotten home. I had to forget it, I couldn't carry it with me. But once in a while, usually in a strange town before I have found companions, the shell of deliberate hardness is broken through. A door comes softly and irresistibly open. I hear the tired old music my unknown father left in the place he abandoned as faithlessly as I. I see the faint and sorrowful radiance of the glass, hundreds of little transparent pieces of it in very delicate colors. I hold my breath, for if my sister's face appears among them—the night is hers! (*Collected Stories* 119)

This night of the unconscious is the same as the one of which Cocteau speaks when he says he is trying to become "an archeologist of the night" which inhabits him and which he tries to expel by advising a young man in quest of the reasons for his own problems:

> I would urge [this young man] to escape from the crowd and find refuge in the uniqueness of his night. I would not suggest to him, as Gide would: "Flee, abandon your family and home." I would tell him: "Stay and save yourself in your own darkness. Inspect it. Expel it in the light." (*Journal d'un inconnu* 39)

It is evident that, on the contrary, Williams approaches the Oedipus of Gide, who abandons his home (in Corinth) to avoid the traditions, family oppression, and social conventions and to be able to live in freedom (cf. Besser). Besides, Walt Whitman, perhaps providing an inspiration for Williams (Douglas Minyard 291), advises similarly: "Untold want by life and land / Never granted / Now Voyager / Sail thou forth / To seek and find."

A possible interpretation which could be given to the different viewpoints of the problem as seen by both writers is that for Williams the awareness of pathological suffering subconsciously generates feelings of hatred towards the family, the source of the evil. However, because the family does not exist any more, those feelings turn against its substitute, the larger "family" of his fellow men. That is exactly why, as noted above, Williams writes that he would begin to forgive the world when he had forgiven his father. At this point Cocteau seems to have a different perspective, since neither his life nor his work provides us with equivalent stimuli. On the contrary, the pathological suffering of his own family is balanced and completely neutralized by self-knowledge without the further complication of emotional harshness.

Similar feelings also inform the relationship of mother and son, Sebastian and Mrs. Venable, in *Suddenly Last Summer*:

> CATHARINE: Yes! Yes, something had broken, that string of pearls that old mothers hold their sons by like a—sort of a—sort of a—*umbilical* cord, long—*after*. . .

MRS. VENABLE: *Destruction!* (409)

Moreover, by coincidence, as Sebastian-Williams is depicted writing poems to his mother every summer, so Cocteau was in the habit of writing a poem to his mother every Christmas *(Lettres à sa mère* 135, 293, 345, 442).

The dominance of the matriarchal prototype in the subconscious of both Williams and Cocteau can be perceived in the plot of the two adaptations of the Orphic myth. In contrast to the classical myth, where Orpheus takes the initiative in his actions and Eurydice puts up with them, the modern Orpheus of Cocteau and Williams is more passive. The initiative is in the hands mainly of the female protagonists (Lady Death and Lady Torrance) rather than in those of Orpheus, who philosophizes. The women take action to get what they want, just as the frenzied women (Maenads) tear apart whatever they want but cannot get.[6]

The Orphic Symbolism in Williams

The Orphic approach of Williams is different from that of Cocteau as it is nearer the classical myth. Here as well, however, we have an autobiographical reshaping of the Orphic myth. Certain external elements of the plot lend credence to this. First of all, the surname of the main protagonist who symbolizes Orpheus is "Xavier", the name of an ancestor of Williams (Leverich viii). Secondly, the story unfolds in a shoe-shop, the hell to which Val-Orpheus descends and which evidently refers to Williams's personal hell when he was working at the International Shoe Company, so dramatically conveyed in *The Glass Menagerie*:

> TOM: Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!—Whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes—except as something to wear on a traveller's feet! (283)

Finally, from the evidence of Williams's brother, it appears that Tennessee had bought a lyre and tried to learn to play it (D. Williams and Mead 43), just like Cocteau identifies himself with Orpheus in *Le Testament d'Orphée.*

The Orpheus of Williams is a wandering artist who, by means of his unique personality, symbolically resurrects dead souls. Orpheus defeats death, not with violence but through poetry. The nonconformist Orpheus of Williams is a marginalized revolutionary (a wild loner [283], as the name Orpheus is etymologically derived from the word "orphan"). This is externally shown by the snakeskin which he wears (obviously inspired by the snake which bit Eurydice in the classical myth) and which gives him the look of "the animal which does not exist" according to Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (Normand 75). His revolution is directed against the conditions imposed by the patriarchic or puritanical marriage-based society and against corruption in general. The story takes place in a city of the American South suffocating with hypocrisy and symbolizing hell. The set, the Torrance Mercantile store, announces clearly the plot which is to follow:

> *The ceiling is high and upper walls are dark, as if streaked with moisture and cobwebbed. A great dusty window upstage offers a view of disturbing emptiness that fades into late dusk. [. . .] Merchandise is represented very sparsely and it is not realistic. Bolts of pepperel and percale stand upright on large spools, the black skeleton of a dressmaker's dummy stands meaninglessly against a thin white column, and there is a motionless ceiling fan with strips of flypaper hanging from it. There are stairs that lead to a landing and disappear above it, and on the landing there is a sinister-looking artificial palm tree in a greenish-brown jardiniere.* (227)
> LADY: We always had a problem with light in this store. (248)

In this setting Sheriff Talbott is the Cerberus. His wife, Vee, is a kind of Eurydice too, deprived of anything beautiful and living side-by-side with fear, corruption and violence. She channels her neuroses through "visionary painting" which, together with her religiosity, comprise the bridge of communication with her repressed internal self, in a word her self-knowledge. Just like Blanche DuBois, she couldn't live without visions:

> VEE: I paint a thing how I feel it instead of always the way it actually is. Appearances are misleading, nothing is what it looks like to the eyes. You got to have—*vision—to see!* (289)

From the gossip of the townswomen, a kind of Chorus based on the prototype of ancient Greek tragedy, we learn that Jabe Torrance, who "looks like death" (311), bought his wife when she was a girl of eighteen, and very cheaply too, as she was a nervous wreck because the man whom she had loved up to that time had left her on account of her low descent (229-30). Because he was a racist, Jabe had burned her father alive together with his wine garden—a kind of garden of Eden, like Belle Reve in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* symbolizing purity and innocence—a fact which his wife represses but which persistently torments her (233). To these revelations Val-Orpheus adds a Faustian philosophy about life:

> VAL: [T]here's just two kinds of people, the ones that are bought and the buyers! No!— there's one other kind . . . a kind of bird that don't have legs so it can't light on nothing but has to stay all its life on its wings in the sky. [. . .] They fly so high in gray weather the goddam hawks would get dizzy. But those little birds, they don't have no legs at all and they live their whole lives on the wing, and they sleep on the wind, that's how they sleep at night, they just spread their wings and go to sleep on the wind like other birds fold their wings and go to sleep on a tree. . . . They sleep on the wind and . . . never light on this earth but one time when they die.
>
> LADY: I'd like to be one of those birds.
>
> VAL: So'd I like to be one of those birds; they's lots of people would like to be one of those birds and never be—corrupted! (265-266)

This is exactly the vision of Orpheus according to Williams, beautiful but lonely. As for Cocteau's version, it is summed up with the aphorism: "Be born or else die! I prefer real death to a false life" (*Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* 74). The same relationship of buying and selling is very present in *Sweet Bird of Youth* between Chance and Alexandra del Lago.

Val resurrects the Lady, not because he offers her sex and love (the temporary "make-believe answer" 272) which she was deprived of, but mainly because he leads her to self-awareness even when this entails revelation of a morbid inner psyche. In a manner consistent with his handling of characters, Williams portrays Val-Orpheus as the artist who avoids relationships and sex due to their triviality and, as a result, seeks refuge in his art (Coronis 36). In Williams, as well as in Cocteau, the poet's only hope is to escape to another world, a lyric "zone" that lies far away from corruption. For both writers love seems unrealizable in this life. Besides, in Williams, "love, insofar as it exists at all, is the transient joining of two different desires contained in individuals who will [however] remain isolated, separate" (Clum 132). Thanks to Val's closeness, Lady learns the real value of life away from hypocrisy and corruption. And here can be found the characteristic element of Williams's dramatic art. Man reconciles himself to his nature when he frees himself from social conventions in order to live his life as his heart dictates and not as a result of any kind of necessity.

> CAROL: What on earth can you do but catch at whatever comes near you with both your hands until your fingers are broken (245) [. . .] Dead people do talk. They chatter together like birds on Cypress Hill, but all they say is one word and that one word is "live," they say "live, live live, live, live!" It's all they've learned, it's the only advice they can give—just live . . . simple!—a very simple instruction. (252)

The same advice is given by Princess-Death to Orpheus in the cinematic version: "If I belonged to the other world, I would say: let's drink" (74). Likewise, when Cocteau's Orpheus discovers poetry as a real expression of life he exclaims: "We were dead without realising it" (play: 32; screenplay: 41), exactly as the messenger Heurtebise in the film version of Orpheus cries out on descending to Hades and perceiving that men exist there who "*think* they live" (64). Thus, life is the spiritual life of the poet found in his unconscious, whereas death consists of the normal, unenlightened worldly consciousness of everyday living. Indeed, "where is the life we have lost in living?" (T. S. Eliot, *The Rock,* 1934). Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* waxes ironic:

> TOM: You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail? (255)

As a matter of fact, the escape from the corruption of the world is a permanent element in Williams's theater. The character of the fugitive is encountered in the writer's most important works (cf. Costello and Tischler in *TWAR*). Tom in *The Glass Menagerie* is "attempting to find in motion what was lost in space" going as

far as he could "for time is the longest distance between two places" (313). Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* wanders about seeking a new life, as does Hannah in *The Night of the Iguana,* both depending finally on the kindness of strangers:

> HANNAH: We tried every hotel in town and they wouldn't take us. I'm afraid I have to place myself at your . . . *mercy* (285). [. . .] We make a home for each other, my grandfather and I. Do you know what I mean by home? I don't mean a regular home. I mean I don't mean what other people mean when they speak of a home, because I don't regard a home as a . . . well, as a place, a building . . . a house . . . of wood, bricks, stone. I think of a home as being a thing that two people have between them in which each can . . . well, nest-rest-live in, emotionally speaking. [. . .]
> SHANNON: When a bird builds a nest to rest in and live in, it doesn't built it in a . . . a falling down tree. [. . .] When a bird builds a nest, it builds it with an eye for the . . . the relative permanence of the location, and also for the purpose of mating and propagating its species.
> HANNAH: I still say that I'm not a bird, Mr. Shannon, I'm a human being and when a member of that fantastic species builds a nest in the heart of another, the question of permanence isn't the first or even the last thing that's considered . . . necessarily? . . . always? Nonno and I have been continually reminded of the impermanence of things lately. (356-57)

Escape from the immediate world, though, is not possible finally, and the fugitive is isolated or in the worst case is driven mad (Blanche) or killed (Val Xavier).

This personal salvation by means of self-awareness and the self-confidence which is entailed constitutes the dramatic leitmotif of Williams. Self-knowledge gives man the strength to shake off the misfortune of his hell. Jim substantially provides this—like another Orpheus—to Laura in *The Glass Menagerie,* Chance to Heavenly in *Sweet Bird of Youth,* and Hannah (a female avatar of Orpheus) to Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana.* This lack of self-awareness, generated by social conventions, is what destroys Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* Alma in *Summer and Smoke,* and also Mrs. Stone in *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone.* These tragic heroines, both mythomaniac and nymphomaniac, losers till the end, unable to confront and express their true selves—and mainly their unorthodox sexual fantasies—live a lie and try to convince the others about the "truthfulness" of their lie:

> BLANCHE: I don't want realism. [. . .] I'll tell you what I want. Magic! Yes, yes magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth. I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! Don't turn the light on!! (203-04)[7]

Their unavoidable end is paranoia or the street. They do not even have the strength to commit suicide over their degraded dreams, as their earlier predeces-

sors, the first neurotic heroine of the theater, Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. And as Williams's Orpheus says:

> VAL: Nobody ever gets to know *no body!* We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! [. . .] We're under a life long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live in this earth! (271)

The actual catharsis in Williams's work, as in Cocteau's, is brought about by transfer of the repressed impulses from the subconscious to the conscious. For Cocteau especially, this transfer takes place systematically with the reshaping of Greek mythology.

Self-awareness as a revelation of the dissimilarity and uniqueness of the individual self is symbolized by both Williams and Cocteau (a characteristic coincidence) by a unicorn. In *The Glass Menagerie* Laura discovers happiness fleetingly when, dancing with the gentleman caller, they sweep away a glass unicorn and break the horn that made it different from other animals (302). In the ballet of Cocteau *La Dame à la licorne* (*The Lady with the Unicorn,* 1953), the virgin heroine loses her horn when making love for the first time.

The Internalization of the Orphic Myth

Generally one could say that the Orphic myth in Cocteau and Williams is internalized, as the classical descent of Orpheus to Hades is attributable to the descent to the depths of the soul of the individual in order to discover the mystery of his existence, of his god-like nature. For both Cocteau and Williams this is poetry and self-awareness. Cocteau shows this by using magical film trickery: when plunging into the mirror to seek his lost inspiration, Orpheus succeeds in penetrating his own self. After all, doesn't Sophocles's Oedipus, who inspired Cocteau so much, seek self-knowledge in the end (cf. Estève)? This is also the deepest meaning of Orphism, the forerunner of Christianity. Orpheus, both in classical form and in contemporary adaptations by Cocteau and Williams, could very well be Christ himself (cf. Tischler "Bohemian Revision"; Egan 65). Like Saint Veronica, who received her veil back from Christ with the lasting impression of His face upon it, Vee—who "was born with a caul! a sort of thing like a veil" (289)—recognizes Val-Orpheus as the Christ of her vision (Baker Traubitz 59).

Moreover, Cocteau himself says that his first idea for Orpheus was as a one-act play about the birth of Christ and the expulsion of Joseph and Mary by the villagers. The plot led to such a muddle that Cocteau finally preferred to recreate the Orphic myth. In this way, the inexplicable birth of the Holy Child was replaced by the equally inexplicable production of poems by means of the horse or the car-radio of Princess-Death, the villagers giving way to the Maenads (*Journal d'un inconnu* 48).

Man, savior of God according to Nikos Kazantzakis, becomes God when he discovers what exists within himself. God does not exist outside Man but inside him. Thus, by saving himself, Man saves a part of God. This is exactly the theory

that Orphism promotes (cf. Jacquemard and Brosse 66). In his *Bacchus,* Cocteau writes: "The Kingdom of God is not found in front of us but within us" (144). The plot in Williams's *Orpheus Descending* develops on Easter Eve, with Val sharing the same fate as Christ, but with one difference—that his resurrection will not be predestined, Orpheus having been a passive victim of destiny, whereas Christ was a voluntary one (Pruner 33). As by the end of Cocteau's *Orphée* (play: scenes X-XII), where the hollow casket of a plaster head is all that is left of the poet, Val, when dying, leaves behind his snakeskin:

> Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bones behind them, and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind . . . (341)

This is perhaps the only optimistic note in Williams's work, as it implies resurrection. The influence of Orphic literature is obvious; Orphism proclaimed the god-like nature of the soul imprisoned in the human body which is likened to a tomb. With death, the soul (symbolized by the snakeskin) is set free and incorporated in other humans (metempsychosis). The same concept is found in Williams's autobiographical short story "The Man in the Overstuffed Chair," where the author maintains, despite his known differences with his fugitive father, that the latter bequeathed him "his blood in [his] veins" (xvii). A similar confession is made by Cocteau in his semi-autobiographical fiction entitled *Le Livre blanc,* where we also find interesting "compassion" for his father:

> Pederast knows pederast as Jew knows Jew. They sense each other beneath the mask, and I undertake to discover them between the lines of the most innocent books. This passion is less simple than moralists might suppose. [. . .] For there exist pederasts who are unaware of their own nature and live to the end of their days in a state of uneasiness, which they ascribe to poor health or a jealous nature. *I have always believed that my father was too much like me to differ on this major point.* He was no doubt unaware of his inclination and instead of pursuing it he strenuously followed another without knowing what made his life so unbearable. His tastes were revealed to me by odd phrases, his way of walking and endless details about his person, but if he had ever discovered them or found the opportunity to develop them, he would have been astonished. At that period people killed themselves for less. But no; he lived in ignorance of himself and accepted his burden. It is perhaps to this blindness that I owe my existence. I regret the fact, for if my father had known the delights which would have prevented my misfortunes, we should both have been happier. (24-25)

The well-known precondition which Hades imposes on Orpheus, not to turn round to see Eurydice, is rendered in Williams with the Sheriff's threat to Val to leave town before sunrise. Val disobeys and is punished, in a cannibalistic way, like Sebastian (Orpheus again!) in *Suddenly Last Summer.* Furthermore, the similarity with which *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1959) and *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) con-

clude is characteristic: in the former work Orpheus-Cocteau, transformed into a hibiscus flower, is trodden on and torn apart by a group of noisy youths (81). In the latter work, Sebastian-Orpheus is pursued by young boys who in the end tear him apart and devour him:

> CATHARINE: Torn or cut parts of him away with their hands or knives or maybe those jagged tin cans they made music with, they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs. There wasn't a sound any more, there was nothing to see but Sebastian, what was left of him, that looked like a big white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses had been *torn, thrown, crushed!*—against that blazing white wall . . . (422)

This flower allegory is no stranger to the myth of Orpheus, akin to Narcissus. According to Ovid (94), when Narcissus was received into the abode of the dead, he kept looking at himself in the waters of the Styx. And after Orpheus's dismemberment, instead of his corpse, the nymphs discovered a flower with a circle of white petals round a yellow centre.

The Enigma of Self-Knowledge

From the comparison of the life and work of the two writers arises the tenuous but undeniable psychographic convergence of Cocteau and Williams. Although both admitted their sexual identity, they lived it with many excesses and feelings of guilt. Nevertheless, in their works both try to shake off this treacherous burden, finding refuge even in amoralism. In Cocteau's *La Machine infernale* Jocasta appears after her suicide as a vision to the blind and wandering Oedipus and tells him: "Things which seem abominable to men are insignificant to the gods" (216); Hannah, in *The Night of the Iguana*, remarks that "nothing human disgusts [her] unless it's unkind, violent" (363-64). Williams's and Cocteau's Orpheus avatars are mostly concerned with the artist's inner conflicts.

Besides, we should not forget that Cocteau wrote in 1928, albeit anonymously, *Le Livre blanc,* an open manifesto on homoerotic life and fantasy:

> As far back as I can remember and even at the age when the mind still has no power over the senses, I find traces of my love for boys. I have always loved the stronger sex and believe that it can legitimately be called the fair sex. My misfortunes are due to a society which condemns anything out of the ordinary as a crime and forces us to reform our natural inclination (21). In exiling myself I am not exiling a monster, but a man whom society will not allow to live, since it considers one of the mysterious cogs in God's masterpiece to be a mistake. [. . .] I fully realize that an ideal fit for termites, like the Russian ideal which tends towards the plural, condemns the singular in one of its most lofty forms. But nobody will ever prevent certain flowers and fruit from being smelt and eaten only by the rich. *A vice of society makes a vice of my rectitude.* In France this vice does not lead me to prison because of the way

> Cambacérès lived and the longevity of the Code Napoléon. But I will not agree to be tolerated. This damages my love of love and of liberty. (75-76)

The lesser (in Cocteau's case) and the greater (in that of Williams) repressed (homo)sexuality finds its necessary release through their works, surely disguised or allegorical but deep down extremely erotic. And of course it is not just eroticism *in abstracto* but the very special *"gender"* of their eroticism which lends authenticity and greatness to their works even if it creates guilt feelings for them. On this subject, Milorad writes:

> As regards matters of sexuality, Cocteau, who was generally considered daring, openly provocative and a Heliogabalus, was at heart extremely reserved. He was marked in an indelible and dramatic way by an upbringing of repressed sexuality which caused him the feeling of guilt; he was one of those for whom sexuality represented such a huge problem that the more he repressed it and shook it off, the more it burst out in his work without his being able to control it, a fact which emerges from the erotic colouring of his writing. (*Lettres à Milorad* 193)

Likewise, on the question of Williams's guilt feelings, Gore Vidal in his introduction to Williams's *Collected Stories* aptly points out:

> Thirty years ago I tried to explain to him that the only way that a ruling class—any ruling class—can stay in power and get people to do work that they don't want to do is to invent taboos, and then punish those who break them while, best of all, creating an ongoing highly exploitable sense of guilt in just about everyone. Sexual taboo has always been a favorite with our rulers. [. . .] But Tennessee had been too thoroughly damaged by the society that he was brought up in to ever suspect that he had been, like almost everyone else, had. He thought he was wrong; and *they* were right. He punished himself with hypochondria. (xxii)

Hidden sexuality is symbolized by the hidden alcove, a kind of darkroom or backroom, an emblematic place in the set of *Orpheus Descending.* Forbidden sexuality can only blossom in the shadow, in the dirtiness, on the fringe of society:

> Another, much smaller, playing area is a tiny bedroom alcove which is usually masked by an Oriental drapery which is worn dim but bears the formal design of a gold tree with scarlet fruit and fantastic birds. (227)

How can someone find relief from feelings of guilt? It may be surmised that the heroes of Cocteau (for example in *Bacchus* where the victims—male avatars of Antigone—oblige their persecutors to dance with them round the pyre) on meeting the heroes of Williams (for example, in *The Glass Menagerie* with the, albeit temporary, release of Laura or in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with Brick's outburst against his

father) provide us with some directions to solve the enigma: man reduces the burden of guilt of his being different, on the one hand by unloading a part of it onto his persecutors-victimizers; that is to say, onto those who created his guilt feelings, namely society at large or a smaller community (family) and on the other hand by being the first to accept his own nature, even if this breaks social taboos, since victimizers and victimized very often identify with each other unconsciously. Man will have learned to live the day he stops fighting his own instincts. In the final analysis, Sartre was not entirely correct: hell is not always "the others." Sometimes we ourselves create our own hell in our self ignorance, in the creation of imaginary fears and even in our failure to establish sincere communication, a necessary prerequisite for which is once again self-knowledge, that is in Williams's words, "crawl[ing] back under the crumbling broken wall of [ourselves]" (*In the Winter of Cities* 28).

Notes

Grateful acknowledgment is given to Professors David and Helen Hurst for their help in preparing this paper, and, of course, to Pierre Chanel, eminent Cocteau specialist.

[1] To the best of our knowledge, the only comparative study on the relations between Williams and Cocteau has been made by Gilbert Debusscher: "French Stowaways on an American *Milk Train*: Williams, Cocteau and Peyrefitte." *Modern Drama* 15 (1982): 399-408. In this article the author suggests that Williams's *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963) has been largely inspired by Cocteau's *L'Aigle à deux têtes* (*The Eagle Has Two Heads,* 1946).

[2] For a comparison between the play and the film, see Maurice Yacowar: *Tennessee Williams and Film.* New York: Ungar Film Library, 1977: 60-66.

[3] For Cocteau, the mirror is an environment of creative intercourse, gestation, decay, and regeneration (Tsakiridou 93): "I give you the secret of the secrets . . . The mirrors are the gates from which death goes in and out. Besides, look at yourself all your life in a mirror, and you will see death at work like bees in a glass-covered hive" (*Orphée,* screenplay, 60).

[4] In psychoanalysis, the directing by instinct of itself towards an aim other than and remote from that of sexual gratification.

[5] This strongly brings to mind D. H. Lawrence's artistically skillful descriptions in *Sons and Lovers* (1913).

[6] An equivalent case is the reversal of the traditional roles and the assignment of initiative to the women in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941) by Carson McCullers, Williams's close friend.

[7] Cf. Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*: "We live on two levels, the realistic level and the fantastic level, and which is the real one, really . . . " (317).

Appendix

I. Introduction by Jean Cocteau to the published French translation and adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (*Un Tramway nommé Désir.* Paris: Bordas, 1949. 7-9), previously unpublished in English.

Nothing is more significant of our times than following the course of a stage play. The course of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is all the more interesting since I have followed it very closely, translating Tennessee Williams's work word for word. Contrary to what some critics imagine, Tennessee Williams is a writer searching the depths of existence and he does not achieve this with undisciplined writing. Further, he is very well acquainted with the literary world and is not unaware of the treasure of our most famous melodramas, from *Courrier de Lyon* to *Deux Gosses*. He likes this naïve art, which nurtured a Rimbaud in the theatre of Charlesville. What they reproach him for is an impeccable presentation.

In New York, London or Paris, wherever the play enjoyed a triumph, its course was the same. Negative reviews. An enthusiastic public. Could one surmise that the theatrical intelligencia had lost all sensitivity and could not judge a spectacle other than on the basis of predetermined ideas and prejudices, this occurring not in one city only but in all three?

The press spoke much about rapes. Strange. Where did it see them? In a husband who reconciles himself with his wife? In Stanley, who takes advantage of Blanche's weakness in a scene when she resists him only for form's sake? Must the conclusion be drawn that the individuals who have undertaken to inform us on matters of public spectacle see and hear such a work with closed eyes and inattentive ears?

I would not now have written these few lines if the theatregoing public had to assume the role of a law court. However, the trial has already been won at the higher court of appeal, thanks to the verdict of the crowd. It thus behoves Paris to be more careful! It often takes pleasure in making fun of Picasso. But Paris's face looks increasingly like the ones depicted in this painter's works, where a nose is put in place of the ears and a mouth in place of the eyes.

II. Previously unpublished material by Jean Cocteau printed by permission of the Jean Cocteau Estate, Paris, France. The following manuscript is conserved in the Cocteau Archives of the Historic Library of Paris (Hôtel de Lamoignon, 24, rue Pavée, 75004 Paris). © 2001 Comité Jean Cocteau. Grateful aknowledgment is given to Pierre Bergé, President of the Cocteau Estate, Professor Pierre Caizergues, director of the Cocteau Archives at the University of Montpellier, and Claudine Boulouque, archivist.

I have translated the *Streetcar* because I consider that such dealings should exist so as to avoid deplorable translations which falsify the plays. The *Streetcar* is a singular, highly and truly poetical work, full of that poetry which stands against the poetical atmosphere with which it is often confused. All the characters of the *Streetcar* are pure—or at least in a state of purity—which is not quite the same thing. One must not mistake the purity of a material for the shape this material takes on. I mean that, in spite of their many exquisite shades, the characters in T. W. unfold on one line, develop in one single piece; in a word, they move us by their role as soloists in an orchestra.

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