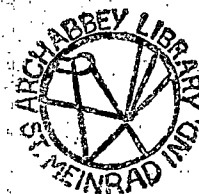


The Sacred and the Profane in  
Tennessee Williams'  
The Night of the Iguana

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## Introduction

Tennessee Williams has always been interested in the conflict between the sacred and the profane and The Night of the Iguana is a good case in point. This thesis will identify and elaborate on Williams' theme of the sacred and the profane.<sup>1</sup> Particular attention will be paid to sexuality versus puritanism. Particular attention will also be given to the following elements in Iguana: the way in which each character may be a symbol of either the sacred or the profane. Of special importance in the play are such words as "realistic", "fantastic", "the spook", and "decency". All these themes become significant when used in the play for they smack of the sacred and the profane, or a character's view of them.

Shannon is the main character who embodies the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, the sacred and the profane. From the beginning of the play, we are told that Shannon's

weakness and downfall are his interests in women and liquor. But he is unable to mesh his interests into his moral code and his notion of God. On a deeper level, he is unable to discover a balance between the spirit and the flesh. Due to this inability (which is partly a result of societal norms and values [see Falk for further detail]) to openly confront and mesh his incongruities, he is on the verge of a mental collapse: "[he is a young man who has cracked up before and is going to crack up again--perhaps repeatedly]"<sup>2</sup> It seems that he has already suffered, and not yet recuperated from, a spiritual crisis. He is a "defrocked" Episcopal priest who was locked out of his parish for heresy and fornication. These few facts about Shannon indicate a strong sense and identification with both the spirit and the flesh. Shannon is identified as profane, or as too much of the flesh. This is an element in him; the tourists he is guiding and even Hannah accuse him of being too self-indulgent (111.97). But he is more than a sinner.

On the symbolic level, Shannon is like the iguana (which is a symbol of human existence) who is caught, tied, and is later to be consumed. He struggles to free himself from bondage, but the kind of psychological and spiritual bondage which is destroying him.

He is also a kind of prophet and, perhaps, even a confused Christ figure. Hannah refers to him as such when he is tied in a hammock (because of his severely unstable condition): "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....?" (LII.96.) But his ministry is not Jesus' nor an ordinary one: he has a driving need to help others "to see, to see!--the underworlds or all places...to feel and be touched" (III.90). He seems to say, or wants to say, that the flesh (which is often associated with the underworld) and the spirit are one in man. Neither flesh or spirit can be denied, nor can they be separated from the other if life is to be fully known and appreciated. He believes that the flesh is not profane for it is with the body that one communicates with others and experiences emotions. This is his prophecy and this is the point of disharmony between him and the Baptist teachers who represent an incomplete and narrow view of what is sacred. They accept only the spirit in man, and claim that anything of the flesh is to be suppressed and rejected because it is profane. Since these women refuse to accept their flesh, they refuse to accept the underworld. But Shannon particularly rails against them because he sees too much of the "pharisee" in these women; they refuse to see, feel, or be touched.

It is Miss Hannah Jelkes who is the final arbiter in this conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Her insight into the internal workings of all the characters give her insight into the whole of humanity, and so she is able to arbitrate. She has a mature appreciation of the delicate

balance that is needed between the spirit and the flesh. The difference between herself and Shannon is that Hannah is able to love and live selflessly in her duality, Shannon, however, does not. Because of her own struggle with her spirit and flesh, she is able to listen, understand, and support Shannon in his struggle for harmony within himself. She is his equal in all things but failure. She is on the same end of the scale in the sacred/profane realm. She, too, is a Christ figure, but a more successful one.

Mrs. Maxine Faulk (who has been recently widowed) is the third and last major character. She is a very practical woman who has established a lifestyle of her own, and does not suffer from confusion in the area of the flesh and spirit: she is "affable and rapaciously lusty" (I.7). She is an emancipated Shannon (but in her middle forties) because she has no qualms about satisfying her desires and she does not worry about God. Her appreciation and expression of the flesh is deeper than Shannon's, especially in relation to the Baptist teachers. Though she is a stable person, she offers Shannon very little except a quiet place to recuperate because she is unable to relate to him, or Hannah, on an intellectual or spiritual level.

There are a number of minor characters who affect the three main characters. Two Mexican youths work for Maxine as houseboys and as casual lovers. The only importance they give to the play is the iguana they catch and plan to eat. They

also add a bit of crude humor which is worth mentioning. When the Baptist teachers attempt to leave their site, the boys urinate on their luggage. Somehow it seems appropriate that their luggage be "profaned" in this manner. The leaders of these teachers is a very boistrous (as her name suggests) Miss Judith Fellowes. She is a domineering woman who is insensitive to the hidden difficulties of Shannon. She mercilessly rebukes and degrades him for his obvious faults in cheating the tour he guided and in his sexual promiscuity with a young member of the tour....a Miss Charlotte Goodall. Her name suggests her character; she is a naive young girl who has latched on to Shannon and is an example of his sexual interests in women.

The German family, the Fahrenkopfs (traveling-head), represent another aspect in this sacred-profane sphere. They are really quite obnoxious because they are oblivious to the emotional and psychological pain of those around them; they find entertainment in the difficulties and the downfall of Shannon. This is an indication of their perverted appreciation of life. They are as unreal and narrow as the teachers because they have carved out a reality all their own, ignoring anything foreign to themselves. It might be called hedonism. They, too, are a symbol of the tourist, but more importantly, they are a symbol of the industrialist order, and the values that serve that system. Herr Fahrenkopf is a tank manufacturer. Since the play is set in the summer of

1940, he takes pleasure in experiencing the bombing and destruction of London as well as Shannon's downfall. (Here again, Williams parallels the activity to intensify its impact.) For example, Herr Fahrenkopf says "[ecstatically]: London is burning, the heart of London is on fire!" (II.45). He and his family are the epitome of selfishness. They relate to everyone and everything as objects. The word "objects" is appropriate since they relate only on the level of materials, of physical, sensible objects. They are content to settle for beer, their inflated rubber horse they take swimming and the demise of Shannon for their entertainment.

The last character is Hannah's grandfather, Mr. Jonathan Coffin or Nonno. At the age of 97, he utters (more or less coherently) bits of his most recent poem. These recitals provide a brief but creative commentary on the action of the play. As the play finishes he completes and recites his poem before his death, giving the play a bit of cohesion. He visually provides a contrast to Shannon. Both are dressed in white linen suits. Shannon's is crumpled (so is his spirit). The image of Nonno is quite a dignified one: "He is a very old man but has a powerful voice for his age and always seems to be shouting something of importance. Nonno is a poet and showman. There is a good kind of pride and he has it...He is immaculately dressed--a linen suit, white as his thick poet's hair" (I.29).

The final introductory consideration is the location where Iguana takes place. Williams stages his play, appropriately, on the west coast of Mexico. The tropical rain forest, the jungle covered hilltop where the hotel rests, the exotic flowers and birds all help to create an air of a fertile, passionate and hot-blooded atmosphere. This is important since Shannon and Maxine, but Hannah too, are full of passion and a robust sense of sexuality. The flowers and birds have special significance: the birds are often heard when there is some kind of hostile confrontation, almost always between Shannon and another character. The flowers are horn shaped and symbolize the male genitals, or at least a reference to sexuality.

Williams sets this tropical setting against another. Both are quite different, just as the characters who come from those areas are different. Their character is implied by the name of the town (Blowing Rock, Texas), barren, arid, and sparse.



### An Analysis of the Play

As the curtain rises, our attention focuses on Maxine, who is followed by her Mexican houseboy, Pedro. He is "stuffing his shirt under the belt of his pants and sweating as if he had been working hard in the sun" (I.7). The drama is off to a "profane" start with this suggested sexual intercourse. This tone will continue and will play a significant role since sex is a taboo in the realm of the sacred. Maxine's greeting does not interest Shannon, he came here only to rest, but he gets little rest. He hears the horn of the bus (the bus is full of his tourists, the teachers) which painfully reminds him of his obligation to them. On a deeper level, their nagging gnaws at him because he is guilty of their accusations. He gives us a good description of his situation: "Fantastic. I can't lose this party. Blake Tours has put me on probation because I had a bad party last month that tried to get me sacked....If I lose this party I'll be sacked for sure...If I lose this job, what's next? There's nothing lower than Blake Tours" (I.10-11). This excerpt verifies his ever-increasing desperation. He copes with this anxiety

by creating the illusion that he is in control of himself, and his relationships. This escape, by illusion, indicates his inability to accept the truth about his deep-seated emotional problems. He clings to his illusion in the attempt to become stable. His purposeful use of "fantastic", he later admits, is part of the illusion he is creating. It is a verbal sign or it. He pretends to operate on the realistic level but, in reality, is acting on the unrealistic, "fantastic" level. Another example of his delusion is the comment he makes in response to doubts concerning his ability to lead the tour; his sexual promiscuity is also emphasized: "I don't care what they think. A tour conducted by T. Lawrence Shannon is in his charge, completely--where to go, when to go, every detail of it. Otherwise I resign" (1.12). He claims control when he hasn't the emotional stamina to do so.

Williams also assigns Shannon some subtle allusions in his subsequent speech. He makes two references, which represent the "real" situation, to food and drink. Namely, to "thermidor dishes" and a "cold Carta Blanca". These two words shadow his instability. He, like a thermidor, is a moderate counter-revolutionary who needs to restore a sense of order, and rid himself of tension. He needs to rediscover a sense of normalcy. He, likewise, has granted himself a carta blanca, at the expense of the teachers. He has used his position to gain control, though this is in the process of being overturned, for his benefit rather than for his tourists.

Williams is stuffing the Iguana's ballot box with these loaded allusions. In doing so, he fortifies our sense of Shannon's near mental collapse.

He uses another allusion in reference to the German family upon their entrance: "What in blazes is this? A little animated Hieronymous Bosch?" (I.12). The importance of the allusion is that Bosch, in his paintings, stressed sin and the forces of evil. Williams carries this same theme in Iguana. Another factor to consider, though previously mentioned, is the parallel action: the Germans take part, at least as spectators who profit, in Britain's and Shannon's destruction.

Throughout the play, Williams builds the intensity of Shannon's unstable condition. This involves the main action of the play. He is never able to escape or solve his problems until near the end of the play, and then it is questionable. Constant harassment from Maxine, the Germans, and the teachers, and even from within himself, force him to confront his incongruities, his sin. His goodness is not considered for the most part. The following words from Maxine are typical of her treatment of him: "[chuckling]: Ha, so you took the young chick and the old hens are squawking about it, Shannon?" (I.13). She is referring to Charlotte Goodall. He admits having had intercourse with her. After his narrative of events about her and the tour, he speaks of the "spook". The spook seems to be Shannon's conscience, or his better self.

He says the spook "doesn't attack before sundown, he's an after-sundown shadow..." (I.15). His conscience plagues him and will attack before the night is over. In terms of this thesis, the spirit in him struggles with the flesh in him. All these images and contradictions between the sacred and the profane multiply, and become more complicated as the play progresses.

In this last passage, Shannon says the "attack" is not before sundown. Thus we have The Night of the Iguana because it is in the darkness of the night that Shannon does come to some terms with himself. Literally, the title means the dark night of the soul, the night of human struggle and existence. And the existence, a troubled one, is Shannon's and Hannah's.

The next significant action is the entrance of Judith Fellowes. She and Maxine are on stage and they present quite a contrast. Maxine is more fleshy and Fellowes is more of the spirit, at least she claims to be. It is in the conversation between Shannon and Maxine following Fellowes exit which adds a fuller appreciation to Shannon's situation:

Shannon: Why did you have to...?

Maxine: Huh?

Shannon: Come out looking like this! For you it's funny but for me it's....

Maxine: This is how I look. What's wrong with how I look?

Shannon: I told you to button your shirt. Are you so proud of your boobs that you won't button your shirt up--Go in the office and see if she's calling Blake Tours to get me fired.

Maxine: She better not unless she pays for the call.  
(I.18)

Maxine's "boobs" are probably offensive to Fellowes but Maxine, as she says, does not know "what's wrong". She is insensitive to their feelings and is unable to relate on Fellowes level and even Shannon's. Shannon is able to relate on both their levels (that is part of his problem) and he is torn between the spirit and the flesh. He can expect little help from Maxine who is more concerned about paying her phone bill than tending to his inner needs.

It is shortly before this conversation when Hannah enters. From the description presented earlier, we know her appearance captivates Shannon. She leaves momentarily with the fall of a coconut and the scream of a parrot. This symbolizes the ever-deepening difficulties of both herself and Shannon. Maxine persists in her questioning of his interest in women. She asks him: "Why do you want the young ones--or think that you do...why do you take them...?" [He swallows but does not answer] (I.19). His pause almost admits guilt. But he does respond with a truthful answer though it just suggests his difficulty: "People need human contact, Maxine honey" (I.20). He is very occupied with this need and usually channels it into a genital expression which only adds to his difficulty. Maxine has totally missed the depth of his comment and she centers on his physical needs, such as his worn out shoes and socks. She is unaware of Shannon's inner spiritual self. In fact, he is considering returning to active

ministry as an Episcopal priest though he was locked out of his parish for heresy and fornication. This wavering interest in the spirit and the flesh only adds to his mental difficulties. He is not thinking realistically about himself and about the impossibility of his return to ministry because of his instability and sexual appetite. But his interest in ministry does indicate a strong sense of the spirit within himself. His desire and need to express his spiritual nature is ignored and he is pressured to defend himself unceasingly. In this next passage he admits this fact and also that he is operating on two levels, the real and the fantastic: "It's horrible how you got to bluff and keep bluffin even when hollering 'Help!' is all you're up to" (I.21).

Fellowes keeps digging at Shannon in her righteous fury. She accuses him of cheating those on his tour. His only defense is an appeal to her better side and his claim to gentility and uprightness as a minister. Fellowes knows better and becomes increasingly insulting: "De-frocked! But still trying to pass himself off as a minister!" (I.27). She is right. She has discovered, and will discover more of his incongruities. She keeps picking at him till he responds: "Miss Fellowes, don't, don't, don't...do what...you're doing! [He is on the verge of hysteria, he makes some incoherent sounds, gesticulates with clenched fists, then stumbles wildly across the verandah and leans panting for breath against a post.] Don't! Break! Human! Pride!" (I.28). There is no

doubt of his instability, and he is becoming progressively worse.

Upon Nonno and Hannah's entrance, we begin to sense that Hannah and Maxine are at opposite poles. (We already know they are.) It is almost pitiful, the uneducated and uninterested Maxine is not willing to relate to or even help this intelligent pair. Hannah's situation, she admits to Shannon and later to Maxine out of necessity, is rather desperate also; no other hotel in town would accept them. This desperation (though less acute than Shannon's) serves to set up a rapport between them. Shannon's frequent use of "fantastic" should also be mentioned. He says this upon seeing their desperation and their attempts to cover it up. Their immediate need is a place to stay. But Maxine consents only for one night since they have no money. So, this night, The Night of the Iguana, becomes more intense as Hannah and Shannon face their increasing difficulties. Their communication progresses and she admits to him that she has been around the world almost "as many times as the world's been around the sun, and I feel as if I had gone the whole way on foot" (1.38). Maxine notices their familiarity and is quick to show it as she mimicks Hannah's thanks to Shannon for his assistance. But he defends her because she is genuinely a good person: "Don't be bitchy. Some people say thank you sincerely" (1.39). Even with this comment, he recognizes the disparity between these women. The "bitch" versus the "sincere". There is

between these two a reflection of the spirit and the flesh.

this act ends with Nonno's words:

How calmly does the orange branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch,  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no expression of despair....(I.40)

this is a poem about life and the poet's reflection on the human experience. It has a soothing effect, especially considering the pain and anxiety of Shannon and Hannah.

Williams has provided the undercurrent of the play, an air of desperation with emotional and psychological instability and bodily depravation, which is represented in Shannon's promiscuity and liquor addiction and Hannah and Nonno's need for a place to stay. The others provide a smug security and antagonizing spirit. In the next act, the problems, the confusion and the complexity of the leading characters, increase. In doing so, their intensity becomes clearer as some of their difficulties unfold.

The second act opens several hours later, near sunset:

"The scene is bathed in a deep golden, almost coppery light, the heavy tropical foliage gleams with wetness from a recent rain" (II.41). This recent rainstorm might be a sign of some relief but the tension of the play continues to deepen.

The tension becomes increasingly apparent with the juxtaposition of Hannah and Maxine and the brief commentary on their situation: "(Maxine's whole concentration shifts abruptly to him[Shannon]). She freezes and blazes with it like an



exposed power line. For a moment the 'hot light' is concentrated on her tense, furious figure. Hannah provides a visual counterpoint. She clenches her eyes shut for a moment, and when they open, it is on a look of stoical despair of the refuge she has unsuccessfully fought for] " (II.44).

The German's entrance continues to build this troubled atmosphere. The Battle of Britain is being broadcast as they enter decked with seaweed while "the heart of London's on fire" they call for "beer, beer, beer!" (II.45). This is typical of their total occupation with themselves. Maxine joins in their delight but Shannon finds no relief as Charlotte Goodall approaches. Williams describes her as a "teenage Medea" (II.46). He ducks into his room and Hannah attempts to distract the girl for his benefit. It is at this moment that Charlotte's shouts for him "startle the rain-forest birds into a clamorous moment" (II.46). The birds shadow the pain and difficulty of the characters. The oncoming mirage of action is total chaos. Charlotte is pounding on Shannon's door while Hannah's efforts are being ignored. Herr Fahrenkopf reappears, ignores Hannah's portraits and attempts to listen to a broadcast of Hitler. Hannah's sketches fall out, Charlotte steps on them and, once Shannon comes out, they launch into a nerved conversation which includes the allusion to the war that parallels their own instability and their desperation. Charlotte's recollection of the events of their affair is an example of Shannon's confusion concern-

ing a balance between the spirit and flesh: "I remember that after making love to me, you hit me, Larry, you struck me in the face, and you twisted my arm to make me kneel on the floor and pray with you for forgiveness" (II.50). The values which cause his guilt are, in part, a result from his puritan upbringing which he admits is one of the causes for his preoccupation with the flesh. Recall that Fellowes is a symbol of puritanism. It is obvious that she represents puritanism because she negates the flesh. She rejects the flesh especially in relationships such as the one between Shannon and Charlotte. She is intolerant and rigid in her stance and becomes insensitive to Shannon and Charlotte's inner confusion, of which their sexual promiscuity is an example. Because Fellowes is unbending in her judgement and harsh in her treatment of Shannon and Charlotte, she becomes identified as a hypocrite in her Christianity and a sinner because of this. The others are elevated to hero and heroine despite their incongruities and "sin". This becomes clear when she seizes and degrades Charlotte and she barks: "What's your word worth--nothing? You promised you'd stay away from him!" [Charlotte frees her arm, sobbing bitterly. Miss Fellowes seizes her again, tighter, and starts dragging her away.].... "I'm responsible for you" (II.51). Despite Charlotte's defense, Fellowes imposes her values and wishes upon the girl. They exit.

Once he is alone he collapses on the hammock and relates his experience with his first and only parish. His former parishoners held the same views of Christianity and the flesh as does Fellowes. He rails against such a limited and judgemental scope concerning God and man. After he had fornicated with one of the Sunday school teachers and shortly before he was locked out of that parish he

climbed into the pulpit and looked down over all those smug, disapproving, accusing faces uplifted, I had an impulse to shake them--so I shook them. I had a prepared sermon--meek, apologetic--I threw it away....Look here, I said, I shouted, I'm tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent--yeah, that's what I said, I shouted! All your Western theologies, the whole mythology of them are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent....all our theologies do it--accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all he created for his own faults in construction.... And out they slithered, they slithered out of their pews to their shiny black Cockroach sedans...I shouted after them, go on, go home and close your house windows, all your windows and doors, against the truth about God. (II.55-56).

He is totally dissatisfied with this example of Christianity. Since the established Church gives him no model of Christian living or values, he must discover his own. But he has been unable to live with the values he chooses, thus the frustration and tormenting of himself.

Williams does not leave the drama in this abyss of spiritual anarchy. Hannah fulfills the expectations of a Christ figure. She is the one who brings hope to the situation. She senses Shannon's deep awareness of the spirit within himself, and she believes he will one day return to

his parish in Pleasant Valley, Virginia (here is another of Williams' juxtapositions which accent the two polar opposites). She assures him that he will "Lead them [his parishoners] beside still waters because you [Shannon] know how badly they need the still waters" (II.57).

Shannon and Hannah act as prophets because they have sensed an element of God which is foreign to the others. Because of their deeper sense of the spirit and flesh among them, they offer this deeper vision, a prophecy which few are willing to receive or accept. The deeper vision was not gained in a vacuum. Rather, they are steeped in the experiences of life. At one point, Shannon even calls Hannah a "fantastic cool hustler" (II.58). Yet she is a saintly image to Shannon too. Again, Williams presents polarities in such a way that they lose their opposition to one another and become intermingled. This mixing of what is usually considered opposites reflects his bringing together the spirit and the flesh.

In the subsequent scenes the Mexicana boys appear with the iguana they have recently caught and it becomes the symbol for this struggle with the human condition. Hannah's struggles are primarily financial and concern Nonno as well. Yet she is able to assist Shannon, even in her own desperation. She offers this insight: "I know people torture each other, you know, and then, if they're decent, they do want to help each other all that they can" (II.76). The need for decency

is the need for compassion and love in the human situation. She fulfills this need as she acts Christ-like in her concern for him. The act closes with Shannon's declaration of God whom he sees in the upcoming storm: "yes, I see him, I hear him, I know him. And if he doesn't know that I know him, let him strike me dead with a bolt of his lightning" (II.78). His vision of God is not restricted to the power and majesty in the storm, but it is one of the few signs of His presence which has not been tainted by smug and narrow-minded Christians.

Maxine, in the third act, suggests a concrete solution to the conflict between the ideal and the real, the spirit and the flesh. It is a reasonable one which reflects a definite sense of a higher plane of existence, perhaps even God. But she is quite aware of the human factors: "I know the difference between loving someone and just sleeping with someone--even I know about that. We've both reached a point where we've got to settle for something that works for us in our lives--even if it isn't on the highest kind of level" (III.81). At this point, Shannon is still unable to accept her balance, or any balance it seems, between the spirit and flesh. Maxine explains why he is unable to integrate the two without guilt; his puritan upbringing:

You practiced the little boy's vice, you amused yourself with yourself. And once she[your mother] caught you at it and whaled your backside with the back side of a hair brush because she said she had to punish you for it because it made God mad as

much as it did Mama, and she had to punish you for it so God wouldn't punish you for it harder than she would....you said you loved God and Mama and so you quit it to please them, but it was your secret pleasure and you harbored a secret resentment against Mama and God for making you give it up. And so you got back at God by preaching atheistical sermons and you got back at Mama by starting to lay young girls. (III.81)

this epitome of the puritanical misconception (held by his mother) of God as a hard and cold judge promotes legalism in Christianity rather than a belief in a God who touches men's hearts.

Shannon fills the Jesus role as he is tied in the hammock due to his neurosis and attempted suicide. The Germans act as the Romans who persecute him while Hannah provides the narrative for his self-indulgent performance: "Stop it! Stop being childishly cruel! I can't stand for a person that I respect to talk and behave like a small, cruel boy, Mr. Shannon" (III.98). Shannon has been too bruised by the world and centered on his own difficulties to act the part. Hannah challenges him to act without self-pity as Jesus did.

She continues his character sketch and suggests a second solution. His problem is "the oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone--almost anyone--almost anything...something....I've discovered something to believe in....A little understanding exchanged between them [people], a wanting to help each other through nights like this" (III.104). He believes very strongly in God and man's worth but he becomes confused because of the distorted input

by people such as the Germans and the teachers, and by his own inability or unwillingness to analyze his own faults.

Hannah gives Shannon another key to overcome his difficulty. Due to her insight into Shannon's spook, or what she terms her own "blue devil", she knows "Endurance is something that spooks and blue devils respect. And they respect all the tricks that panicky people use to outlast and outwit their panic" (III.105). This kind of wisdom of vision is a result of her experience with the spirit and the flesh within herself, which she has just admitted. She goes on to include chastity and the looking out of oneself as possibilities for self-therapy, the therapy which helps one to endure in difficult times. She summarizes the entire meaning of the play in a very powerful statement: "Nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind, violent" (III.115-116). She has reiterated the unity and innate goodness of the flesh and the spirit since they are both human elements.

She continues to tell Shannon what real joy can be and it provides for the appreciation of humankind: "We all wind up with something or with someone, and if it's someone instead of just something, we're lucky, perhaps...unusually lucky" (III.117). Contrary to what the materialistic Germans, and even the teachers to a point, hold, people are more important than things or the law.

The dialogue between those of the various "schools" of the flesh and the spirit is now complete. The play is

concluded with the symbolic action of freeing the iguana. Ironically, it is Shannon who frees it though it is the prompting assistance of Hannah which is the determining force for the freeing of the iguana and not Shannon. Maxine and Shannon who "[chuckles happily]" (III.126) at the prospect of remaining at the hotel to care for the "needs" of the clients. Hannah listens to Nonno's words and then witnesses his death. His poem completes Williams' fable: the point of the poem is that nature is not afraid of aging and even of dying, and that man should learn this "fearlessness" from nature:

How calmly does the orange branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair.

Sometime while night obscures the tree  
The zenith of its life will be  
Gone past forever, and from thence  
A second history will commence.

A chronicle no longer gold,  
A bargaining with mist and mould,  
And finally the broken stem  
The plummeting to earth: and then

An intercourse not well designed  
For beings of a golden kind  
Whose native green must arch above  
The earth's obscene, corrupting love.

And still the ripe fruit and the branch  
Observe the sky begin to blanch  
Without a cry, without a prayer,  
With no betrayal of despair.

O courage, could you act as well  
Select a second place to dwell,  
Not only in that golden tree  
But in the frightened heart of me?  
(III.123-124)



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a more complete assessment of Williams interest in the sacred and the profane see Harold Clurman, "Theatre", The Nation, January 1962, p. 86; Tom Driver, "Drama: Self-Transcending Realism", The Christian Century, February 1962, p. 169; Signi Lenea Falk, Tennessee Williams (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1961), p. 8; Jim Gaines, "A Talk About Life and Style with Tennessee Williams", Saturday Review, April 29 1972, p. 25; John McCarter, "The Theatre: Lonely, Loquacious, and Doomed", The New Yorker, January 1962, p. 61; Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1975), pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> The following text is cited throughout this paper: Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (U.S.A.: Two River Enterprises, Inc., 1961), p. 8.

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