

The Relationship of Tennessee Williams' Autobiographical Artist and Fragile Female character and its Presence on his Life and Works

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Introduction

The two most influential forces in the life of Tennessee Williams were his writing and his sister Rose. By no accident, many of his male characters are artists, and many of his female characters, like Rose, suffer from some condition that makes them alienated from the world and emotionally unprepared to deal with its hardship. This study is an examination of the relationship between William's male artist and fragile female characters in each of the plays in which the two figures are found. It reveals that through these two characters and the progress of their relationship, Williams expressed the inner emotional turmoil of his own life. By the end of his work, Williams created an unsustainable bond between his writer and fragile female, allowing them to live, flourish, and care for one another in a way that he and Rose never could.

The Writer and his Rose: Real Life Reflected in Fictional Work:

Williams' relationship with Rose was the closest in his life. He and his sister shared a traumatic childhood, having grown up with an abusive, alcoholic father and a compliant, depressed mother, but they found solace in each other. Rose was a schizophrenic who underwent a bilateral frontal lobotomy in 1943 to treat her condition. After the operation, Williams watched his sister fall into inescapable madness. He never forgave himself for what happened to her, and it was his greatest fear that he too would be overtaken by what he referred to as the "little blue devils" that had taken his sister away from him. Though he remained close to her until his death in 1983 regarding her as "the living presence of truth and faith in his life"¹, Williams could never share reality with her after the lobotomy, for Rose was forever trapped in an emotionless and incomplete world. Tennessee Williams found it imperative to constantly improve his writing craft. He said once in an interview that he "couldn't face a day without writing. The day would seem so completely empty to me that by the time the evening came I would feel like shooting myself"². He was a perfectionist, continually

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reworking and rewriting plays. He believed that there was nothing he could do but write. His life was not an easy one, but in his work Williams found salvation. In one of his last diary entries before his death, Williams wrote that:

In my life, extra – familial, what has happiness been but little fractions of experience, encompassing not much time. But yes, there was work, and if I ran before death to perform it, this saying of truth as I felt it, then – whatever it comes to when completed – whatever was discarded on the way – friendship or love sanity or that which is so regarded, I may deeply regret but would not wish to choose otherwise.³

Therefore, it is impossible to deny that Williams' fictional work is heavily burdened with reminders of his own life. Williams admitted that this was true. However, he stated many times that actual situations and characters in his plays were not taken from his life, but rather the "dynamics of the characters, the tensions," corresponded with what was going on with him at the time.⁴ His work, he said, was "emotionally autobiographical," dealing with the rich emotional currents of his dynamic and tragic personal story⁵. These two great forces, Rose and his writing, are subsequently two of the major themes in Tennessee Williams' fictional work. Many critics have recognized the personal traits of Williams' sister Rose in Williams' female protagonists. Laura in The Glass Menagerie (1943), Catherine in Suddenly Last Summer (1958), and Clare in The TwoCharacter Play (1973) are a few. Each of these women, like Williams' sister, suffers from some condition that makes her alienated from the world and frightened of life.

Also significant in Williams' works are his "writer – figures" those male characters that Williams himself categorized as autobiographical: Tom in The Glass Menagerie, Felice in The TwoCharacter Play, and August in Something Cloudy, Something Clear (1981) are a few. Each of these men, like Williams himself, struggles with dissatisfaction in life and work, and is in search of escape.

In many of Tennessee's works there is interaction between these two recurring characters: the fragile female and the writer. In The Long GoodBye, there are Joe and Myra, in The Glass Menagerie Tom and Laura, in Suddenly Last Summer Catherine and Sebastian, in The TwoCharacter Play Felice and Claire. In these works, a writer – figure is involved in a complicated relationship with a fragile female. More obvious traits of their relationship include: the writer being older than the female, the writer feeling a brotherly protectiveness over the female, the writer drawing inspiration from the female, the writer seeing

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something of himself in the female, and the female having a lasting and profound impact on the writer.

Based on this ground Williams believed that it is the responsibility of the writer to put his experiences as a being into work that refines it and elevates it and that makes of it an essence that a wide audience can somehow manage to feel in themselves. In all human experience, there are parallels which permit common understanding in the telling and hearing, and it is the frightening responsibility of an artist to make what is directly or allusively close to his own being communicable and understandable, however disturbingly, to the hearts and minds of all whom he addresses.⁶

Clearly, there were experiences in Williams' life that he felt necessary to make communicable to the hearts and minds of his audiences. The greatest of these forces were, evidently, his feelings about his sister Rose and his personal struggle as an artist. Still, Williams warns his readers against a superficial understanding of the persons in his life or art. "You don't know Miss Rose" he writes, "and you never will unless you come to know her through this 'thing' for Laura of The Glass Menagerie was like Miss Rose only in her inescapable difference"⁷. This 'inescapable difference' could be used to describe Rose's condition, but also the dissimilarities that separate Williams' protagonists from other characters, and the disparity from others that Williams himself felt throughout his life.

In their younger years, Tom (who would later be dubbed "Tennessee") and Rose Williams were as close as a brother and sister could be. Though Rose was two years older than him, Tennessee recalled that his "little sister" was an ideal playmate. "My sister was very charming," he said in an interview with Jean Evans in 1945, "very beautiful. She had an incredible imagination. We were so close to each other, we had no needs of others"⁸. Tennessee's mother recalls their "wild intimacy of childhood" as being a relationship so close that when one would fall ill, so would the other.⁹ However, their mother remembers that as Rose grew up, the relationship between sister and brother changed. Rose was very social and outgoing, showing "plenty of temper and temperament," while Tom was usually "quiet and calm"⁹. As Rose grew into society, Tom stood by observing. Rose began to develop small hysterias, and was often terrified that someone was trying to kill her. She was sent to many doctors to try to find the cause of her condition, and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. In March 1937, she was institutionalized in a mental ward in Missouri, and would remain there for the rest of her life. On the day that she was taken to the sanitarium, Williams remarked that, "I belong in one myself"¹⁰.

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At that time, Tom Williams was developing into a talented young writer. In 1937, two of his earliest plays, The Fugitive Kind and Candles to the Sun, were produced in St. Louis. In 1938, Tom graduated from the University of Iowa with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and in 1939, he moved to New Orleans. It was there that Tom adopted the name "Tennessee" and wrote some of his most important works, including The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire. Tom loved writing and found in it an escape from the hardships of his life. He and his father were on bad terms. His father had forced him to leave the University of Missouri a few years earlier and when he was actually present in their St. Louis home, he was a constant cause of violence and disturbance. Tom exchanged letters with his mother almost always inquiring about Rose's current condition. He was aware of her institutionalization and diagnosis, and often wrote in his diary that he wished he could help his dear sister.

The plays The Long GoodBye and The Glass Menagerie represent a time in Williams' life in which he felt torn between a responsibility to care for his sick sister and move on with his own life and work. They express a need for escape from his stagnant life in St. Louis, they cry of his guilt in being away from his sister, and they establish his creative force as something that is dually creative and destructive, a comfort to his sister's memory and a betrayal of her current condition. In 1940 Williams composed The Long GoodBye. This one – act takes place in an unspecified city in the American mid – west. It centers on Joe, a young writer, who is moving out of his childhood home. His mother has recently died, leaving him 150\$. The Long GoodBye is a memory play, literally a "long good – bye" written in a series of scenes that occur between the time that Joe's mother became very ill, and present day. As Joe's memory unfolds, it is revealed that his mother actually committed suicide so that her children could have her insurance money. Joe's sister, Myra, is a former swimming champion and a lover of boys. She dates many of them, creating a reputation for herself of which Joe is ashamed. By the end of the play, Myra has become estranged from Joe, and Joe is left alone in the house with only the movers going in and out as they strip away everything that makes up the memories of the young writer. Joe, though ready to leave this place once and for all, finds it very difficult to say his last good – bye.

Joe is not a positive portrait of a writer character. He is a destructive force as much as he is a creative one: selfish, and incapable of helping the people that he loves. This is partially due to his being a writer. His sister Myra goes out with boys to enjoy herself all the time, but Joe only sits at home on his fruitless typewriter. He does not take progressive action in any form, even when his mother warns him that she is going to kill herself. He does not protect Myra from aggressive men, but rather rubs her created reputation of being a whore in

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her face. He even forgets to feed the goldfish, and it dies too. He is incapable of living in the real world as a participatory being, and spends all of his time either with his typewriter or with his best friend Silva, making up fake stories of a meaningless existence with both. The only action that Joe takes is to conjure the memories of his home. He feels a desperate need to escape the house. "No I'm not gonna stay here," he says to his friend Silva, "all of this is dead for me"¹¹. But he has to have some parting ritual before he leaves, a sort of last creation. "Every stick a furniture out – before me!"¹². Joe must unravel the memories of this house in order to say good – bye to it. It is because he is a writer, weaving these tales as they happened to him, he can conjure the things that happened to him and finally say good – bye. It is only because he is a writer he can find the freedom that he so longs for.

Myra is Joe's opposite in everything. She is Joe's older sister, though Joe and his mother both remark that she is still a baby and seems younger than Joe. She is frank and sociable, always ready to enjoy herself. She has extensive sexual experience, while Joe is a virgin. Events of the house are kept hidden from her, and she is kept ignorant of her mother's suicide, while Joe is aware of everything that happens. Myra finds worth in material possessions; in fact, according to Joe, she dropped out of high school so that she could have more clothes and cash. Joe only finds worth in sentimental and immaterial things: the smell of his mother's perfume and the sanctity and wholeness of the objects in the house. Myra has similar desires to Joe, but attempts to achieve her desire with dissimilar ways. Whereas he wants to conjure these memories so that he can find freedom, she wants him to stop writing all the time so that he can enjoy life. She finds joy in dating a lot of men, and it is because of this that Joe says he cannot protect her. She wants escape from hardship just like Joe, but she tries to find it in men, not in creative work. It is believed that this doesn't work out well for her, as Joe has no idea where she is by the end of the play.

The relationship between Joe and Myra is one of the most unstable relationships between a writer and a fragile female due to their contrasting personalities and tactics. They are incapable of understanding each other, for they operate on completely different directions. In their final confrontation, Joe accuses Myra of being a whore, yelling:

I used to have hopes for you, Myra. But not anymore. You're going' down the toboggan like a greased pig. Take a long look at yourself in the mirror. Why did Silva look at you that way? Why did the newsboy whistle when you walked past him at night? why? cause you looked like a whore – like a cheap one, Myra, one he could get for six!¹³

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She launches back at him, accusing him of loafing around all day and "writing crap that nobody reads. You never do nothing, nothing, you don't make a cent!"¹⁴. Joe bases his judgments of Myra and of other people on appearances and character. This makes sense, as he is a writer who examines these qualities and creates them into character. Myra bases her judgment on work and money. This is interesting, as Joe is the artist but never seems to care about what his work yields him the way Myra does. Again, it is obvious that Joe is motionless, incapable of taking action towards getting what he needs. Myra is an action taker, searching constantly for happiness, while Joe waits by, observing life but not actually living it. Joe has a lot of trouble parting with his past, as if he, like Tom of The Glass Menagerie, and like Williams himself, is pursued by something, haunted by the memories of what he left behind. As Joe prepares to leave the house, he talks with his friend Silva who worries that Joe may be contemplating suicide:

Because your state of mind is abnormal. I've been lookin' at you. You've staring' off into space like something's come loose in your head. I know what you're doing. You're taking a morbid pleasure in watchin' this junk hauled off like some dopes get in mooning around a bone orchard after somebody's laid under. This place is done for, Joe. You can't help it. Write about it someday. Call it "An Elegy for an Empty Flat." But right now my advice is to get out of here and get drunk! Cause the world goes on. And you've got to keep going on with it.¹⁵

Joe replies that Silva is just too free a spirit, too unattached. "You're kidding yourself," he says, "You're saying good – bye all the time, every minute you live. Because that's what life is, just a long, long good – bye!"¹⁶. To Joe, life is not a "long good – bye," and though he spends the entire play trying to part with his memories, in the end, he cannot. Rather than a parting, life to Joe seems to be defined by his creative activity – his remembering. He leaves the house reluctantly but the overwhelming sense is that he doesn't wish to. For Tennessee Williams, The Long GoodBye was a chance to deal with his guilt in leaving his sister. In an essay entitled "The Escape that Failed: Tennessee and Rose Williams," Michael Paller suggests that The Long GoodBye was an attempt for Williams to "escape the memory of his damaged sister"¹⁷. In it, Paller believes that roles of the sister and brother are reversed, so that Myra is more reminiscent of Tennessee and Joe of Myra. However, one is inclined to disagree with this opinion for the following reasons: Myra is more like Rose before the lobotomy than any other fragile female: friendly and sociable, unstable but loving. Joe

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resembles the artist character clearly and this personality is accurately defined by George Niesen in his essay "The Artist against Reality in the Plays of Tennessee Williams". He labels the artist figure in Williams' plays as the following:

He is sensitive to time, to his own feelings, and to others and their feelings. He is generally so sensitive, in fact, that he cannot function well in the real world. He creates, of course. The artist attempts to give some kind of meaning to life and death. He reaches for the unobtainable and often fashions as idealistic fiction to replace a frustrating reality. Finally, and surprisingly, the artist is invariably associated With destruction, either his own or that of someone close to him.¹⁸

This definition is extremely befitting to Joe. Williams does not create Joe to escape the memory of Rose, but rather he puts Joe in such a situation so as to parallel his own feelings of betrayal in leaving Rose behind. Rose was in her most unstable state between the time that Williams' left for New Orleans in 1939 and the time of her operation several years later. In a diary entry dated 10 July 1939 he exclaims:

Rose, my dear little sister – I think of you, and wish, oh, so much that I could help! – Be brave, dear little girl – God must remember and have pity someday on one who loved as much as her little heart could hold & more! Why should you be there, little Rose? And me, here? – No reason – no reason – anywhere why? – why? God bless you tonight – my dear....¹⁹

Clearly, Williams wanted desperately to save his sister, but was completely hopeless in preventing her decline. Joe's world in The Long GoodBye is crumbling down around him, and he does nothing but sit and watch it happen. He is incompetent to help his struggling sister, and she is, in the end, lost to him. Joe's bless in that he is the creator of the story that surrounds him, and it is within his art that he can conjure up his most powerful memories of Myra in order to preserve them. The Long GoodBye, then, is not Williams' farewell to his sister, but his acknowledgment of guilt in not protecting her. In confessing the truth of his sister's tragedy through metaphor, Williams helped his sister in the only way he could, by making her eternal.

On January 17, 1943 a bilateral prefrontal lobotomy was performed on Rose Williams. Three months later, Williams and his mother found out that the operation had caused their beloved Rose to be lost to them forever. This was a

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time of great change for Williams, as he was caught between two worlds: that of ignorance and truth about his sister's condition, and that of success and utter failure as a writer. This world of two opposites and the change in Williams' life is felt in The Glass Menagerie, written in the fall of 1943 and performed in December 1944. The familiar story of The Glass Menagerie is similar to that of The Long GoodBye. In it, Tom, the narrator, presents a glimpse of his life as it was in 1937 in a small St. Louis apartment he shares with his sister, Laura and mother, Amanda. Cripple shy Laura is an outsider from society, living in an imaginary world of glass animals. Amanda, his arrogant mother, desires respectable, successful lives for her children and will do anything to see that they find happiness. In The Glass Menagerie one can see similar character creations to that of The Long GoodBye, with Tom and Laura representing two sides of a binary opposite, traveling in different directions. But in The Glass Menagerie, Williams goes much further, and his creation of a story about writer brother and sister leaves a much more carved image in our minds than was given three years earlier. This binary results in a wholeness in the play – the representation of a full variety of feelings.

In a binary of body and mind, Laura represents physical incompleteness, while Tom represents psychological incompleteness. Rose has a bad foot that prevents her from walking well. Like her little glass unicorn, her physical ailment prevents her from operating in society, and makes her very shy. This makes her a sort of physically half – person, never completely existing in reality or in her fantasy unicorn world because of her physical incompleteness. Tom doesn't have a physical deformity, but is psychologically fragmented. His frustration in the play is derived from his lack of things: not having anything in his life to call his own and desiring to move forward. He longs for something non physical – freedom – and is caught up in his hunger for it that he has as much trouble living in reality as Laura does. He forgets to pay the light bulb, and has horrible social skills. Tom is also divided between two psychological roles due to his status as a writer: he is both the narrator and playwright, and the actor inside the illusion that he creates²⁰. Thus, Tom's psychological incompleteness represents the opposite side of the binary containing Laura's one working leg – brother and sister's fragmented, dissimilar selves, together form a two – fold whole.

Laura and Tom represent two contrasting halves of the creative self: the preserver and the destroyer. Many critics have noted that Laura is just as much a creative power as is her brother, and perhaps even more so. Laura creates an imaginary world of characters out of her glass menagerie of animals; and even creates sort of plays between them²¹. She is the preserver of life for these little animals and for the imaginary world in which she lives. This is why Jim's

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shattering of her glass unicorn's horn is such a shock for her. Laura does everything in her power to care for her little imaginary creations. Tom, on the other hand, couldn't care less about conserving illusion. In fact, though Tom forms the stories within the play, illusion is exactly the thing that he is trying to break. He supposedly sits at his typewriter at all hours working and gets in scolded for writing poems on the lids of shoeboxes in the factory where he works, but we never see the work that he writes. He, like Joe in The Long GoodBye, is a source of destruction more than he is a force of creation. He and Joe both, as George Niesen notes, "must escape the reality" of their existence²², and do so by abandoning their sister. Niesen goes on to say that:

Joe and Tom, in their attempt to become artists and to fulfill themselves, must break away from their environments and families. Like the phoenix, they must create from the ashes of the past they have destroyed.... Tom cannot abandon Laura without destroying her.... for they are kindred spirits.²³

Tom must extinguish Laura so that he can become a creative force. His move from one side of this binary opposite to the other signifies an artistic death for Laura. She can no longer live in her magical world, occupying her half of the binary, if Tom is going to be able to produce work. It is because she is a preserver, a positive force, that her image haunts Tom after he leaves her. It is her magic that pursues him. The only way for Tom to forget is to preserve her in a memory.

The ending fates of Tom and Laura then make up a third binary opposite in The Glass Menagerie. Throughout the play, Tom refers to the stagnant nature of his life in St. Louis. He longs for movement so that he can continue his creative work. In St. Louis, Tom expands all of his energy in non – productive ways, going to the movies almost every night and arguing with his mother constantly. Tom longs for motion and hope. This desire for flight from family and self is common in Williams' writer character. In the end of The Glass Menagerie, Tom comes out of a dark room, leaving the stagnant home of his mother and sister to go and write. As he exits on the fire escape, he recites his ending monologue. In this monologue, the small flickering light of the candles that the gentleman caller brought symbolize Laura's fading illusion that she might have a chance with Jim. The candles – Laura's hope – must be extinguished so as Tom would forget Laura. He pleads, "I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger – anything that can blow your candles out!.... Blow out your candles, Laura – and so goodbye...."²⁴ In the end, though Tom has tried everything to blow the candles out, it is only

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Laura who can. In order for Tom to find freedom, Laura must make herself eternally captive, and she does. The fates of Tom and Laura cannot parallel, and brother and sister will never truly be together again, just like Tennessee and Rose.

In November of 1943, one month before The Glass Menagerie opened to reviews in Chicago, Williams wrote the following of his new play:

It has some interesting new techniques and all in all I can not displeased with the out – come that, when I consider the terrible, compulsive struggle it was to do the thing and what a frightful, sentimental mess it might well have been, and was at some stages. It needs a good deal of pruning, condensing, possible some rearranging even in this version...

I think it contains my sister, and that was the object.²⁵

Later he would say several times that Menagerie did not contain Rose, or that Laura was only an abstraction. But the significant thing about this passage is the obsessive nature with which Williams wrote, and the need he felt to express the emotional struggle within him. Nowhere else in his diaries, until The TwoCharacter Play, did Williams feel the need to exclaim such an outcry from his heart. He could not find any other means of expressing things that seemed to demand expression about one of the most significant inner trials in his life – the loss of his sister Rose.

The biographical connotations of Menagerie have been well established by Williams' critics and biographers. Williams himself said that Laura is "a sort of abstraction" of Rose, though many critics note that she is actually more like Tennessee himself in her incredible shyness and desire to live in a world of magic.²⁶ Specific events in the play are clearly autobiographical of Williams' own life, such as Tom's employment at the International Shoe Company, his getting fired for writing poems, the family's expensive light bill as a result of Tom's late – night writing, and his father's missing presence in the house. Laura is two years older than Tom, just as Rose is to Williams and Myra is to Joe. But it is the emotional autobiography, that "inescapable difference" of Laura's, and the characters themselves are more significant. They do not confine the intentions of Williams, or the emotional breadth of his work, like a pure biographical analysis would do. In the end, Williams didn't care much for Menagerie believing it to be too simple, and even boring. Williams said that in Menagerie, "I said all the nice things I have to say about people. The future things will be harsher"²⁷. And they were.

Suddenly Last Summer (1958) is the only play that includes an actual lobotomy, or at least the threat of one. In it the writer figure is not actually

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present. Sebastian Venable, cousin of the protagonist Catherine, died last summer in what his cousin describes as a freak accident. Significantly, here one can find two examples of the fragile female, not just one, in the characters of Catherine and also in Violet Venable, Sebastian's mother. In this play there is no manipulation of sequential events and memory like in The Long GoodBye and The Glass Menagerie. The events take place in the course of a single day, though the past is often referenced. The atmospheric jungle of Suddenly Last Summer is symbolic of an actual sanitarium, and its true story is elaborate, but its message of the connection of fear to truth and the nature of platonic love shines through. In Suddenly, Williams again puts his writer and fragile female as parallels that share an uncanny amount of traits but meet different fates.

Sebastian and Catherine are situated on two sides of a binary mirror. The characters occupying this mirror, however, mimic each other to an even greater degree, and share a close relationship that is not present in the earlier plays. Catherine is a creator as much as her deceased cousin Sebastian was regardless of whether her story is truth or fiction; she weaves it with the poetic mastery of a writer. Both cousins are destructive forces as well: Catherine is violent in the asylum, and destroys Mrs. Venable's illusions of magnificence (Mrs. Venable calls Catherine "the destroyer" repeatedly) with her revelations of Sebastian's homosexuality and his instigation of his own horrific death. Sebastian sees terror alongside every existence of beauty in his world. He uses Catherine and his mother as objects to secure men, and even the plants in his greenhouse look like dead bodies. He destroys his own life by refusing to correct any wrong in it. Near the end of her story, Catherine remembers:

He! – accepted! – all! – as – how! – things! – are! – And
thought nobody has any right to complain or interfere in any
way whatsoever, even though he knew that what was awful
was awful, that what was wrong was wrong and my cousin
Sebastian was certainly never sure that anything was wrong!
– He thought it unfitting to ever take any action
about anything whatsoever!²⁸

But Catherine is just as unable to change a situation as her cousin is, in fact she says that her plea to Sebastian, begging him to run from the cannibalistic children at the beach, was the only time she ever contested him on anything. The truth serum that "Doctor Sugar" puts in her veins forces her to reveal the story of Sebastian's death, but without it she never would have admitted what happened, even though doing so is the only way to prevent her brain from being cut apart. Sebastian and Catherine are both physically incomplete, as he had a heart condition that made his heart only partially

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working, and she does not have complete use of her brain due to over – medication. Sebastian, in life, is constantly searching for divine salvation, and Catherine for love. In the end, neither finds what he and she is looking for. When Sebastian was alive they used each other because doing so allowed each of them to feel some sense of completeness.

Violet Venable also serves as a fragile female similar to the other muses. She does not see herself as Sebastian's mother, but rather, wishes to serve as his muse. She is jealous of the men whose attentions Sebastian wishes to gain. She refuses to secure men for Sebastian to sleep with, instead trying to believe that he was not gay. Significantly, she noted that Sebastian always took nine months to write a single poem, thus, Mrs. Venable actually saw herself as Sebastian's love, helping him to create his art. Until he spends the summer with Catherine (the only summer he could not write a poem because his mother wasn't there) Violet is Sebastian's muse.

Sebastian, like the artists of the early plays, is freed because he is a writer. This time his freedom only occurs through death. He sacrifices his closest companion, Catherine, to madness as a result of having prompted his own freedom (death). Unlike the earlier plays, here the writer is not the only one to blame for the female's descent into insanity. Catherine was completely clear and lucid before witnessing the horrific murder of her cousin. Had she chosen not to be used by Sebastian and use him in return, she would not be in the sanitarium. Catherine, like Rose, will be confined to an asylum for the rest of her life, though she probably will not be given a lobotomy. His mother has also descended into another kind of insanity as a result of his self – sacrifice. After Sebastian's death she suffers from paranoia and absolute refusal of the truth similar to that of Williams' own mother. She attempts to create something out of the wreckage, remembering Sebastian as a much more holy figure than he was, and casting the blame on poor Catherine. Her agreement to a lobotomy without any hesitation is reminiscent of Tennessee's mother orders to have Rose's brain surgery.

In Suddenly Last Summer we see parallels to Williams' growing fear of confinement and his growing guilt over what had happened to his sister. Throughout his life, Williams suffered from hysteria, paranoia, and nervousness. It was his greatest fear that he would end up like Rose, completely overtaken by the "blue devils" as he called them, and confined to a place where he could not create. Soon after Rose's lobotomy, in July of 1943, he wrote a letter to Donald Windham expressing fear of his unstable mental condition:

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I have plunged into one of my periodic neuroses, I call them "blue devils," and it is like having wild – cats under my skin. They are a Williams family trait, I suppose. Destroyed my sister's mind and made my father a raging drunkard. In me they take the form of interior storms that show remarkably little from the outside but which create a deep chasm between myself and all other people, even deeper than the relatively ordinary ones of homosexuality and being an artist.²⁹

But it was also his actual connection to Rose that he believed created this chasm between himself and other people:

My sister and I had a close relationship, quite unsullied by any carnal knowledge. As a matter of fact, we were rather shy of each other physically, there was no casual physical intimacy...And yet our love was, and is, the deepest in our lives and was, perhaps, very pertinent to our withdrawal from extra familial attachments.³⁰

Tennessee never explains specifically what it is that makes him and Rose draw away from other people and from life, but in his personal writings, he does write continuously about his strange fears and hysterias, "the little blue devils." These surfaced most in the sixties, until his younger brother, Dakin Williams, forced him into a mental institution. Williams was a sensitive man, and in the incarnations of his writer characters, especially the later ones, the writer increasingly became so sensitive that he cannot function well in the real world. In Suddenly, Sebastian cannot create and sacrifice himself to the cannibal children, refusing to relinquish his stubborn, passive identity. The writer's work, in this play, becomes so intertwined with his life that the two cannot be separated. Sebastian's idealistic identity is defined by his work, as Mrs. Venable says, "his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and – vise versa, the life of a poet is the work of a poet, I mean you can't separate them."³¹ This suggests that as a writer develops his craft; his relation to the real world – his sanity – diminishes. The play also suggests that in order to create, the writer must sacrifice a great deal; he must give up his way of living, and his very life. Surely for Williams in these years, this was true.

The women of Suddenly are much more powerful than Myra and Laura. As their male counterparts become weaker and less prominent in the plays, they themselves take the stage. Catherine stands by her confession of what truly happened to her dead cousin, even when everyone else doubts its validity. Her

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voice almost echoes Williams himself when she pleads, "But mother, I didn't invent it. I know it's hideous story but it's a true story of our time and the world we live in and what did truly happen to Cousin Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo"³². Catherine gives Sebastian's life and death meaning with her story, and she believes that she could have saved Sebastian had he only held onto her hand. She has the gifts of preservation and inspiration. Perhaps this increase in strength of the fragile female occurred because of Rose's de – habilitation; though Williams' sister was forced into incompetency in real life, in his plays, he could let her fight. Rose's condition also may have given her a strength that she had not possessed before, for in her state no one could hurt her feelings or scare her as they had before. In an interview in 1965 Williams spoke publicly of her condition:

My sister, as everyone knows by this time, is a mental invalid, afflicted with schizophrenia. I can say she would never hear it. But her spirit is much stronger than my spirit. Nobody who tried to put her down could possibly put her down.³³

Williams was emotionally vulnerable for his entire life, but Rose was not because the operation made her unable to feel. Perhaps for this he was somewhat envious of her, for his creative spirit would cause him to face an incredible amount of harsh personal and artistic criticism in the years after Suddenly Last Summer was published. Much like the writer figure in his plays, he would be forced into a harsher and harsher reality because of his writing, but his sister would continue living in her magical world.

Regardless of the parallels, undeniably the traits of the writer and the female protagonist in this play are intertwined, forming stronger, braver women and more vulnerable, less destructive male writers. The writer and fragile female characters, in this play, become players in give and take relationship, in which, as Michael Paller says, there is a private conflict between two polar opposites: "It's the only thing in my life that I want to remember!" versus "It's not my fault!"³⁴. Perhaps, Williams does this to suggest that the feelings surrounding these two types of guilt are the same, for in his play the male comforter is always also the betrayer, the female preserver of truth is also the resistance to it, and the relationship between the two is as horrifying as it is profound. By creating the images of Catherine and Sebastian, Williams allows for different images of the two personalities to be seen alongside one another. Violet serves a purpose on a higher level bringing a mother – son relationship into the mix and creating a second source of muse that is as destructive where Catherine is creative and comforting. Rose and Tennessee are all of these things: the

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comforter and the betrayed, the creator and the destroyer, the physically and the psychologically incomplete, the free and the captive. He and his sister, and these two recurring characters, represent aspects of all people. As Michael Paller states, having several images of Rose and several of Tom existing side by side, some of them positive and some of them not, could only have been possible with the presence of all the varying images alongside one another.³⁵ In this play, Rose and Tom are not limited to one place or time, but are everywhere and everything, mirroring each other so that each could share aspects of the other in a way that they no longer did in real life. Williams allowed the fragile female to fight in a way that she could not in real life by giving her the writer's courage and emotional range, and by giving the writer power over his family and vulnerability, Williams could protect his Rose and express his fears in a way that he could not in real life. Tragically, in this play neither can the male and female share the same psychological space and so truly be together in the end, for Rose's story was cut out of her brain, and Tennessee could not face the remains of mad Rose that he saw when he looked at himself in the mirror. It is as if, in this play, both of these fictional recurring characters looked in the mirror and saw a stranger standing in his/her place, became frightened and retreated on different paths. The two personas have not yet come to understand each other. However, as Williams' work progresses, they will learn to know each other as fully as they know themselves.

The TwoCharacter Play exists in three published drafts, The TwoCharacter Play, published in 1969, Out cry, published in 1970, and The TwoCharacter Play again, published in 1973. These three plays are for the most part very similar except for small dialogue changes, slight characterization alterations, and their endings. In all three, the only two characters present onstage are Felice and Clare, a brother and sister acting duo who at a young age witnessed their father kill their mother. The siblings suffer from mental problems, and are desperate to complete their self - written / self – performed play, also conveniently entitled TwoCharacter Play. The TwoCharacter Play, which Williams called his "very personal play" and his "best play yet"³⁶ is the story of a life of artistic creation, an expression of a fear of confinement, and an emotional portrait of a relationship between a sister and brother that know each other more than two real humans ever could.

Williams wrote his Memoirs while working on The TwoCharacter Play. Most of his writings about Rose in Memoirs are not sensationalized or sad, but rather, they express wonder, admiration, and profound affection for his sister. He seems fascinated by Rose, this creature whom he knows so well, but who knows him so very little. Of the 1943 lobotomy, Williams says the following:

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I regard that as a tragically mistaken procedure, as I believe that without it Rose could have made a recovery and returned to what is called "normal life," which, despite its many assaults upon the vulnerable nature, is still preferable to an institution existence.³⁷

"Confinement," Williams writes, "has always been the greatest dead of my life that can be seen in my play Out cry"³⁸. "What is it like being a writer?" he asks, supplying us with the answer, "I would say it is like being free.... It means freedom of being. And someone has widely observed, if you can't be yourself, what's the point of being anything at all?"³⁹. In these Memoirs, Williams presents the reader with the notion that to him, writing is life. Writing is existence. Rose is beauty, supplying the color to his writing and to his life. She is the inspiration for stories, the will to keep him moving forward, and the source and recipient of the deepest love in his life⁴⁰. For Tennessee, Rose is a delicate muse and one that, without a doubt, he will do everything in his power to help for the rest of his life.

The TwoCharacter Play / Out Cry deals with the two interlocking forces that enhances this notion: the healing and escapist creative power, and the madness that befalls the non – creator. But, in the three versions of this work, madness and creation interact in a new way, as the two recurring personas share reversible traits and exist as one entity in world of opposing forces⁴¹. R. B. Parker says the work is Williams' expression of his struggle between his "ambiguous, near – incestuous love for his schizophrenic sister Rose; and his compulsive need for theatre as personal escape and therapy"⁴². The TwoCharacter Play and its subsequent versions present the writer and fragile female character as a singular combined power that is both mad and creative, preservative and destructive, male and female. Due to the formation of this singular force, finally, the two recurring characters can communicate with one another deeply, commune in the same psychological and physical space, and move towards a shared ending, rather than being separated. The writer Felice does not struggle between choosing creation or Clare – writing or Rose – but rather, he is able to "out cry" because he finally has formed an unbreakable connection to his muse, who is literally a part of himself.

In The TwoCharacter Play, Felice and Clare share a reversibility of identical traits throughout the course of the play. The two characters have genderless names. Both suffer from an unnamed mental condition and from physical defects; Clare has constant headaches (this could be a metaphor for Rose's "incomplete" mind) and Felice has a heart condition (interestingly Williams had heart palpitation). They have similar appearances – Clare notes that Felice's hair

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has grown almost as long as her own and that he could pass for a woman. They even share the same pair of prescription eye glasses; they literally "see" the same. Williams goes so far in his intertwining of traits between the two, not as a literal suggestion of incest, but as a metaphor for their close understanding of each other. The two characters touch one another with the suggestion of intimacy when talking about their deceased parents. They finish each other's sentences and each always knows what the other is thinking. They cannot be physically separated from one another without causing each other physical and mental pain. A second important notion of this metaphorically sexual intimacy is that it is deviant because the two are brother and sister. Its unusual nature is the source of the absurd language and plot of the play. To the outside world, and even to the reader, there is something wrong in the relationship that Felice and Clare share, and as a result, they are pulled away from society, existing completely alone onstage, within a language that is only understandable to themselves.

That the play exists in two sides of reality blurs the distinctions between theatre and life; stage and home; horror and beauty; confinement and freedom; Tom and Rose. Whereas in the earlier plays there was always a world of harsh reality from which writer and fragile female had to escape, here, both reality and the illusions are created by Felice and Clare, and the only possible existence is a world of magic. Horror and beauty exist alongside each other, and seem present in everything. Sometimes, it is hard to tell what in the play is illusion and what is life, for all reality contains sunflowers and soap bubbles, and all lines of the play are as strange as Felice and Clare's everyday language. When Clare asks Felice if he hates her, he replies "of course I do [hate you], if I love you, and I think that I do...."⁴³. Even love cannot exist without its opposite force, hate. The multitude of binary oppositions in The TwoCharacter Play, which were in the earlier plays present within the writer and fragile female characters, are now transmuted and expanded to fill the world of The TwoCharacter Play. Now, neither Felice nor Clare is entirely bad or entirely good at any moment. In fact, they are at times very cruel to each other as much as they are kind and caring. Also, here, one character does not create a reaction in the other that sparks movement like in the earlier plays, for here they move together in a world where art and life, inspiration and creation, exist as joint forces. Madness is no longer a sacrifice of artistic creation, and artistic creation is no longer a salvation from a harsh cruel world. Work may keep Felice and Clare out of the asylum, but it does not make them sane.

The one large distinction between Felice and Clare that can be concluded is that Felice is the writer, resembling Tennessee, and that Clare is the fragile female resembling Rose. Williams precludes his play with a line from Song of

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Solomon, 4:12, "A garden enclosed is my sister..."⁴⁴ hinting that the play does contain her. If Felice is the artist, then Clare is the subject for his art – his muse. Felice threatens to leave Clare and even makes the attempt but tells the audience: "Impossible without her. No I can't leave her alone. I feel so exposed, so cold"⁴⁵. Shortly after she says: "Oh, what a long long way we've traveled together, too long, now, for separation."⁴⁶ Felice often refers to her beauty, her "face of an angel!"⁴⁷ as if she were his muse.

Though Williams said that Out Cry (the 1971 version) was an inner conflict "transmuted into the predicament of a brother and sister,"⁴⁸ it is undeniable that the predicament of brother and sister contains traces of him and his own muse, Rose. Felice cannot leave Clare the way that Tom left Laura, for here they are too interconnected to break apart. Both Felice and Clare refer to the long road they have traveled together, a road that could indicate the long creative journey of Williams that includes his muse, or could refer to the journey of the writer and fragile female across most of Williams' works. Williams' fragile female character has by this time in his work shared a profound range of experiences with his own image, the writer, within the "garden – enclosed" that is Tennessee's plays. The TwoCharacter Play speaks to this range of experiences, this lifetime of interaction between two fictional characters who are the transmutation of Williams and his sister Rose in an alternate reality.

The TwoCharacter Play (1973) and Out Cry (1971) end differently, but in both endings the writer and fragile female find a way to escape reality hand – in – hand and live in an alternate reality together. In the end of The TwoCharacter Play, Felice and Clare attempt to get lost in the warmth and sunflowers of Felice's "Two Character Play" in order to escape their dark and cold confinement in the theatre. In Out Cry too, the two attempt to go back into the play, reaching such a point of involvement within the play that their "magic" becomes real to them. The acknowledge of a revolver in The TwoCharacter Play determines its ending. Felice and Clare attempt to shoot one another, but each admits, "I can't!" Williams' stage directions conclude The TwoCharacter Play as follows:

Felice raises his eyes to watch the light fade from the face of his sister as it is fading from his: in both their faces is a tender admission of defeat. They reach out their hands lifting toward each other. As they slowly embrace, there is total dark....⁴⁹

If they were to kill each other, they would be admitting that their art could not save them. One would be taking responsibility over the other, and so power and action would not be shared the way it is through most of The TwoCharacter

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Play. They would also be without one another. In this ending, they accept a sort of defeat, in which they can be together. In fact, Out Cry has a more poignant ending. The revolver is not an option. Clare sees it, picks it up, gasps and drops it, and looks to her brother. Out Cry ends as follows:

Felice: Hurry it won't hold!

(She crosses to him and touches his hand.)

Clare: Magic is a habit.

(They look slowly up at the sunflower projections.)

Felice: Magic is the habit of our existence...

(The lights fade, and they accept its fading, as a death, somehow transcended.)⁵⁰

Their magic allows them to go beyond death, hand in hand. In life, their creation of "Two – Character Play" is both their existence and their life's blood. Their joint belief in their illusion and maintenance of it allows them to transcend together into another world where writer and muse will always be together, creating.

The TwoCharacter Play/ Out Cry was as much Tennessee's life work as the play within the play is Felice's. Williams said several times that the play was an expression of what he had gone through in the sixties, transmuted to this situation between a brother and sister.⁵¹ Many personal feelings are included in this play, and as it is shown in Memoirs, Rose was an obsession that consumed his mind. Williams had fully realized at this point that Rose was lost to his forever, but in The TwoCharacter Play, he created a brother and sister, writer and muse, who need each other, who have the capability to love each other, and who together create magic. In Williams' "human outcry" the relationship between writer and fragile female cannot be broken by any person or personal tragedy, for the two characters have formed an unbreakable bind within the playground of Williams' alternate reality, his work.

Conclusion

The two greatest forces in the life of Tennessee Williams were his writing and his sister Rose. Rose Williams received a lobotomy in 1943 and fell into an emotional existence where she would remain for the rest of her life. In creating the writer and fragile female, Williams created a space where he and his sister were able to flourish fictionally in a way that they never could in real life. In his early years as a writer, Williams expressed his emotional turmoil over his sister's condition and his own guilt in leaving her by creating a writer character and a fragile female character within two separate halves of a binary opposition. In the plays, The Long Goodbye (1940) and The Glass Menagerie (1943), the first written before Rose's lobotomy and the second written directly after, Williams creates highly contrasting figures in the writer and sister characters, which meet dissimilar fates. These two personas could not share the same fate, world, or

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quality because their real life counterparts were separated psychologically and physically. Williams' guilt over his sister's condition and operation fueled him to place the autobiographical characters representative of himself and Rose on two sides of a binary opposition.

Suddenly Last Summer (1958) was written after Williams realized the long – term effects of Rose's lobotomy. This play is much darker than the previous two. The female protagonist here is heroic and capable, unlike those of the earlier plays. The writer character and female protagonist still meet different fates. A reversibility of traits grows between the writer and the fragile female as they are situated on two halves of a binary mirror, with one distinct difference: their fates. Sister and brother, writer and fragile female do exist in the same confined world, but whereas the female remains permanently trapped, the writer is given a chance to escape through his creation. In The Two Character Play (1973) and its alternate versions, the traits between the writer and the fragile female are so reversible and their relationship is so physically and psychologically intimate that they literally interpenetrate to form a single character, able to create, live, and free both sister and brother from a cruel and harsh world.

Through his works, Williams succeeded in creating a resting place for his aging artist and long – lost fragile female; a playground for Rose's fictional self and Tennessee's writer identity in which the two would never be alone. As the chronological order of these plays shows, the two characters become more and more similar, and as the lives of Williams and his sister progress in opposite ways, the paths of the writer and the female diverge. Though Williams and Rose could not share a real life together in this world, in Williams' fictional world, they have a relationship as rich and as deep as any in real life. By the end these two characters have evolved into magnificent creations and powerful creators of their own accord, who can, unlike Williams and Rose in real life, create memory and magic together.

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- 11- Tennessee Williams, Theatre of Tennessee Williams, Vol. VI: Wagos Full of Cotton and Other Short Plays (New York :New Directions Publishing, 1992), p.205. Volume VI includes several short plays including The Long Goodbye. The New Directions versions of Williams' plays are considered the definitive editions by scholars.

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