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“Ordered Anarchy”: Writing as Transitional Object in *Moise and the World of Reason*

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In a 1999 article for *The New Yorker*, Michael Korda wrote about the process of editing Tennessee Williams’s second novel, published in 1975. His kindest words about the novel were far from praise: he called the final product “at once lyrical and puzzling, a kind of autobiographical peep show full of brilliant jeux d’esprit, in which the characters talk (and talk, and talk) about the loss of innocence and the rekindling of desire, two of Tennessee’s favorite themes” (65). He goes on to say that it has a “stagy plotline” and its dialogue is full of “unbridled lyricism” (65). Korda gives two representative examples of contemporary criticism: for James Leo Herlily the novel was “like a wild street song heard on the eve of a Doom’s Day that is forever postponed,” and Elia Kazan could only comment that “Tennessee Williams is a great man” (65). Both Williams and Korda were disappointed with the reviews: “What the editors at Simon and Schuster had hoped would be a major literary event turned into a major disaster; readers agreed with critics that the incoherence and lack of sustained tone or theme destroyed the work” (Spoto 310). It seems the author continued to feel misunderstood; he said in an interview that same year, “I’m quite through with the kind of play that established my early and popular reputation. I am doing a different thing, which is altogether my own [. . .] I like breaking out of the conventional forms” (Devlin 284-85). Although Williams was referring to his theatre, he broke with traditional form in his prose also. Korda lamented that the public never caught up.

12 Criticism has notably improved since the novel’s publication, but it has done so conditionally. In one of the rare studies devoted specifically to the novel, Robert Bray, in “Moise and the Man in the Fur Coat,” raises a number of issues seeking to justify the apparent incoherence for which the novel was originally dismissed. He first gives credence to the possibility that *Moise* is a “lightly veiled counterpart to *Memoirs*” (60, quoting Spoto), that “Williams’s personal life might serve as one possible explanation for the disjointed, chaotic stylistics of *Moise* as well” (60). (Bray’s title represents such an interpretation, but he actually argues against the notion that the novel is merely the product of Williams’s disordered mind.) Autobiographical interpretations of Williams’s works are, to understate, not rare, and the criticism of his second novel has most often tended toward that aspect. I reiterate it here only to show that my theory of the novel is not distinct from past criticism; indeed, it is closely related.

13 In a discussion of Williams’s fiction published not long after *Moise*, Ren Draya summarizes Williams’s self-referencing: “more often ‘I’ speaks for Williams himself. The result is a gentle blending of fiction and autobiography” (651). Bray quotes Lyle Leverich’s *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams* to that same effect: “it was seldom that anything he wrote grew directly out of an experience [. . .]. The *impressions* of things past, more than his re-creation of events were what prompted him to write” (66). Regarding *Moise*, Williams’s autobiography takes on a homosexual bent more explicit than in his past work, forming what David Savran calls a “revolution.” Edward A. Sklepovich lays the groundwork for such an examination in his study, “The Image of the Homosexual in Tennessee Williams’s Prose Fiction,” in which he demonstrates that

Williams’ so-called “decadent” vision and his preoccupation with loneliness, evasion, role-playing, wastage, sexual

reluctance and sexual excess are in many instances functions of a homosexual sensibility which has been evolving steadily in the more than quarter century since the publication of *One Arm and Other Stories*. (526)

The gay men in *Moise* are no longer the “twisted and grotesquely presented individuals” (534) of Williams’s stories from the 1950s (Sklepowich discusses “Hard Candy” and “The Mystery of the Joy Rio” at length). According to Sklepowich, “In *Moise* the homosexual is an individual with a more identifiable and ‘realistic’ relationship to his surrounding social and historical milieu. Briefly stated, then, Williams’s homosexual has moved from the mythic to the real” (526-27). Sklepowich reads this evolution not only as “an indication of maturing perspective and of changing times” (542), but also as a portrait of Williams’s own growth as a gay man. In conjunction with *Memoirs*, *Moise* is another later depiction of “the fugitive kind definitely after Williams’s own heart, a character not of hate, shame or condescension, but of love and acceptance” (542-43). Draya too picks up on this acceptance: “Williams in the 1970s seems to find more potential for ‘happy’ endings, or at least for resolutions which emphasize acceptance and mutual recognition of dependencies” (657).

14 Robert Bray is first unsatisfied with merely an autobiographical analysis; he finds a “postmodern strategy” in the novel’s execution: “In terms of his relationship with the reader, Williams intentionally creates a confusing pattern of fragmentation, incompleteness, and dislocation that makes demands on the reader for establishing a sense of continuity and cohesion” (62). With such a strategy, Williams “confronts the chaos of modern existence and attempts to impose a blessed rage for order upon it” (62). However, Bray returns to the autobiographical parallel by acknowledging that the fragmentation in *Moise* and other late works may be seen “as a record of Williams’s post-breakdown period in which he was submerged in a delusional state of anxiety and apprehension over a world within and without of unreason” (62):

Williams sought in art what could not be found through the media, an outlet for aspects of his life that might be considered confessional, as in *Moise*—where he renders forth disparate experiences from 1930-1972, combining snippets from this four-decade experience into one long, incomplete sentence. (67)

As Christopher Conlon remarked in his recent study of Williams’s poetry, it is not the “carefree gay soul of the *Memoirs*” that is most evident in Williams’s works, but the “psyche of a profoundly troubled and guilt-ridden man” (60). David Savran presents a similar view in his *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers*: “the fragmentation and incoherence that mark most of Williams’s text from the late 1960s until his death are also the result of a pivotal change in his public status: his coming out” (136). In brief, “finally empowered to speak directly after so many years of (self-)censorship, he could only stutter, only hammer out a broken and lacerated speech” (137). (Sentence-fragmentation will be discussed in greater detail below.)

15 Savran, though, rereads his own findings by presenting the novel as an example of

what is most revolutionary of Tennessee Williams’s work: its ability as a text of bliss and desubjectification to lead the reader or spectator simultaneously to recognize the oppressiveness of the present historical moment and to think an unthinkable alternative. (168)

The “bliss” and “desubjectification” are marks of Roland Barthes’s text of pleasure, for even though the novel may be Bray’s “one long, incomplete sentence” (Bray 67), or even if it is composed of an “ubiquitous movement toward retirement” (Savran 155), a “résumé of the novel’s principal actions does not describe its real subject, which is the act of writing” (Savran 155).

It is this perspective that endows the novel with a potential that can surpass the qualities of drunken ramblings or deliberate obfuscation. The “distinguished failed writer” and narrator of the story writes often of his friend’s tendency, that of the title character Moise, to lecture in trance-like monologues. He attributes these speeches to “the strictly ordered anarchy which she lives in” (152). Although the narrator expresses immediate disdain for his inept term, the phrase is more than appropriate for this perspective: the anarchy, as manifested by the apparent formlessness of the novel, can indeed be attributed to and organized under a single framework, a coherence already established by Bray’s postmodern strategy and Savran’s Barthesian text.

¶17 I propose that such a framework is put forward by D.W. Winnicott in *Playing and Reality*. A collection of articles, lectures, and papers dating from the 1950s and ’60s published in 1971, this seminal work in child psychology and psychoanalysis focuses on transitional phenomena and their importance in the weaning process and the maturation of infants. In brief, Winnicott’s theory states that transitional objects are the first “not-me” possession of the infant, neither completely internal nor completely belonging to external reality. The infant employs the object in a bridge-like fashion, to go from complete internal living, where its self is its all, to living externally in a common reality. The relationship between the child and such an object (Linus and his “blankie” of the “Peanuts” comic strip, for instance) forms the foundation for the child’s cultural experiences and interactions with society by taking the child to a healthy, shared world. In his article “The Dialogue of Incompletion: Language in Tennessee Williams’s Later Plays,” Thomas P. Adler indicates that such a journey is not an anomaly in the Williams canon:

Williams, though, writes about people who, rather than go to extremes to evade communication, crave it obsessively as a means of breaking out of the self and making contact with the other, of overcoming the aloneness that is the human condition and entering into a saving communion of shared humanity. (49)

To borrow Val’s metaphor in *Orpheus Descending*, human interconnection is to act as parole from the “life-long sentence of solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!” (63).

¶18 By reassessing *Moise* from this standpoint, it is my hope to relocate Williams’s novel within the realm occupied by “the artist or artist figure whose vocation it is to create the beauty in our life that allows us to say ‘My God!’ and not just ‘Oh, well!’” (Adler 52, quoting *Small Craft Warnings*). With Winnicott’s theories, a system can be established by which we can say of the novel and of its narrator, “My God!” and not just “Oh, well,” the lament often assigned not only to Williams’s later works, but also to the journeys of many of his protagonists, in prose and drama alike. The process of disillusioning can again be good.

¶19 In the novel, it is clear that the unnamed narrator and author of the Blue Jay journals (to whom I will refer as T)¹ undergoes a maturation process similar to the one charted by Winnicott. Although we may find that T’s progress does not correspond precisely to the steps as Winnicott rigidly lays them out, the psychologist himself states, “It is not the object, of course, that is transitional”; it only represents the infant’s transition (14). The intent of this article is to show the similarities between the progress made by infants in Winnicott’s model and the progress made by T thanks to his writing. T, of course, is not an infant, and in theory he has already submitted to the model of maturation in the years of weaning-proper. However, developmental stages are rarely accomplished once and for all; we are frequently (some would say always) taking another run at them: the infant’s task becomes a grown man’s writing. Applying Winnicott to *Moise* is a manner of finding, following, and making meaning of T’s journey beyond the surface “unhappiness and anguish” (Draya 660).

It will first be useful to summarize Winnicott's model. It must be established that for the individual (infant or adult), there are three areas of living: the inner reality of the individual, the shared external existence in which the individual will participate if/when healthy and mature, and a middle ground where these transitional phenomena lie. This middle ground is a region where the transitional objects are perceived neither as inner nor outer. It is "an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute [. . .] it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (Winnicott 2). Consequently, the objects are often used at bedtime and as a defense mechanism against depressive anxiety (4).

¶11 In order for T's transitional object to exist, it must originate from that intermediate area between internal and external living. This, of course, presupposes the existence of such an area for T, and the area can be readily seen in the novel. If the novel did not appear under the guise of an already-written journal, the existence of this middle ground would be more difficult to prove visibly: narrative forms/prose do not outright presuppose that there is a narrator who is either in the story or, more importantly, affected by it, or that the narration is the product of a particular character's task. *Moise*, on the other hand, does more than presuppose a character in the story; we are reading from the principal medium of transmission. Were T not a writer, or had he simply decided not to record this night and following day in his notebooks, the novel would not exist. (Though many elements of T's exposition seem abrupt and for their own sake, in terms of the story's narrative and T's motivation in writing it, we should have no reason to believe the novel lives outside the journals, since the novel's entirety 'comes from' the journals.) Luckily, T is a writer, and he does record the crucial night in notebooks, on rejection slips, on any scrap paper he can find in his BON AMI box/writing desk. In other words, if the novel did not exist in the guise of T's journal, we would have no tangible proof that the intermediate region existed on a large scale for T. It would otherwise exist, just as it exists for everyone, according to Winnicott's model, but it would be of little importance to the reader or to this study.

¶12 Because T's intermediate area is in such full view, it provides us with two significant points of examination. The first is that, by definition, this middle ground mediates between the inner reality of the individual and the shared outer reality in which he lives. T's writing in his journals perfectly embodies such mediation, and we know this because we see both internal and external existence displayed so forcefully on numerous occasions. Participation in external reality is self-evident in the novel; these are the narrative elements that constitute the plot Korda calls "stagy" (65), Savran, "discontinuous" (155), and many other critics, just incoherent. T and his lover Charlie leave their West Eleventh Street warehouse for Moise's apartment on Bleecker Street; Moise gives her announcement about her retirement from the world of reason; Charlie leaves with someone else; and T eventually goes to look for him, meets an alcoholic playwright, and comes back to the warehouse to write. T receives visits from the playwright and an actress before Charlie comes home after dawn; T leaves Charlie, and Moise rescues T from two abusive policemen on the street. They retire to her apartment where they talk and entertain male photographers. These are the major narrative points in the story; they are said to belong to external reality because they do not live in the mind/illusion/fantasy of one person. They are common, shared experiences.

¶13 In the intermediate region, these outer elements collide with their counterparts: those of complete internal living. This inner reality "can be rich or poor and can be at peace or in a state of war" (Winnicott 2). T's inner reality is exposed as all of the above: rich, poor, tranquil, embattled. The most obvious appearances of the inner

reality come about when T writes of his childhood, his former lover, his past. He is participating in the most inward and personal activity there is: he is remembering. At length, T describes several instances from his childhood, including how he ran away from Alabama and how his mother tried to retrieve him; he describes his scandalous neighbors, his days at school, his time spent in the town library, and his unusual car ride with four strangers. T remembers his first lover, the ice-skater Lance, already twice his age when T was only fifteen; he remembers the time he toured with Lance's ice show, the venereal diseases they shared, and the period surrounding Lance's death. According to the nature of memory, these thoughts are utterly inaccessible, living only in the irretrievable past and in T's mind. Robert Bray mentions the existence of internal living, particularly relating to Lance, in different terms:

These recollections, whether conjured by sheer sentiment or the mental re-creation of pleasures past, form a world outside of time, not merely the past, but a continuum of time that both structures the novel and dominates the narrator's thought process. (63)

When we view the internal living as the first part of the process, we can understand why the "narrator's memories of Lance become one of the structuring principles behind the novel, as both anecdotal and referential memories of their affair form roughly one third of the content" (Bray 65). This is balanced when the internal events encounter external reality head-on, placed side by side with it, thanks to T's pencil and paper, a confrontation that Bray again describes in different terms:

Reduced to its simplest terms, *Moise's* structure depends on the following scheme: the narrator frames the action with physical and spatial descriptions, then allows time to drift between the immediate and distant past—with memory forever circumscribing chronology. (65)

¶14 The second significant point with respect to the observable middle ground concerns the specific way in which the area is employed. When internal and external realities meet, there is inevitable tension: as Winnicott explains, "The task of reality-acceptance is never completed, no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and relief from this strain is provided by an unchallenged intermediate region or experience" (13). For example, Winnicott details the case of one patient, a seven-year-old boy who developed separation anxiety when his mother was hospitalized for depression. In reaction to the separation, the boy became obsessed with string, drawing pictures of it, playing with it. Whenever the mother was hospitalized, the boy would take to the string as his way of coping with the absence of his mother; it provided solace. (Winnicott insists that psychoanalytical interpretations of the string or any other transitional phenomena are not necessarily relevant when discussing the employment of a transitional object; their existence and usage suffice.) As alleviation, the need and desire for the string came from the psychical middle ground, where the boy was fighting to mediate between his inner reality, in which his mother was present, accounted for, and good enough, and his outer reality, from which she had become absent. This was the "strain"; the string, the object, relieved it.

¶15 Similarly, T seeks solace in his writing. After an evening of bizarre occurrences, T returns to his warehouse-ghetto to write, "Which brings me home and alone to my little Blue Jay in the West" (55), the "which" referring to his narration of the evening at *Moise's* flat and his journey home. It is not surprising that T introduces his fear and panic to us before he recounts the bulk of the stories from his past; in essence, he is relating to us the purpose of the journals, their service to him:

Where is the libido located, inflamed? In the unconscious, of course, as surely as the island of San Cristoval is located at the western end of the archipelago called the Louisiade but much more prominently and in brighter color since it is so inflamed by the absence of faithless Charlie, oh, much more prominently with much more inflammation. (60)

T is seeking protection from his “inflamed libido.” The narration of pain and struggle continues:

I jump up from BON AMI, cry out Lance and the outcry seems to be echoed all through the panicky corridors of memory, nine-tenths of which are submerged in the dark, icy waters like the great iceberg that so gently but fatally nudged the *Titanic* [. . .]. (60-61)

[. . .] and so I think about death, his completed, mine now surely approaching [. . .] (61)

Lance is reverberated as if through the whole empty warehouse which is the size of my heart at the moment in the Blue Jay [. . .]. (61)

Then much later:

For of the earth’s frozen waters I wanted now only the ditch where a child crouched at dusk to release from his fingers a paper boat, as frail as a May butterfly, and if the ditch water is frozen, apologies to Rimbaud for these recurrent images of ice. (150)

Through each of these passages, it is clear that T’s self-described “hysteria” (56) has become a force to be reckoned with. The first passage shows how T’s inner reality has become oppressive and desperate; the second gives rise to T’s fears. The third shows how T’s inner reality has begun to dominate the outer, and the fourth is an external metaphor bearing upon T’s internal world. These examples show from what pain T is seeking comfort in his journals. On a larger scale, the source of the pain is found at the convergence of outer and inner reality, and, just as the object of the string provided relief to the separated boy, the “object” of writing, the act itself, performs the same function for T.

¶16 Winnicott provides a list of a transitional object’s special characteristics, which I will apply to consider further T’s writing as his transitional object. Winnicott enumerates the qualities as follows:

- The infant assumes omnipotence over the object.
- The object is cuddled, excitedly loved, and mutilated.
- Only the infant is permitted to change the object.
- The object must be able to survive instinctual loving, hating, and aggression if/when it occurs.
- The infant must perceive the object as having its own vitality.
- The object is neither wholly internal nor external for the infant.
- The object will eventually suffer decathetization, that is, it will gradually lose its meaning and become diffused over the entire middle ground from which it stemmed. (5)

¶17 It has already been pointed out that T will not strictly adhere to Winnicott’s model, the most obvious reason being simply his age. It should also be made clear that Winnicott’s model depends on real *things*: a blanket, a stuffed animal, a piece of string; but this comparison cannot deal directly with concrete objects. For T, the transitional object is the act itself, not necessarily the Blue Jays (though they are frequently in service to the phenomena), not the rejection slips or the pieces of laundry cardboard that stand in for paper, but the action. I pursue such an interpretive comparison because of the way T’s writing closely follows Winnicott’s definition, purpose, and results of transitional phenomena.

¶18 We have already seen how the writing is neither wholly internal nor wholly external (the sixth of Winnicott’s

seven characteristics). Returning to the top of the list we will find that the infant must retain omnipotence over the object. This particular view is not difficult to ascertain: whereas T may feel he loses control over the “world of reason” from which Moise has retired, his writing is the one thing over which he retains supreme control. He writes whenever he wants, he writes on whatever he wants: the cherished notebooks, rejection slips, laundry cardboard, envelopes. He stops whenever he wants. This is a consistent pattern, seen most notably on the several occasions Lance tries to lure T away from his work at BON AMI, typically with commands and insults. T responds in an equally bitchy manner and keeps right on writing:

The talk would go like that, but I am an obstinate writer, as obstinate as unsuccessful, and if Lance persisted in trying to interrupt me when I was hotter for a Blue Jay than even for him, I would run downstairs and continue on the Blue Jay in the Pier Ten bar which used to be across the street from the warehouse but which no longer exists there. (104)

Even when Lance attempted to use force, it was often to no avail:

Lance would come to the table and he would literally pick me up from it and carry me to the warehouse with my Blue Jay and pencil clutched in my fist and (105, original sentence fragment)

This also demonstrates that T writes wherever he chooses, in the Pier Ten bar, at BON AMI, in Moise’s apartment, on the roof of his warehouse. Nothing is to come between T, the Blue Jays, and the act performed there.

¶19 The control T has over his writing is also reflected in the style and content of the journals. He drifts between present narration and recollection with breakneck speed, and although he claims, “Of coherency, I usually attempt it” (35), he is often unable to achieve it. He leaves sentences dangling, paragraphs and thoughts unfinished. (This characteristic, in fact, will relate to T’s loss of omnipotence, as described further below. For now, it is essential only that he exert general control over the act.) He comments, sometimes at length, on the form of his writing, even on punctuation:

I do not use exclamation marks as I think that they are probably the most dispensable piece of punctuation to which a writer can descend unless he is writing for dumb actors and actresses like that unfortunate playwright whom I encountered before the Truck and Warehouse Theater. (132-33)

He even alters the form of his writing, writing more boldly when the light is dimmer on top of the warehouse, writing smaller on the laundry cardboard to conserve space.

¶20 This omnipotence also deals in part with the third quality of Winnicott’s listed above: only T will be permitted to change the object. The rejections he cites constantly dog his form for its lack of congruity —“Incoherency is but is not” (34)—but it is constantly apparent that he does not change his style because of such criticism. They, the critics or anyone else, are not permitted to alter the work or the working. Such persistence is even more relevant since it shows T’s determination to keep the internal image of the object alive. (This topic will resurface below as it relates to object-relating and the destruction of the object.) T even becomes apprehensive when anyone approaches his work: we see him reproach the drunken playwright for reading his work, calling it an “outrageous invasion” at “the height of insolence” (123). However, T can change his own object in any way he wishes.

¶21 Continuing down the list, the transitional object must be loved and mutilated at the same time:

I have always preferred the presence of a companion [when writing]. I think, in a way, that is the excuse for the Blue Jay and that I have now accepted it as the only reward in my case. (72)

This is only one reason why the Blue Jays are cherished for the action performed on them, and lest we be tempted to say it is out of default, more heartfelt and even sexual descriptions of the writing emerge:

I was so attached to it, the Blue Jay notebook, to the pale blue regularity of its parallel line on each side of the page, that I had them mailed to me [. . .]. (55)

Not even now as I stare at the next page of the Blue Jay with its pale blue parallel lines still undefiled by the pencil [. . .] And now that next page of the Blue Jay has been fucked by the pencil and is no longer bare beauty [. . .]. (84)

Writing has become the companion; it has been personified: it lives, it breathes, it makes love. (This passage alone is enough to satisfy Winnicott's fifth quality, that the object must have a vitality of its own.) We have already seen T reject veritable sex and love, replacing the former and often the latter with writing. As David Savran commented, the novel is a "mutual configuration of sexuality and textuality" (157), a "symmetry of writing and sexuality, pencil and penis, page and anus" (156). And despite the libidinal praise T offers of his lovers past and present, none seems greater than the one he affords to his writing by working on the desk/box marked "good friend."

¶122 The necessary mutilation is not difficult to discern either. The form of T's journals eschews nearly all established structure, opting for his own brand of anarchy, writing what he pleases when it strikes him. The rejection of traditional composition is indeed mutilation, certainly in the eyes of the publishers T cites. And what better way to mutilate one's writing than by dignifying the rejections received about it and daring to mix the words that reject with the rejected words themselves? Throughout the changes in location, the changes in medium, in scrawl, throughout the loving "defiling" T inflicts on the journals with his pencil, the object survives, however instinctual these alterations are. Even though T feels he is a "distinguished failed writer," he and the writing persist, on and on.

¶123 Finally, Winnicott's seventh quality deals with decastration. That is, the object will eventually lose its special meaning (along with its corresponding internal image in the individual), and it does not so much retire back into the intermediate area from which it sprang, as become diffused, spread across the "entire cultural field" located between inner and external reality (5). Even long before the end of the novel, we have the impression that writing, for T, has served its purpose: it has bridged inner and outer, it has provided solace. We are made even more aware of this fact when we remember the nature of the novel: we are not living this night concurrently with T, but reading after the fact about past incidents and incidents before that past. Moreover, we may assume that had the writing of the journals not completed its function, T would not have stopped writing after describing the assuredness of a new and better day and the potential of a new love, both of which arrive at Moise's apartment. Indeed, "The last Blue Jay is completed" (190), and T's internal reality for the first time feels comfortably mediated with external reality. Where T was earlier troubled by the sound of footsteps of the drunken playwright, the scorned actress, and his wayward lover, he is now untroubled by even "the footsteps of a giant being, as hushed as they are gigantic, footsteps of the Great Unknown One approaching our world of reason or unreason, you name it as you conceive it" (190). He is not even concerned anymore about whether the external is "reasonable" or not, but he is ready for it, and so he stops writing.

¶124 It is not enough to say that T's writing shares the properties of Winnicott's transitional phenomena. There is

an ordered sequence that also must be closely followed in order to explore further the transitional role of the writing. According to Winnicott, “To use an object the subject must have developed a *capacity* to use objects. This is part of the change to the reality principle” (89). That reality principle goes hand in hand with the maturation process begun by the subject’s use of transitional phenomena. In other words, an individual can live in the shared external reality, the world of objects, because of the bridge provided by that first “not-me” possession. More specific to *Moise*, T has to be able to use objects to show he is a functioning member of the outer world. Not to see the thrust of the novel as his attempt to live comfortably in the world outside himself is to shortchange the purpose of the journals and the character of the narrator. With that in mind, we attempt to locate the means and levels of T’s maturation process, of which there are five principal steps:

Object-relating.

The subject finds the object outside the area of omnipotent control and in external reality.

The subject destroys the object with this recognition.

The object survives the destruction.

The object may now be used, and the subject can now live a life in the world of objects from which s/he will benefit immensely. (Winnicott 90)

Because of the nature of these steps, it is not necessarily feasible to divide the novel into five segments and assign page numbers to each step in the sequence. This is because the last four steps happen nearly simultaneously, with no phase arriving independent of another.

¶25 Let us begin with the one most independent phase, that of object-relating, in which an individual becomes aware of external reality because of a specific object. As soon as that individual is conscious of that reality, the whole “intermediate area of experience” and its subsequent problems of mediation are introduced (Winnicott 2). The individual undergoes introjection: incorporating the image of the object into the psyche and focusing aggressive energy onto that image instead of the object itself. The true object-relationship begins when the individual redirects that energy and projects it back onto the external object (2). Here, the individual initiates the important progression of the object, from strictly a member of the outside world to a member of the intermediate area, this latter membership signifying it henceforth as a transitional object. Winnicott expands the denotation of object-relating by insisting it include an element of the “acknowledgement of indebtedness” (2).

¶26 Because I am not considering concrete objects as T’s transitional phenomena, choosing instead the more significant and metaphysical action of writing, it may seem that this smaller sequence becomes a bit muddled in comparison. Still, T does incorporate the writing into his psyche, making of it a companion and even a lover, and the writing does endure the effects of the necessary aggressive energy (the loving and mutilation discussed above). In terms of the redirection and projection of this energy, by returning to the four passages quoted above from the novel, it becomes clear upon what T focuses his energy: the action of writing, his hand moving across the paper/cardboard/slip, his pencil defiling page after page. The intermediate area is thus established, and since the tone of T’s narration when mentioning his writing ranges anywhere from appreciation to worship, the “acknowledgement of indebtedness” is sufficiently evident without lengthy analysis here.

¶27 Returning to Winnicott’s overall sequence, this first phase is what we read when we pick up *Moise*; it covers nearly the entire novel. The beginning of the object-relationship is established a long time before the novel even begins. T has already incorporated his writing into his psyche, he has already projected the energy back onto the action, he is already grateful. T is an experienced object-relater; he does it with ease by the time we meet him. In the second phase, T must find the object outside his omnipotent control and in the outer reality, with a

“perception of the object as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity, in fact recognition of it as an entity in its own right” (Winnicott 89). The ensuing question is then: how does T go from the omnipotence described above to finding his writing outside this omnipotence? He loses his control slowly and gradually, until the last scene in Moise’s apartment the next morning, when he finally recognizes the loss of omnipotence.

¶128 As previously mentioned, T exerts a general control over his style, but as the novel and journals progress, his control begins to slip away. In the first section of the novel (as delineated by the author), there are four instances of sentence incompleteness, the first coming sixteen pages after the opening. In this first chapter, he shows an awareness of these incompletenesses, saying after one of them, “That is a sentence Moise did not complete, not an incomplete sentence of my own doing” (24). Though sentence fragments in characters’ quotations are not counted in the tallies here, this comment shows T’s awareness of the fragments; Bray maintains that “the creation and maintenance of this fragmentary form is a viable function of the narrator’s cognizant engagement with the act of writing” (62).

¶129 In the second chapter, there are fifteen instances of the broken sentence, the first coming one page after the opening. Not only is this a significant increase, but the incompletenesses come at a more rapid and steady pace, averaging one approximately every six pages, compared to the four in chapter one that all fall within one four-page rush. (Chapter two is indeed the largest chapter of the four, but what is important here is not the exact pagination, but the progression.) Even more notably, T twice loses the thread of his narration in this section:

I know when a sentence is going on too long for the mental breath of a reader not to mention a writer so let me complete what I had started to say and leave it there and go on. (71)

T tries to recount one incident he witnessed during his stay at Bellevue, but he must interrupt himself:

I honestly don’t remember although I know that something of a shocking nature did happen [. . .] Oh, Christ, now I remember. (80)

Also in this chapter, a loss of control over the actual language becomes evident, as he makes mention of a near-Freudian slip: when intending to write “Blue Jays,” T comments, “Came very near saying ‘blue jeans’” (57).

¶130 Chapter three has no incompletenesses, and chapter four has five, averaging one every seven pages. Though the pace slows down after the second chapter, by the time T has recorded the events that take place there, the damage has already been done, and when coupled with those events, the fragments reveal just how gradually and definitively T loses omnipotence over his writing.

¶131 In his examination of Williams’s later drama, coincidentally published the same year as *Moise*, Thomas P. Adler analyzes the function of the sentence fragment in plays such as *Small Craft Warnings*, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, and *Out Cry*. One of his most definitive conclusions has relevance here:

Such dialogue in which one character must help the other to verbalize his thoughts is a concrete, aural demonstration for the theatre audience of man’s need to not remain separate from the other. (53)

With the novel, there is a distinct difference, due in part to the difference in medium. Through T’s journals, we see the character working things out for himself instead of necessarily relying on a “symbiotic closeness” with another character (Cohn 237). If “an interconnection achieved through words is one antidote for the characters’ sense of incompleteness” (Adler 50), then the method T employs throughout *Moise* is another such antidote. He is using the journals in order to take charge and to find his identity finally. I do not agree with Ruby Cohn’s

reading that the “tendency to incompleteness becomes a talismanic sign of character kinship” (238) since the majority of the fragments are the narrator’s and do not occur in conversation with Moise. The kinship being formed is between T’s internal and external realities, which David Savran restates through an analogous paradigm established by Barthes and Michel Foucault: “the narrator of *Moise* painstakingly dedicates all his fragments to the service of completion, fruition, in the hope of recuperating an unbroken sentence or narrative, of filling the final notebook” (156). After all, as Adler suggested, “man’s ability to use language is what gives him the power to know and define himself” (50).

¶32 Robert Bray reaches another possible conclusion:

In terms of his relationship with the reader, Williams intentionally creates a confusing pattern of fragmentation, incompleteness, and dislocation that makes demands on the reader for establishing a sense of continuity and cohesion. [. . .] Williams implicitly implores *the reader* to supply the missing word or lines. (62)

The employment of Winnicott’s model is not by nature contradictory to Bray’s reading, but it is necessarily self-contained. It concerns the inner mental state of one person. To believe in the power of the transitional object is to believe that T’s world is closed, that the journals are real, and that the reader has no place in the process itself. This does not mean that we cannot consider *Moise* in the same succession as *Small Craft Warnings*, *Tokyo Hotel*, and *Out Cry*, despite the obvious difference in genre. The attempts made by the characters in those plays can be seen as the groundwork for T’s, as reflected in Williams’s increasing skill with the sentence fragment. As Ruby Cohn indicates, specifically in reference to *Tokyo Hotel*, “the play’s sentence incompleteness served to prepare Williams to manipulate the device meaningfully in his novel [. . .]” (238).

¶33 To return to the steps of the maturation process, T is able to write when and where he wants, as described above under Winnicott’s special qualities. This all changes, however, during the night in question. T is interrupted three times during his writing, once by the drunken and lonely playwright, once by the scorned actress, and finally by Charlie’s return. The first time, T is able to escape to the roof of the warehouse to continue writing, but on his way back down, the Actress Invicta’s arrival prevents him from returning to BON AMI. Charlie’s return and the subsequent argument send T out into the cold night, pages in hand (and without his “good friend,” no less). Not until after Moise rescues him from a pair of abusive cops and they return to her flat does T have a chance to write again.

¶34 There is another problem however. T once enjoyed recording Moise’s monologues alongside his own in the Blue Jays, but tonight is different:

“Oh, Moise, when I came here I expected you to say such wise and beautiful things but instead you are filling my last Blue Jay with delirium and folly.” (181)

Of course Moise does not care, but she does speak eventually:

“Here!” She hurled the notebook at me, then pencil, and I caught them both as skillfully as an infielder for the Mets: fortunate, since she had risen and stalked to the center of the room as if to a podium with banners behind it. (182)

Not only does T feel he cannot write what he wishes, but he is made to realize that he can no longer write when or where he wishes. The ultimate control he once had over his writing, the same control that would keep him at BON AMI in spite of Lance’s sexual overtures, has now diminished.

¶35 Now with the omnipotence lost, the step that instantly follows is that of destruction: because the subject no

longer exerts control over the object, the object is then destroyed for the subject. This is so because the external object is no longer capable of maintaining the internal image assigned to it in the introjection-to-projection action, as performed in the original object-relation. Winnicott defines destruction as the following also:

Failure of the [external object] in some essential function leads to a deadness or to a persecutory quality of the internal object. After a persistence of inadequacy of the external object the internal object fails to have meaning to the infant, and then, and then only, does the transitional object become meaningless too. (10)

By following the narration of the second half of the novel, and also by seeing in what ways T loses control over his writing, it is justifiable to say that the writing no longer serves the more-than-adequate function it once served. It will now experience a decline in its transitional duties. This is, of course, the ideal progression of Winnicott's model:

It is important to note that it is not only that the subject destroys the object because the object is placed outside the area of omnipotent control. It is equally significant to state this the other way round and to say that it is the destruction of the object that places the object outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives) contributes-in to the subject, according to its own properties. (90)

It is crucial not to treat the action of writing simply as something that T does and over until he eventually loses control. The writing must be considered as a being, as an object as defined by Winnicott, one that takes on its own vitality and "autonomy and life," for it is at this juncture that the comparison comes to fruition. It is Winnicott's final step that will ultimately be of most service to this analysis and to T.

136 After the subject destroys the object with the recognition that it now lies outside the area of omnipotent control, the object must survive the destruction. If it does not, it will not contribute-in to the subject (to borrow Winnicott's phrase), and its life as a transitional object will have been for naught. In other words, for T to benefit from his writing, he first must recognize the object as destroyed. He does this in the final lines of the book (quoted above):

It isn't yet dark in the room but dim and dimmer and all that I hear now are the footsteps of a giant being, as hushed as they are gigantic, footsteps of the Great Unknown One approaching our world of reason or unreason, you name it as you conceive it. And now

The last Blue Jay is completed. (190)

What is immediately remarkable is the novel's final sentence fragment. The final sentence should not be considered as a consequence of the "And now." This is according to the characteristic of the fragments in the rest of the novel: they are a complete break, some for reasons of frustration, some due to feelings of futility; some even occur without comment from T and without apparent justification. Here, however, we surmise that for the first time, the sentence fragment actually signals completion. The "you name it as you conceive it" is of a tone T has not employed in his journals before this moment: optimistic indifference. We have followed him through times of indifference on many occasions, but the tone has always been one of distance: he was indifferent about Charlie's urinary technique of seduction late that afternoon, about going to the party at Moise's, and even about Moise's announcement regarding her withdrawal from the world of reason. In all three cases, among many others, the indecision accompanies apathy and listlessness, not the chin-up assuredness that comes when he implies that matters of reason and unreason are no longer of importance. Furthermore, there is evidence in the

novel that suggests that T is working towards a certain point, which, though it may be an undefined goal, is still present as a priority. Halfway through recounting the evening at Bleeker Street, T writes that he has “got to discontinue this thing for awhile,” in order to “Rest, breathe, recover if you can, the cry is still *En avant*” (39).²

¶137

The confidence is in fact the climax of a series of events that takes the novel’s two main characters off their slippery slope, which nearly climaxed itself with the policemen’s attack, Moise’s incapability to produce her usually effortless and eloquent ranting, and finally her seizure. Shortly after, Moise receives the shipment of pigments and brushes accompanied by the promise of the patronage for which she was so desperate, and two cameramen arrive to photograph Moise’s new work in progress. The air is pregnant with renewal, Moise and T each couple up with a photographer, and T jots down that he is ready for the unknown. It seems that the night filled with hours of anguish and paper have not only been worked through successfully, but have actually paid off, and the action of writing has produced for T some very positive results. It is no wonder then that “The last Blue Jay is completed.” Savran’s reading of the novel and its conclusion of Lacanian impossibility in particular also provide the appropriate accompanying bliss (the orgasmic *jouissance*):

In its final pages, all the fragments, false starts, and unfinished sentences are explicitly focused toward completion, filling the last Blue Jay—as happens in the last two luminous pages of the text. (167)

The transitional object of writing has now been successfully decathected, as described under Winnicott’s seventh special quality. T’s bond to the object, as originated by the process of introjection-to-projection, is destroyed. With the journals completed, the transitional object is of no internal use; both subject and object now live comfortably in the external world of objects.

¶138

At last, this is how Winnicott defines the destruction of the object: it must yield membership in the world of objects, not only of the transitional phenomena, but more importantly, of the individual, the subject, T. This step is the one that is not easily made concrete by the novel itself. However, the steps through which we have followed Winnicott and T grant us this final and most useful phase. Once the object survives destruction, the subject can use it and its accompanying attributes; we assume and truly hope this to be case for T: he will use the object, that is, employ and live with the mediation and solace the writing has given him. It is important to note that the object “is not forgotten and it is not mourned”—it simply “loses meaning” (Winnicott 5). Now, straying from Winnicott’s model of the concrete transitional object proves to be advantageous; we can better recognize that T will exploit the results of his transition more than the actual object. He will use the mediation and solace, for the action of writing no longer provides the service it once did. If it did, why would the journals (and therefore the novel) end, why the completion of the *last* Blue Jay?

¶139

This article has focused its application principally on the progression of the transitional object in T’s worlds of reason and unreason, and there are two major benefits of seeing such a development in the novel. One advantage concerns the construction and style of the novel, seemingly random and immoderately fluid: by treating T’s path as a process of successful maturation, we give form to the formless, meaning to the meaningless, and order to the anarchy. As a second advantage, we can treat T as a success-story, something all too rare in the Tennessee Williams oeuvre, so that he is not merely “anxious” or “schizophrenic” (Savran 165); he is growing and adapting. We can believe Winnicott in that T’s writing, all transitional phenomena, and the “intermediate area [are] necessary for the initiation of a relationship between the child and the world” (13). Through Winnicott’s objects, we can see such a relationship bloom, develop and thrive, a story Tennessee was

not often able or willing to tell. Blanche, Alma, and Tom may not have “gone to the moon,” but they, among many other Williams characters, found no place in our (shared) world either, for theirs was the “quest [for] an unrealizable ideal” (Sklepowich 535) so characteristic of many of Williams’s works. We can claim that as the source of their sadness, and of ours as we watch them. Here though, we can render T’s quest a happier one, allowing him access to that “saving communion of shared humanity” (Adler 49).

Notes

¹ I substitute *T* for the sake of simplicity, but also as a means of continuing the exploration of the parallel between Tennessee Williams and his narrator of *Moise*, as discussed by Bray, Draya, Savran, and Sklepowich.

² The use of *En avant* is remarkable, certainly in terms of an autobiographical reading of the novel. According to *The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams*, the author employed the phrase as early as 1943 (letter 262), and “[it] would become a familiar closing for letters and journal entries, as well as a declaration of the writer’s indomitable will” (441). Also according to that volume, the phrase may have been suggested by the 19th century French poet Arthur Rimbaud, to whom T apologizes for the “recurrent images of ice” (150).

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