Agnieszka Woźniakowska[*]

ROMANTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY IN SELECTED PLAYS BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Keywords: *city, American drama, Tennessee Williams, American romanticism*
Abstract: *The aim of the article is to show similarities between representation of the city in two texts of American romantic authors, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and two dramas of Tennessee Williams, a playwright of the post WWII era. While it is a well-known fact that writers contemporary to Williams, such as Allen Ginsberg or Saul Bellow, reached back to romantic tradition for literary inspiration, not much is known about the extent to which American playwrights were influenced by American romantic men of letters. The main purpose of the present article is to try to show that the romantic opposition between urban spaces and natural environment is present in plays by Tennessee Williams.*

It is a well-known fact that writers of post-World War II era were inspired by, and, to a large extent, relied on philosophy and texts of some mid-nineteenth century authors; for example, Allen Ginsberg is to some degree an heir to Walt Whitman, Saul Bellow was inspired by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Sylvia Plath is often linked with Emily Dickinson. While the influence of romantic ideology on the poetry and fiction written after the second world war has been mentioned in numerous texts[1], few critical works have focused on American post World War II drama's relation to the romantic thought and this area has remained little known. Therefore it seems justified to take a closer look at some affinities between selected romantic texts and plays

[*] University of Silesia, Poland.

[1] David Amram, for example, in *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac*, writes about Walt Whitman's influence on Jack Kerouac (David Amram, *Offbeat: Collaborating with Kerouac,* Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2002); M. A. Quayum examines the influence of American transcendentalists, in particular Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, on Saul Bellow's novels. (Quayum, M. A. *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, New York, 2004). Also histories of American literature mention this influence; they emphasize, for example, that "[Allen] Ginsberg's writing has been in many ways a return and response to Whitman's vision; he has measured the nation's fall from grace and sounded his own barbaric yawp of pain and disappointment" (Ruland, Richard, and Bradbury, Maclolm, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism. A History of American Literature*, Penguin Books, New York, 1992, p. 395) and that "[t]hey [Ginsberg and Gary Snyder] also share usages of Buddhist and other Asian religious and mythical writings and devotional practices (…). This is in itself an American constant at least from Emerson and Thoreau onwards, part of the transcendental mode of philosophy and poetic actions since the nineteenth-century Romantics." (Cunliffe, Marcus, ed. *The Penguin History of Literature. American Literature since 1900*. Penguin Books, London, 1993, p. 272)

written by post WW II authors. As the major concern of this conference is the city, I have selected for examination two romantic stories and two plays written after the war, in which the urban setting plays a significant role.

My major assumption is that Tennessee Williams, like some romantic writers, juxtaposed the urban environment with the natural one, presenting the city in a negative light, while his representation of what lied outside the city was positive and often sentimental. In all examined texts, both those written in the nineteenth century and those in the twentieth, there are few direct city descriptions. Similarly to romantic authors, Williams expressed his attitude towards the city indirectly, most frequently through the presentation of city-dwellers and their behavior in the urban setting.

My first "romantic" choice has been *Bartleby, the Scrivener* written by Herman Melville in 1853, and the second the equally well-known *The Scarlet Letter* written in 1850 by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I intend to examine the relation between them and two plays of Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). All the mentioned texts were written by major representatives of their times, also all the texts are well known and often included in reading lists for students of American literature. However, what seems neglected in the critical examinations of these texts is the relation between them and, in particular, the fact that in Tennessee Williams's writings elements of romantic philosophy can be traced. In a sense, it is possible to see in Williams a continuator of the romantic thought, including his attitude towards the city and life in the urban environment. It seems that the influence the city exerted on Melville's and Hawthorne's characters bears much resemblance to the influence of the city on the characters of Williams's plays[2], despite the fact that the texts were written one hundred years apart.

New York is the setting of Herman Melville's story, *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. Although the story's subtitle informs the reader that it is "A Story of Wall-Street," few lines in the text are devoted to the characterization of the street or the city. Interestingly, instead of drawing a panorama of New York for his readers, Melville limits the view to one office room and, briefly, to a yard in the city's prison. On the one hand, the subtitle suggests that this is a story of Wall Street; on the other, not a single line describes the looks of the street. Despite this fact, the location of the story's action in the financial center of the United States plays a crucial role. The story refers to a place where money is most significant, but at the same time it shows that it is a place where man is trapped, like in a prison, no longer free of the burdens of the capitalist society. It seems justified to say that the office in which Bartleby works metaphorically represents life in urban America, where such processes as growing

[2] Thomas E. Porter stated in *Myth and Modern American Drama* that Tennessee Williams's attitude to urban environment was shaped to some extent in the playwright's childhood. He writes: "His early boyhood was spent almost exclusively in the company of his grandparents, his mother and his sister in the Episcopal rectory of quiet Mississippi towns. When at the age of eight he moved to St. Louis with the family, the experience was traumatic. "Neither my sister nor I could adjust to life in a Midwestern city." The "big city" in the "Midwest" is a sharp contrast to the small, rural communities that framed his earliest memories, and the conflict this move provoked is the subject of his "memory" play *The Glass Menagerie*. The ideals and attitudes that Williams absorbed in his Southern childhood establish the perspective from which he wrote his plays" (Porter 155).

materialism, consumerism, and life without true communication with fellow-men lead to the decay of previously cultivated ideals and to the spiritual death of man.

The plot is set mainly in a lawyer's office, where the protagonist, the eponymous Bartleby, spends most of his time. As soon as he is employed by the owner of the office, Bartleby is separated from his co-workers and the rest of the world by walls and by a folding screen. The owner of the office says:

> I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory agreement, I procured a high folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined. (Melville 2169)

Thus Bartleby is separated from other people; he becomes confined and alone. His working place is even called "hermitage" (Melville 2172). But Bartleby does not complain. What is more, the owner of the office discovers one day that Bartleby does not leave the office at all – it seems to have become his home: "I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office (…)" (Melville 2175). In this way Bartleby voluntarily sentences himself to solitude. The office becomes his world.

Bartleby finds it difficult to communicate with his co-workers, as he can hear other copyists, but he cannot see them while he is working. It seems that the setting of the office decreases the possibility for effective communication. The workers interact with one another only when they verify whether the texts were copied correctly – that is, when one person is reading the copied text aloud, while the other one is looking at the original and searching for possible mistakes. "It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair" (Melville 2169) the narrator comments. The communication on non-professional basis turns out to be more difficult. As the time passes by, the protagonist, who is separated from his colleagues by the folding screen, ceases to feel the need of talking to others and after a time he refuses to work. When the owner of the office asks Bartleby to perform some tasks, he more and more frequently answers: "I would prefer not to." Eventually, when Bartleby is removed by force from the office and is imprisoned, he refuses to eat and, finally, dies.

What needs to be emphasized is the fact, that the other workers in the office: Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut, despite some deficiencies in functioning in the workplace, were well accommodated in the office. Turkey was an efficient worker only till noon – "at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours." (Melville 2166) Nippers, on the other hand, due to indigestion, was, contrary to Turkey, nervous in the morning, but "in the afternoon he was comparatively mild." (Melville 2168) The workers were not effective enough for some period of time during the day, but they did not become completely passive the way Bartleby did.

At the end of the story the only fact from Bartleby's past is revealed: he used to work as "a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration" (Melville 2189). This fact concerns another American great city, Washington, where, as it turns out, some communication problems also occur. Dead Letter Office is a place where undelivered letters are dealt with. The fact that for some reason the letters failed to reach the addressees, suggests a failure in communication between people. Thus it turns out that communication has become an "urban" problem, as two major American cities, Washington and New York, were affected by it. The narrator of the story notices, that the impossibility of getting in touch with another person may lead to spiritual death. He observes: "Dead letters! Does it not sound like dead men?" (Melville 2189) And he finally exclaims: "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" (Melville 2189) This exclamation seems to be Melville's warning: humankind, like Bartleby, is slowly dying. This is not death in the literal sense of the word, but spiritual one, as excessive materialism and lack of true contact with other people, associated with places like Wall Street, lead to the loss of spiritual life.

Bartleby's lack of interest in communication with other people goes hand in hand with his lack of contact with nature. His access to the natural world, that is to trees, birds, even clouds in the sky is completely obstructed – nothing can be seen from the office window, except another wall. As the building standing nearby limits the view, only a small piece of the sky can be observed in the corner. It appears that, paradoxically, while romantic authors emphasized the importance of contact with nature, which they perceived as the second book of revelation, and nature was for them the object of contemplation, this story is set almost entirely in the enclosed space of a room, in which there is nothing natural. On the contrary – everything here seems to be man's invention: the legal system (the story is set in a lawyer's office), money (Wall Street is a symbol of the US financial system), the prison, buildings and walls. This fact seems to be the main reason for the protagonist's atrophy.

According to romantic thinkers, by studying nature man could learn something about God, and also something about himself, as there existed a divine element in all God's creation. Therefore by studying divine presence in nature man was finding out something about himself, as the same divine element dwelled in him. In Bartleby's office man cannot study nature; as a consequence, he acquires no knowledge about himself, about other people, or God. This fact leads to Bartleby's loss of identity, and also to the absence of God in his life and the lives of other characters. The city, represented by the lawyer's office in Wall Street, appears therefore as an antithesis of nature.

Similarly, human creativity seems to be reduced in the urban environment. The main task of the protagonist and his colleagues is copying legal texts. Nobody creates anything new – the characters' only professional activity is re-writing. Although they work in a lawyer's office, they seem to be completely uninterested in any activities commonly associated with the legal system. While romantic thinkers were crying out "never imitate" (Emerson 970), "[i]mitation is suicide!" (Emerson 956), Bartleby and his co-workers in the office re-create, in other words, imitate, somebody else's words. As a result they become more and more inactive. This attitude is well-expressed by the owner of the office, who admits "I am a man who, from his

youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best." (Melville 215)

Similarly, Boston, in which the plot of *The Scarlet Letter* is set, is presented in opposition to the world of nature and is defined by this opposition. There are not many distinct descriptions of the city of Boston in the story; the places which are mentioned and the actions of city-dwellers bear only negative connotations. The central places with which the reader gets acquainted are the prison, where the story of Hester Prynne begins, and the scaffold, on which Hester is tried and on which Dimmesdale, the father of her illegitimate child, confesses his sin. Such a setting brings association only with crime, guilt and punishment. Other places, including city institutions are almost completely neglected, as if lives of inhabitants revolved around taking punitive measures against fellow-men.

Because of the scarcity of city descriptions, it is presented rather through the impressions which its inhabitants and their actions exert on the protagonist. Hester Prynne, who is tried and punished by the authorities of Boston for the sin of adultery, is imprisoned not only literally, but also metaphorically, by the Puritan mentality and morality of the city-dwellers. Interestingly, the Bostonians who are first mentioned in the story are those, who want to see the culprit being punished:

> The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison-Lane, on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston; all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door. (Hawthorne 1188)

The inhabitants of Boston are presented as strict, law-abiding and pious people. The narrator calls them "these good people" (Hawthorne 1188). But they all make a crowd which appears to be uniform: they all seem to hold the same opinions, be in the same moods, have the same judgments:

> there was (…) solemnity of demeanour on the part of the spectators; as befitted a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and the severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders at the scaffold. (Hawthorne 1188)

That is why, once she is released from her confinement, Hester Prynne prefers to stay away from the crowd and feels much better when she leaves urban spaces and goes to the woods. It is outside of the city where she re-acquires her freedom and her identity. The city overwhelms her, forces her to assume the false identity of a sinner, whom she feels she is not. Like Bartleby, Hester Prynne has the impression of being oppressed in the city; and like Bartleby, she loses her identity, for she is perceived only through the letter A which she wears as a sign of punishment, while Bartleby is judged only by the amount and quality of performed work, and his individuality is completely neglected.

Through this negative representation of city space and through setting it in the implied ("Bartleby") or directly expressed ("The Scarlet Letter") opposition to the

world of nature, both Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne expressed their dissatisfaction with some directions in which the American society was heading: materialism, consumerism, hedonism, and also false morality, hypocrisy and selfishness. What results from the confrontation with the city is the alienation of the protagonists. Both Bartleby and Hester Prynne act alone and against the rest of the citizens who, unlike them, adapted to the life in the city. Neither of them fits the urban environment – therefore Hester finds refuge in the woods and Bartleby dies, unable to escape from environment which deprives him of vitality and the will to live.

About one hundred years later the American playwright Tennessee Williams, like his romantic predecessors, seemed dissatisfied with the directions in which the American society was going. Such phenomena and events as industrialization, the growth of great fortunes, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, resulted in the spiritual bareness of many Americans, in their discontent with formerly cultivated ideals. Beginning from the post-World War II era, the American society was perceived as money-oriented, consumerist and pragmatic. Like other forms of literature, drama reflects social changing attitudes and reacts to many events in the world. Therefore Tennessee Williams, like some other American playwrights of that time, also responded to the new situation. Two plays of Tennessee Williams display numerous similarities with the examined texts of Melville and Hawthorne, both in structure and in meaning. These are *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961).

A Streetcar Named Desire, like *Bartleby*, is set entirely in the city, and the city is New Orleans. The protagonist, Blanche DuBois, arrives in the city to visit her sister Stella and Stella's husband, Stanley Kowalski, and to inform them about the loss of the plantation where the sisters spent their youth. In the play, Williams contrasts the melting-pot of New Orleans with the romantic vision of the lost estate.

Thus, when confronted with the plantation which was called, significantly, Belle Reve – a beautiful dream – the image of New Orleans becomes negative. As the play opens, the part of the city to which Blanche arrives, is described as "poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm" (Williams (1) 115), there is "the atmosphere of decay" (Williams (1) 115). Ironically, Stella and Stanley's apartment is located in the city district called „Elysian Fields"; to Blanche it is a place which "Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture (…)." (Williams (1) 121) The stage direction opening the play reassures: "(…) New Orleans is a cosmopolitan city where there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town" (Williams (1) 115). This relatively positive image of the city changes, however, when it is confronted with Blanche's memory of the plantation, "A great big place with white columns" (Williams (1) 119). This remark is brief, but it carries with it a whole load of associations related to the myth of the Old South as it existed in the American popular mind. Thomas Porter thus writes about the myth:

> The general details of the plantation myth are well-known. The image of a large, white, six-columned house set amid acres of lawn and garden with a periphery of slave cabins and cotton fields provides the proper setting. The owners of the big house are aristocrats with the appropriate chivalric virtues and patrician vices. The master is autocratic, prideful, gallant; the mistress is a paragon of the domestic virtues (…). The Negroes are devoted serfs, contented of their lot. Life on the plantation is easy and gay, a round of lawn parties, dress balls and visiting (…) The young men and women spend their time on at play and courtship. Coquetry from the lady is never mistaken for indelicacy; exuberance and high spirits among the gentlemen is always tempered with courtesy and a sense of honor. The War is a duel fought by gentlemen to preserve the old plantation and the way of life that flourishes there. (Porter 157)

Thus, the one line about "place with white columns" carries memories which are related to the young years of Blanche and her sister Stella. This is why Blanche's first impression of the city "is one of shocked disbelief" (Williams (1) 117), and she says it is "this horrible place" (Williams 120) From her perspective, the city is rough, noisy, and unpleasant. Space and orderly arrangement of the plantation are contrasted with the very modest two-room flat in which Stella now lives; the quiet home from the past is set in opposition to the noisy streetcar which every now and then passes the house in which Stanley and Stella live, and safety of the southern plantation contrasts with dangerous city where Blanche is raped. Like Bartleby, Blanche feels alienated from and oppressed by the city. She is overwhelmed by poor living conditions, in particular she lacks space and silence. Every now and then she presses hands against her ears, for the noise, in particular the noise of the eponymous streetcar, is unbearable for her:

> A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hands to her ears and crouches over. The headlight of the locomotive glares into the room as it thunders past. As the noise recedes she straightens slowly and continues speaking. (Williams (1) 183)

Unlike other inhabitants, who adjusted to the living conditions in this city and who accepted its deficiencies, Blanche never comes to like this place. Stella, whom Blanche had not seen for a long time, seems to have changed; she is no longer sensitive and delicate the way she used to when she lived on the plantation; in the city she got used to being brutally treated by her husband. Stella adapted to the city, and she says: "It's not bad at all! New Orleans isn't like other cities." (Williams (1) 121) at the same time implying that "other cities" are "bad", which might suggest, that urban spaces are "bad" in general. But a stage direction seems to deny Stella's words, as it makes it clear that New Orleans is a dangerous place, where drunkards, prostitutes and thieves dwell:

> The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle. The shadows and lurid reflections move sinuously as flames along the wall spaces. Through the back wall of the rooms, which have become transparent, can be seen the sidewalk. A prostitute has rolled a drunkard. He pursues her along the walk, overtakes her, and there is a struggle. A policeman's whistle breaks it up. The figures disappear. Some moments later the Negro woman appears around the corner with a sequined bag which the

> prostitute had dropped on the walk. She is rooting excitedly through it (Williams (2) 213).

Most of her impressions of the city are negative; including her perception of the people, who seem very simple, uneducated and materialistic. They are occupied mainly with gambling and drinking alcohol. It seems justified to claim that the character of the city is visible through its inhabitants. Although there are no explicit descriptions of New Orleans, the readers'/spectators' attitudes are shaped by observation of characters who live in the city and are part of the urban landscape. Thus, the initial "raffish charm" of the city vanishes as Blanche gets acquainted with the city dwellers. One of them is Stanley Kowalski, Stella's husband, who, as the play opens is absent, for he plays poker with his friends. For Blanche he appears as a brute:

> He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! (…) There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the Stone Age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you – *you* here – *waiting* for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night! – you call it – this party of apes (…) Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! (…) *Don't – don't hang back with the brutes!* (Williams (1) 163-164).

Stella admires in her husband physical strength, which genteel Blanche cannot understand. Stella does not mind living in a shabby place, she seems not to notice lack of money or roughness of her husband, as if these were acceptable "costs" of moving to the city. But Stella also has become very passive. Like characters in *Bartleby the Scrivener*, she has adapted to new conditions, to life in the city, but in effect she has become inactive. Stella does not protest when her husband is brutal towards her, she meekly cleans the flat after Stanley and his companions have finished playing poker late at night, or does not prevent Stanley from smashing dishes or rummaging through her sister's luggage. She accepts whatever life brings her; in this sense Stella resembles Bartleby's co-workers, who have adapted to office rules and were carried by life events. Blanche says to Stella: "I don't understand your indifferenc" (Williams (1) 158).

Urban life has transformed Stella into a less refined, less requiring from life woman with simple, physical rather than spiritual, needs. She seems to agree with her husband Stanley who said: "Be comfortable is my motto", which sounds like "the easiest way of life is the best" in *Bartleby*. But Blanche, who could not or did not want to adjust to this city lifestyle, was not able to live there and remain sane. She said "I'm anxious to get out of here – this place is a trap." (Williams (1) 219) Like Bartleby, she felt confined in the city but was not able to leave it. Both Bartleby and Blanche are in

some way punished for not adapting to the new urban reality. Bartleby, who refused to leave the office although he had been fired, is taken by the police and arrested. His life in prison is not much different from his life in the office, as he is "caged" here and there. Blanche's most brutal confrontation with the urban reality occurs when she is raped by Stanley, after which she goes insane and is eventually taken to asylum. Apparently, what happened to Blanche is the consequence of her inability to conform to the urban life; she remained too delicate and too fragile to defend herself against brutality of the city epitomized by Stanley.

In *The Night if the Iguana* Tennessee Williams confronts this new, harsh, pragmatic American world with a gentler, happier, seemingly more secure, and beautiful world of nature. *The Night of the Iguana* is set

> in a rather rustic and very Bohemian hotel, the Costa Verde, which, as its name implies, sits on a jungle-covered hilltop overlooking the 'caleta', or 'morning beach' of Puerto Barrio in Mexico. (…) the (…) predominantly primitive Indian village, and the still-water morning beach of Puerto Barrio and the rain forests above it were among the world's wildest and loveliest populated places". (Williams (2) 1976, 228)

The reader further finds out there are wild flowers, cactus plants and "foliage of the encroaching jungle"; this place can be reached only by a path going down to the highway and the beach.

The main character of the play is Shannon, a man whose young years are over. He is a defrocked minister, who has gone through a crisis of religious faith. Having left the church, he travels to various parts of the world looking for some fulfillment. Shannon is an unaccommodated man – having been "locked out of his church", he has not found any substitute for his faith. Now he works for a travel firm, which specializes in guiding church groups. Shannon guides tours to Mexico; he brings the vacationers to the Costa Verde, a hotel in the jungle. The tourists he travels with do not see much sense in their lives, too, and they proceed to degeneration and death.

Shannon, like Blanche, belongs nowhere: he is unable to return to his past life of a minister, but is also unwilling to adapt or conform to the present modern world. For him, this world seems to be complicated, contaminated, and insecure. Shannon, like Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, is suspended between the civilized world, symbolized by the city, and the world of nature, symbolized by the woods. Like Hester, Shannon escapes from this world and goes to the hotel in the jungle, which provides him with some peace and relief.

In fact most characters of the play, like Shannon, are dissatisfied with their present lives. They are a part of the world they really do not want to belong to. This state of suspension, of unconsciously realized impossibility of return to the "prelapsarian" time on the one hand and unwillingness to come to terms with the present situation on the other makes some of them look for some kind of stability in their lives, something they might rely on. They escape from the reality which they do not accept, the reality which is symbolically represented in the play by two cities: Chilpacingo and London. One, Chilpacingo, is situated not far away from the hotel, while London is, obviously, distant from Mexico. But together, they symbolize what lies outside of the jungle; they represent the modern civilized world. The time of the play is the year 1940, the second world war, and a group of Germans stay in Costa

Verde hotel; they are fascists, who constantly listen to the broadcasts reporting the Battle of Britain and sing a Nazi marching song. Their presence increases the feeling of potential danger looming over the unfortunate people. At a certain point of the play radio broadcast is heard informing that London is burning:

> HERR FAHRENKOPF: The London fires have spread all the way from the heart of London to the Channel coast! Goering, Field-Marshal Goering, calls it 'the new phase of conquest! *Super-fire-bombs! Each night!* (Williams (2) 274)

The overwhelming impression of the play therefore is, that the outside world, symbolized by the two cities, is inhospitable and dangerous. This impression is strengthened by its confrontation with the world of nature: the people in the play escape from the world outside, from their cities, to find a kind of shelter in the jungle hotel.

The characters find themselves therefore in a state of in-betweenness, and the uncertainty of their situation makes their existence unbearable. They have escaped from the world of dirt, danger and uncertainty, but they found themselves only in a temporary shelter – a hotel where they cannot stay for ever. Like their romantic counterparts, they cannot find any place for themselves, they have no sense of belonging anywhere. In the play the setting is presented as an ideal, paradise-like place. The protagonists' closeness to the natural world – the jungle, palm trees, birds – brings to mind associations with the past, with the unspoiled world. In the very American context the setting seems to bring the audience to the times of the first pilgrims and, by further association, to the innocence, virginity of the land, and high moral standards of the people inhabiting it. The scenes are as if removed from reality, from "contemporality"; the place is alienated from the world, just like the individuals inhabiting it. This place also brings to mind the romantic idea of confrontation with nature. Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau wrote in "Walden, or Life in the Woods":

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life (Thoreau 1682-3).

Some characters of *The Night of the Iguana*, including Shannon, do find in the woods – in the jungle – a glimpse of hope, they do regain some sense of their lives. Therefore their escape from the outside world – from cities of violence and of war – brings some consolation and relief. But as their stay in the hotel is only temporary, so the regained sense of life is very fragile. Sooner or later they will have to return to their cities – to the outside world.

As they cannot rely on other people and are too weak or vulnerable to even rely on themselves, the characters in the play turn to an idea which has always been a permanent element of American tradition, and which, as they initially conclude, is reliable — God. They turn to the past, to the Christian God who, as they believe, had the power to shape lives of people and help them in overcoming problems. The 'God'

they remember from the past was the embodiment of qualities which they long for: justice, reliability, love, forgiveness. But the God they try to find, remains silent.

This "speechlessness of God" is suggested in most Williams's dramas, in which characters, basically good people but spiritually and morally weak, are deprived of any support from God and are sentenced to despair and failure. Therefore the vision of the world which emerges from Williams's dramas is a sad one – God, who seems to have been the only reliable idea in this world remains indifferent to human fate – and people have nothing or no one to trust and to depend on. This problem is also a part of *The Night of the Iguana*, which deals with the problem of lack of faith in the contemporary society. As Shannon, the protagonist, states: "(…) I tell you they do that, all our theologies do it – accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all He created for His own faults in construction (…)" (Williams (2) 269). The ex-minister, aware of his own sins (he had an affair with a young girl, as well as with some other women), suffers guilt and remorse. On the one hand, he would like to regain the faith he had had in the past. On the other, he is overwhelmed by the evil he sees around, the atrocities of the war, and, in consequence, God appears to him cruel and the world meaningless. Shannon lives among people deprived of religious faith or on the verge of losing it, but hoping to have "something to still look up to, something to still believe in" (Williams (2) 270).

Shannon re-examines his faith outside of the civilized world, away from cities, from wars, and everything which he considers as evil. It is only in confrontation with nature and in the company of vulnerable people like himself that coming to terms with his own situation seems to be possible. The examination of the play reveals that people, facing numerous traumas, tend to become deists – they do continue to believe in the existence of God, but no longer trust in His power to influence the lives of people. In a sense, Shannon experiences the nostalgic feeling for the God of their ancestors, but, confronted with His silence, lack of any interest in his own creation, he reexamines his faith, and keeps searching for some new values, outside religion.

It appears that both the romantic writers and Tennessee Williams notice a certain crisis of religious faith, and try to examine the nature of this crisis. In the story of Bartleby the issues connected with religious faith are completely neglected and the reason for this may be the absence of nature, in which God is present. According to some nineteenth century thinkers (like Emerson or Thoreau), God reveals Himself in His own creation, and studying nature is a source of knowledge about God, as it is like "a second Book of Revelation". This fact explains the absence of God in the man-made world of law and finance in *Bartleby* – nothing is "God's creation" there, only man's. *The Scarlett Letter*, on the other hand, is strongly critical towards the Puritan approach to religion, the hypocrisy of the Puritan clergy and reveals that sin is socially conditioned – that what is seen as sinful by Puritans is an act of passion from the romantic perspective.

The observation of all the characteristics the city is endowed with in the texts under scrutiny is possible only because the characters arrive in the city from the outside. They are not part of the cities which they confront in the examined texts; on the contrary, the city is an alien environment to them. And, thus, Bartleby appears on the threshold of the office one morning from "somewhere". Nothing is revealed about his past except the fact that he used to work in Washington. But in the office, which

symbolizes Wall Street, and, by extension, may also stand for the city of New York, he appears from the outside, from another reality.

Hester Prynne came to Massachusetts from a distant land. She was born in "Old England", later moved to Amsterdam, to, eventually, settle down in the city of Boston:

> Yonder woman, Sir, you must know, was the wife of a certain learned man, English by birth, but who had long ago dwelt in Amsterdam, whence, some good time agone he was minded to cross over and cast in his lot with us of the Massachusetts. To this purpose, he sent his wife before him, remaining himself to look after some necessary affairs (Hawthorne 1195).

Blanche came to New Orleans from the plantation which she had lost. After she abandoned the plantation Blanche lived for some time in Laurel, but she left it to look for help from her sister. Shannon, who is now a tour guide, arrives in various cities and towns only for a moment. In all those cases the "intruders" are confronted with city dwellers – and it appears that inhabitants of cities do not see what the newcomers notice – the routine, lack of space, noise, danger, shallowness, materialism. The citizens accommodated themselves to the urban reality and seem to be incapable of noticing the shortcomings of the life in the city. In Williams's plays, there appears an individual, who is an "unaccommodated" man. This fact results from the character's unwillingness to come to terms with his/her contemporary situation, and from yearning for the time gone by; therefore s/he becomes a "dangling man", suspended between unrecoverable past and unwanted now.

In most of the discussed texts a few settings are presented as ideal, paradise-like places. It is the woods in *The Scarlet Letter*, the plantation in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the jungle in *The Night of the Iguana*. The vicinity of the natural world brings to mind associations with the past, the unspoiled state. In the very American context the settings seem to bring the readers to the times of the first pilgrims, and, by further association, to the purity and virginity of the land. This ideal setting seems to come into conflict with what lies outside of it – the town or the city. Outside, as the playwright suggests, there are looming dangers of the contemporary world.

Summing up, cities in Tennessee Williams's plays serve as representation of the modern civilized world. At the same time, the romantic representation of the cities in Williams's dramas is negative, as it is associated with everything which is not a part of nature. Thus the city comes into conflict with what lies outside of it. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, New Orleans turns out to be unbearable when confronted with life on the lost plantation. In *The Night of the Iguana* the paradise-like jungle hotel is like a safe island in the inhospitable world which surrounds it. The city, as the playwright suggests, is associated with the perils of the contemporary world. The city appears as immoral; it is a materialistic, corrupt, preoccupied-with-appearances place, forgotten by God, where people feel alienated. They crave for the times when the world was better. For some more sensitive inhabitants of the cities these places become like prisons. A few characters leave the urban civilized areas to live in places, where they hope to find some spiritual consolation, but the hostile world is waiting to intrude and spoil the momentary relief.

In Tennessee Williams's plays ideal nature clashes with the not-so-ideal city life, fragility with brutality, innocence with corruption, faith in God's intervention with deism, gentleness with violence. Because they refuse to adjust to life in the modern world, represented by the city, Williams's characters never become "accommodated"; the plays' endings strongly suggest that those characters will rather suffer or die than give up their search for the ideas they find precious. The sad suggestion that Tennessee Williams makes is that man holds no hope for a better future: he is destined to live in the world spiritually empty, materialistic, with shallow human relationships.

Works Cited

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Self-Reliance." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym et al, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989. Print.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Scarlet Letter." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym et al, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989. Print.

Melville, Herman. "Bartleby, the Scrivener." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym et al, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989. Print.

Porter, Thomas E. *Myth and Modern American Drama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969. Print.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Walden, or Life in the Woods." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym et al, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989. Print.

Williams, Tennessee (1). "A Streetcar Named Desire." *Sweet Bird of Youth. A Streetcar Named Desire. The Glass menagerie*. Penguin Books, 1959. Print.

Williams, Tennessee (2). "The Night of the Iguana." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Other Plays*. London: Penguin Books, 1976. Print.