

C H A P T E R - I I

THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

This chapter seeks to offer a critical statement on the group of plays which deal with man-woman relationship in the context of marriage. The plays, thus grouped thematically are, - Battle of Angels, Orpheus Descending, The Rose Tattoo, 27 Wagons full of cotton, In a Bar of Tokyo Hotel, A streetcar Named Desire, Kingdom of Earth and Period of Adjustment. For reasons of comprehensiveness, even the two minor, short plays are taken into account.

II

Williams' first play Battle of Angels (1940) is a fine example of his tragic vision which portrays the collapse of familial relationships. The major relationship in this play is the husband - wife relationship as shown between Jabe and Myra.

Myra Torrence wife of Jabe Torrence is undergoing an emotional crisis. Myra, about 34 years old, appears distraught and mentally disturbed and no more wants to live in this world as her husband is physically weak. She says;

I am absolutely desperate from lack of sleep.
My nerves are all on edge - I wish I was dead - dead-
dead.¹

Myra has thus been unhappy in her marital life right from the beginning. She was forced to marry Jabe after her father's death. But somehow she manages to live with her husband and tries to remain faithful to him. She avoids even

David, her premarital lover, when he tries to meet her in the store. But she is basically frustrated because of her husband's physical weakness. She is sexually dissatisfied. And therefore, she demands sleeping pills.

Myra tries to concentrate all her attention in their store, where she has employed three girls, who are all spinsters. She is particularly careful in her business policy. Jabe, her husband is suffering from heart trouble. He is a living symbol of death. Myra, though sexually unhappy with him, tries to remain faithful to him and manages his store well.

But the Myra- Jabe relationship slowly develops cracks as soon as Valentine Xaviers arrives on the scene. Myra tries to stick to the security of marital life for sometime but ultimately falls a prey to the snares of valentine and undergoes a crisis.

Valentine xaviers is a writer who is working on his book. He is a wanderer, a philanderer. He has no faith in the security of institutional security of marriage. He never wants to remain at one place. His behaviour is like a gypsy. He has something special in his personality which tempts women. All his life he prefers to be alone. He is a young man of twenty five with fresh and primitive quality. He has a virile grace and freedom of body with strong physical appeal. Why does such a man with dynamic personality wander? Val himself says that,

" This is just a habit that lonesome people get into".²

Right from his arrival at the store, we see how the lusty girls try to catch him as their lover though without any success. He meets Cassandra who is dark and strikingly beautiful and full of intense feelings. She is the only woman of aristocratic extraction in the play. Her family is the oldest in this part of the delta and once richest. Cassandra knows that the three girls in the store long for Val. She informs Val about them,

Don't you know what those women are suffering from? : Sexual malnutrition ! They look at you with eyes that scream 'Eureka' !³

Valentine Xaviers realises the situation at the store and tries to triumph over it. The three girls at the store and Cassandra, are all longing for this lonesome wanderer. Cassandra not only warns Val about these three girls but she herself tries to win Val. She hopes for Valentine's love at any cost. As she puts it:

May be they just imagine that you do. I can understand why. You're beautiful, You're wild. I have feeling We'll come together some night".⁴

But Val refuses Cassandra, he refuses even the relationship between them when Cassandra says :

I felt resemblance between us. There is none I know, lady.⁵

Thus Cassandra is hurt by Val. She calls him savage. She is aristocratic and both of them want freedom. But Val sticks to his ideal of loneliness and refuses her. Cassandra accepts what she is and says to Val, " You should have killed me before I kill myself, I will some day. I have an instinct for self destruction".⁶

She bids goodbye to the 'snakeskin' Val and goes away.

Myra, the owner of the store is no exception to this craving for Val. On the one hand Val refuses all these spinsters and but he does feel sympathy for Myra, who is also sexually depressed. Val tries to establish himself there with Myra, at least for sometime because he too is tired of wandering from place to place and changing persons. He explains to Myra the reason for his constant moving. There is a rape charge against him and he is wanted by the police. He says :

A woman from Waco, Texas, wife of an Oil field superintendant. I boarded with them. But one day the man was drunk and he too was ! The woman came to him and told, "I am getting away, I am going with yuh."⁷

He refused her of her and preferred to travel alone. The woman screamd that she had been raped. Val had to leave Texas before the daybreak. This is why he travels from place to place. His confession brings him closer to Myra. She does not tell him her premarital affairs but Val understands her when David visits the store. He is clever enough to understand

Myra's appetite for sex.

This is the real crux in Myra's life. Her marital relationship for which she even avoids her lover David, is now about to collapse. Val tries to get closer to Myra. And finally Myra who has tried hard to be faithful to her husband falls a victim to Val's dynamic personality. Myra tells Val;

When people have dreams, they get up singing, they go to the beauty parlour and act like fools all day ! When serious minded people who write big books say, 'What's the matter ?' they simply smile and say, 'we have our secrets'.⁸

Tennessee Williams thus projects contrasting and conflicting sets of values in this play. The entire network of human relationships in this play is governed by these conflicting values. The Myra - Jabe relationship in the early part of the play stands for the institutional values of marital fidelity, loyalty and a meek acceptance of suffering. Though sexually frustrated, Myra tries hard to live within the conventional values of the institution of marriage. Val's arrival sets off an explosion. Val represents a solipsitic kind of individual moral code, in which he is at the centre, with responsibility to none. He stands for open morality as against Myra's closed one.

Thus Valentine Xaviers, the gem of masculine power emerges as a destroying agent of the Torrence family. Myra, like the woman of Texas, wants to run away with Val but he

refuses it and tells her, "I travel by myself, I don't take anything with me but my skin."⁹ While Val is going out, Jabe, Myra's husband listens to their conversation. He realises Myra's madness for Val and her love, and says:

I tried to get rid of the key but that didn't work. Since then all decency's left me, I've stood like a woman naked with nothing but love-love-love."¹⁰

Myra threatens him but Jabe shoots her and she dies. In the darkness, leaving his snakeskin Jacket, Val disappears.

Besides this familial collapse, the other relations with Val are rootless and hence they are futile. The three girls are relegated to background. The remaining two, Myra-Val and Cassandra-Val relationships are climax of the play. Cassandra is excessively passionate. She too wants Val to come away with her. She asks him :

Why don't you come along me? you an me, we belong to the fugitive kind. We live on motion, mile after mile, keeping up with the wind, ever faster. Doesn't that make you hungry for what you live on? May be we'll find something new, something never discovered. We'll stake out our claim before the others go it.¹¹

But Cassandra is unsuccessful in taking away Val with her. She is neurotic and her madness for Val leads her to 'self destruction'.

Battle of Angels, thus portrays a complex network of decaying relationships. On the one hand there is Myra, who despite her deep sexual frustration tries to cling to the conventional values of the institution of marriage. On the other, there is Valentine who is always on the road, and represents a set of individual values. Val is something of a conquerer. He has led a life of sexual conquests.

Williams shows that all these characters are living in terms of sheer passions. That is, what gives them their emotional instability. Since, practically, each individual lives on his or her own island of individual passions, there is hardly any understanding, reasonableness and responsible communion. The result, therefore, is the inevitable tragedy. The main focus in the play is on the collapse of the husband-wife relationship when it is threatened from within as well as from without. The sense of impending chaos and tragic disorder is powerfully conveyed by Cassandra when she warns Myra, "That's just a case of unwarranted optimism. I have it on the very best of authority that time is all used up. Cannot you see feel it? The atmosphere is pregnant with disaster. Now I can hear it ! A BATTLE OF HEAVEN, A Battle of Angels above us and thunder ! And storm ! " 12

A Battle of Angels thus portrays men and women who are completely swayed by unfulfilled passions. Their rootlessness and their final tragedy both spring from their basic emotional instability. A Battle of Angels explores the gradual

dissolution of an ordinary couple's marital relationship into the tragic chaos of passion and rootlessness. Tennessee Williams says of Orpheus Descending

On the surface it was and still is the tale of a wild spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the south and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop.¹³

Orpheus is Val Xaviers, who descends into the hell of a small southern town to rescue the dead Eurydice, or Lady (Myra of the old play), from Pluto, or Jabe Torrence- husband of Lady who snatched her away from the romantic life she dreamed about. Williams uses the same plot, places and persons. In the beginning we are informed that Lady is not faithful to her husband. Obviously, the play begins with the collapse of marital relations between husband and wife. Jabe is cancer-doomed, flint-hearted and is brought back from the hospital.

This relationship between Lady and Jabe is flawed by their incom^batibility. Lady's first lover David Cutrere visits once in the play. Meanwhile Val's arrival as a salesman turns the action into a whirlwind.

Carol, sister of David, an excessive passionate girl recognises Val but he refuses the identification. He starts his services in Lady's store. He is without any experience but answers Lady:

I do electric repairs, all kinds of odd jobs. I'm through with the life that I've been leading. I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted. My life's Companion ! It washes me clean life water when anything unclean has touched me - All my life I been selling something to someone.¹⁴

He is confident enough in his masculine power and says :

They say that a woman can burn a man down. But I can burn down a woman, I could.¹⁵

According to Val there are two kinds of people, the bought and the buyers ! But one more kind in these - 'that has been never been branded'.¹⁶ He assures Lady that he would be honest and faithful.

Lady hates Jabe because he has burnt her father's wine garden and married her forcibly. She has had the revenge motive in her mind since their marriage. Jabe is about to die and Val's entry at the proper juncture leads Lady to her decision. She keeps away Jabe, and takes Val as her companion. Val Xaviers is a differently branded man, who has definite views on life. At one place their conversation becomes highly important.

Val : I would say this. Nobody ever gets to nobody ! We are all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life ! I'm tellin you it's the truth, we got to face it we're under a life - long sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this

earth. The question and going right on as if the question was answered and then well- then you get the make- believe answer.

Lady : Love - that's the make believe answer.

Val : It's fooled many a fool, that's God's truth, Lady and you had better believe it.¹⁷

Given this view of life as solitary confinement, it is not surprising that love has no value in this world.

Jabe Torrence is aware of Val's presence in the store. He knows his relations with Lady. He often reminds her about her father's death and Lady is irritated by it.

Lady wants to take revenge of her father's death so she is unwilling to leave Val. Val assures that he will send her a copy of his book because he loves her. Lady abruptly says :

Oh don't talk about love, not to me, It's easy to say 'Love- Love' with fast and free transportation waiting right out the door for you.¹⁸

As Carol waits outside the store for Val. Lady is lunatic and does not want to lose Val from her clasp. She feels 'Death Knocking' for her. At last she allows him to to and says,

True as God's word ! I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body has burst in flower ! You've given me life, you can go.¹⁹

Jabe in the darkness overhears this and shoots Lady and shouts that the clerk- Val has robbed the store and killed his wife. The police take him away.

The play ends with the complete destruction of husband-wife relationship. The Jabe-Lady relationship is a loaded one. At last Jabe wins his goal as he kills both Lady and her father. Lady is not faithful because the basic relations are not rooted in loyalty. She was forced to accept her lot. Jabe pretends to be ill, but he is a man of wild nature. Lady does not receive love either from Jabe or from David. It results in Val's affair and ends in her death. This loaded husband-wife relationship is the soul of this tragedy.

One more husband-wife relationship is found in the play. Sherief- Vee who love good each other. Vee is a painter of primitive art. Once Vee comes closer to Val. He puts his hands on her bosom and is caught by sherief. Though this relationship is normal one, it magnifies Val's character.

Orpheus Descending is thus a mythic extension of Battle of Angels. It is Tennessee Williams' searing drama of a wandering guitar player whose passionate liaison with Lady incites a hot tempered man to brutality and violence. The play provides a deeper exploration of the theme of marital relationship in the context of frustrated passions and wild

desires. The play shows the collapse of the traditional, institutional values of marriage. But it also shows how this collapse does not necessarily imply an alternative value of love. Men and women remain groping creatures inhabiting what W.H.Auden has in another context called the world of "unlove".

III

The Rose Tattoo (1950) is in a sense, another version of Battle of Angels or Orpheus Descending. The play opens with children's games. Serafina, a Sicilian is a wife who always remains faithful to her husband. She says, " I saw the rose tatto of my husband on my left breast ".²⁰

Serafina is a widow with definite views on man-woman relations. Woman should always be considerate and not like gypsy Estelle, she says, "A woman should not encourage a man to be wild".

Her husband Rosario is dead. His ashes are kept in her house. Rosario, a driver had illicit affairs with Estelle, 'the witch' in the eyes of Serafina. But she does not know this relationship and when she comes to know it, her faith to shattered and she too takes another man, at least for a temporary period. Three years after the death of Rosario, Serafina has locked Rosa, her daughter in her house

and that too naked. Rosa is in love with Jack, a sailor. Rosa tells her teacher, Miss Yorke, that her mother wants her to live like herself. The way they lived is -

The way that we live, she never puts on a dress.
She stays all the time in that dirty old pink slip!
And talks to my fathers ashes like he was living.²²

Serafina is 'disgusting' for Rosa. She becomes introvert, nervous and maniae. She does not believe Jack, the American. She has faith in her dead husband. She does not allow her daughter Rosa to marry Jack. Once she catches them together. She calls him hunter. She is frustrated when she says;

To have a good time and the Devil cares who pays for it ? I'm sick of men, I'm almost as sick of men as I am of women.²³

Serafina interviews Jack and then accepts him as Rosa's prospective companion. She is totally Catholic in her behaviour. But the repeated thoughts of her husband, his memories, his being disloyal to her make her aware of truth which she tries to seek from Father De-Leo; who according to the laws of confessions refuses to tell her and advises her to mix in society. But, she speaks of social, familial conditions in America in general terms :

They make the life without glory. Instead of the heart they got the deep-freeze in the house. The men, they don't feel no glory, not in them, get drunk, women, they go to bars, fight in them, get fat, put

hours on the women because the women don't give them the love which is glory. I did, I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion. Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories only.²⁴

The speech shows her faith in her dead husband.

But in the latter part of the play she changes her mind. Alvaro, a driver wants to be with her forever as he is in search of this type of old lady. Alvaro demands her hand and says :

I like a woman that laughs with all her heart, I like everything that a woman does with her heart.²⁵

Alvaro is ready to forget all her past and wants her to be happy, jolly. He says, "The important thing in a lady is understanding, good sense, and I want that".²⁶

The play ends with Alvaro- Serafina's secret meeting and both of them are caught at the hands of Rosa, who is ready to go with Jack. She tells Alvaro to go out. The ashes of her father are blown out by wind. Serafina, the ideal wife has no answer for her behaviour. She too is tempted and has forgotten everything. The play explores the theme of marital relationship and presents a dramatic conflict similar to that in A Battle of Angels. Serafina tries to remain faithful to the memory of her husband. She tries to impose a similar value system on her daughter Rosa also but the knowledge that her Rosario himself had illicit affairs unsettles her. Then

she changes her mind and falls in love with Alvaro. The play is not exactly a tragedy but it does show once again the futility of traditional conformist's values. This is well symbolised in the scene when Rosario's ashes are blown away. In a different way The Rose Tattoo explores the problematics of marital relationships.

In the Bar of Tokyo Hotel also deals with the same theme of the collapse of marital relations. The play takes place in a bar of Tokyo. We are informed that Mark, Miriam's husband is not in a proper mental condition, so she wants to cable Leonard, their friend. Mark suffers from nervous breakdown. He is a painter, an artist. He speaks a vague and meaningless kind of language. Both Miriam and Mark hate flowers.

This husband- wife relationship collapses when Mark tries live apart in loneliness. Miriam says, "Loneliness has become a worm out thing to discuss".²⁷ Miriam is not faithful to her husband and tries to fool him but Mark knows her tricks. She goes out late in the night and returns near daybreak. She meets a man, Elaine, who has his own marital difficulties. But Mark waits for her all the while. Leonard, their friend does not agree with Miriam's saying that Mark is mad. In fact, he is a painter, an artist who is not tenderly treated by his wife. His paintings are the pictures of madness according to Miriam but Leonard does not accept this. Miriam is also responsible for Mark's frustration, and

mental collapse. Their conversation brings out this relationship clearly.

Mark : Pretension is unpardonable offence, we live in a gossippy world and we cannot go a step outside.

Miriam : The circle of light stays with me, and not with you.²⁸

Miriam makes him more introvert and nervous. He collapses downstairs. The discussion ends with Mark's death.

Thus the marital relationship between Mark and Miriam has cracks right from the beginning. Mark is frustrated because of the behaviour of his wife. He is under treatment of neurophotologist but Miriam can't attend to him. He is left alone. Her permissive behaviour, relations with Elaine shows her being disloyal to Mark. She is trying to get rid of him and Mark realises it. His frustration develops more and tragedy overtakes him. Psychologically speaking, he dies of loneliness. Thus their marital relations are exploded.

27 Wagons Full of Cotton (1946) is a short play which Williams revised for a film version Baby Doll. This is a play of husband- wife relationship in which Jake Meighan and Flora Meighan try to cling to this relationship but without any success.

Jake the businessman takes on a job to gin 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, a pretty business for him. He meets Silva Viccaro who describes to him Flora's slim figure. Jake now

seeks help from Viccaro. Silva and Flora form the main action of the play. Flora tells Silva about what happened the previous day. She tells him that Jake was out after supper last night, the very night when the gin of Silva was burnt. Silva's minute asking makes her suspicious about her husband. And catching this clue, Silva makes her tell about their marital life. They do not have good relations with each other. Silva has got a mean look in her eyes. Here Silva is confirmed that Jake alone has burnt the godowns and wants to take revenge. He shows interest in Flora.

Jake realises his wife's dreamy behaviour and calls her 'useless wimmen'. But he knows better that his business is dependant upon Silva's help. At least Silva accepts his 'good neighbour policy' and seduces Flora.

The relations between husband and wife are blown to pieces at the end of the play. Jake is interested in money and for the sake of it he cares least for his wife. But this comedy- as Williams calls it - ends in the collapse of the relations between husband and wife. Williams is interested in showing the picture of modern American Society, particularly, the marital relations which govern a couple. Jake overrules the marital values for the sake of monetary and materialistic things. In this play Williams has deplored the southern myth, by the gross mercantile values which have replaced the old aristocratic culture.

IV

Playing to capacity houses from the start, A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) won both the Drama critics Award and the Pulitzer prize for 1947 -1948. Williams regarded Streetcar as the best that he had yet produced. This play also maintains the thematic pattern of marital relationship. Williams is remarkably loyal to his favourite thematic pattern, and for that reason it seems to provide an indispensable key to the nature and meaning of all his plays.

The principal relationship in this play is between Stanley and Stella. Stella is living a happy married life with her wildman Stanley. Blanche, her sister has a good reason to fear the loss of her beauty and to lie about her age. Meeting after a long separation, Blanche requires somebody nearer and has come to Stella's house. Blanche has got into the habit of living alone; and her loneliness is her only companion. Blanche, has lost her homosexual husband and laments for him for sometime. But now she is in need of a man. She is a nymphomaniac. Therefore, her mental condition is abnormal. Every now and then, she hammers Stella about the rude and wild behaviour of Stanley. But Stella is happily living with him and is about to be a mother of his baby. They are altogether different in their nature. Stella is practical and affirms marriage. Blanche is desperate. Her affairs, her lying about her age and lastly, her turning into a maniac, these transitions show us that she is abnormal and a contrast

to Stella.

The husband- wife relationship is at the centre of crisis in Streetcar Named Desire Stanley Kowalaski, a wild man loves his wife. But he suspects the character of Blanche which Stella does not believe, because it would affect her faith in the values of marriage.

Stella, the wife is a flower in the Williams wilderness : She is normal. She feels deeply for her sister, and for all his coarseness and for all his roughness, loves her husband. She does not allow Blanche to wreck their marriage. Thus husband- wife relationship in this play is important. After the rape scene, Blanche informs Stella about it, but Stella values her husband more.

If we consider this relationship, Stella is a balancing presence between the world of roughness and coarseness of Stanley and the sophisticated world of Blanche. She is a woman of adjusting nature. Not only Stella revert Blanche to her former values but her sympathy goes out to Blanche for her tragic marriage and its aftermath of her desperate search for love. She tries to shield Blanche, from Stanley. Stella's inner conflict reaches a climax when she and Blanche come back from the festive evening to see him in barbarous revelry.

Stanley's behaviour is ugly and harsh towards Blanche. It is unsympathetic. His love for Stella is

unquestionable. One of the happiest pieces of the play is the moment when Stanley having beaten his wife, calls her back from the neighbour's apartment where she has taken momentary refuge. He whines like a hurt animal, shouts like a savage, and finally his wife descends the staircase to return to his loving arms. This husband- wife relationship in A Streetcar Named Desire has its rootcause in the social ideals of marriage. Whatever may be the case, Stella remains a wife and proves her genuine love for husband.

There are many reasons for Blanche's downfall. She is lonely and impractical. Therefore, she never settles in her life. Her losing her husband, lamenting for the past days and hoping for Mitch lead us to say that she wanted brand new human being. Loss of faith in the primary values of life has made her nymphomaniac and in the end she is sent to the hospital. She is a pitiful figure, but in a sense, she has been asking for what has happened.

In Battle of Angels, Orpheus Descending, The Rose Tattoo and 27 Wagons Full of Cotton - in all these plays the basic pattern is that of a marital relationship threatened by an outside agent. The outside agents in these plays are Val, Alvaro, Silva. In Streetcar the outside agent of destruction is a woman- Blanche. Herself frustrated, she challenges Stanley's masculine ego and it becomes a battle of passions.

Tennessee Williams' main focus is on the possible destruction of marital relations by an outsider. Compared to other women like Myra, Serefine and Flora; Stella presents sobriety, the quality of acceptance and forgiveness. She is a woman with positive qualities which prevent her marriage from being a tragic disaster. Yet another feature of the play is the relative multiplicity of women characters. Tennessee Williams explores the psychological complexities of Blanche and Stella. In this context, an observation made by Stanton is highly relevant. Stanton says :

All Williams' ideas seem to follow from this basic concept of Anti-hero. Evil, for example is not only to be found in society. Evil also exists within the self - Blanche, Big Daddy, Jabe Torrence, Sebastian, Boss Finley and Shannon are dramatic demonstrations of it. All have weaknesses of the flesh and are selfish- even brutal. Good is spirit as opposed to flesh; dreams as supposed to mundane reality; ideals as opposed to brutality; above all it is love as supposed to selfish interests.²⁹

Kingdom of Earth (1968) is Williams' major play in the later phase. Like other plays in this group it too addresses itself to the theme of marital life. Lot and Myrtle, husband and wife and chicken- Lot's half brother are the only three characters in it. And these familial relations lead the major events of the play towards a tragic end.

Myrtle- Lot, a newly married couple comes to a village, which is about to be surrounded by floods. Williams has juxtaposed Myrtle and Lot in terms of their incompatibility. Myrtle is a fleshy woman and Lot is ten years younger than her. Myrtle dominates him in an amiable way. Lot is released from the hospital and comes back home in the floods.

Chicken is jealous of Lot as he got Myrtle, and scares them of flood, so that they should go back. Chicken is interested in the house only. He wants ownership of the house after the death of Lot, and thinks that Lot will meet death earlier. He does not believe in their marriage and asks for the marriage license.

Myrtle tells him that she worked in show business and Lot saved her, she offered him to choose her as either, 'to be a Holly wood queen' or 'Life-easy-queen' and he preferred the second. They married and came back. Chicken says that it is a 'make believe' sort of thing. He warns Myrtle about Lot's illness, i.e.T.B. and says he will die soon. Scared by this, Myrtle thinks to go back to Memphis. Lot guesses Myrtle's thought and realises that she is protecting herself. He tells her, - "Yes, selfish as hell, but when people are desperate, Myrtle they only think of themselves" Lot warns both of them that they are selfish- chicken for the house and Myrtle for her safety. But Myrtle assures him,

I understand. And I'm going to devote myself to you like a religion, mystery as you are, back of that ivory holder and Mona Lisa smile.²⁹

Chicken is lunatic and often thinks of himself. He wants to destroy the marital relations between Myrtle and Lot. Myrtle informs Lot, who is unable. He plans to take back from chicken all the documents about the house.

Myrtle goes downstairs and chicken threatens her by opening flood trap and throws a cat in the water. She makes him drunk but it does not affect him. She gets his past account and knows about Lot's mother, who was not faithful to his father. Chicken, further, scares her by saying everybody will be drowned except him and the house will be his. He keeps the paper with him. He assures her to help only on the condition that she would obey him.

Lot suspects Myrtle's behaviour when she goes back to bring the marriage license. He realises that soon he will be victim and that he has brought Myrtle for chicken. Chicken forces her to write a letter telling that the house will be his. Myrtle feels that her life is 'evil'. But Chicken says :

I think that life just plain don't care for the weak or the soft. A man and his life - both got to be made out of the same stuff or one or the other will break and the one that breaks won't be life.³⁰

He forces her to kiss him. Lot repeatedly says that he brought Myrtle for Chicken, ' A present from the dying'. Myrtle is afraid of life and she wants protection from drowning in the floods. She believes that Chicken can protect her while they talk Lot gasps and collapses down-stair and meets death.

The husband- wife relationship remains no longer stable as Chicken threatens them. In the early part of the play this marital relationship is stable and valued. Lot's plan fails and for the sake of house he loses his wife. He cannot save her so Myrtle accepts Chicken. Myrtle is an ideal wife in the beginning but when her life itself is in danger, she unwillingly leaves Lot who meets death at the end of the play.

For the sake of saving her life Myrtle kills her ideals. Unwillingly she accepts Chicken who is her saviour, protector. Chicken expresses his attitude towards life in the following words.

In this whole Kingdom of Earth just that thing, nothing more, is perfect. The rest is crap. Just one thing is good, and if you never had nothingelse but that, no property, no success in the world but still had that, why then I say this life would be worth something, and you better believe it. Yes you could come home to a house like a shack in blazing heat look for food and find not a single crumb of it. But if on the bed you seen a woman waiting may

be not very young or good looking even, why, then I say you got a square deal out of life, and whoever don't think so has just not had the right woman. That's how I look at it, I see, at it now, in this Kingdom of Earth.³¹

Chicken's threatening makes Myrtle change and she falls a victim to her lust for living, and even forgets 'religion' of wife. The flood water surround the farmhouse at the end of the play, as Chicken pulls Myrtle to safety. She cuckolds her husband, destroys her lover and tries to save herself but she fears the dark-floods- symbolizing death and disintegration.

Williams is interested in showing how man struggles for survival, forgetting and breaking every relation and tries to live at any cost, at any price in this 'Kingdom of Earth'. In this frantic craze for survival all other values become subordinate. When it comes to her survival Myrtle gives up her commitment to Lot and goes to Chicken. In the plays we have examined so far, we see that Tennessee Williams' strategy is to put every marital relationship on trial. The reasons vary from one couple to another. In Battle of Angels and Orpheus Descending and The Rose Tattoo, it is husband's sickness, his past illicit affairs or as in the case of Period of Adjustment simple emotional incombati-bility. In the Kingdom of Earth, it is Myrtle's interest in her own survival which makes her throw all other values to the winds. Tennessee Williams has thus provided a series of

changing contexts in which the marital relationship is put on trial resulting in loneliness, death or failure of dreams.

Period of Adjustment also concerns itself with the same frustrated men and women of the south. Williams emphasises the marital values and concepts of family. He shows three couples in it, who try to remain faithful. They want to continue their marital life, though they are neurotics.

The husband- wife relationship is at the centre of this play. Ralph Bates - Dorothy, Isabel and George Haverstick, Mr. and Mrs. McGillicuddy; these are the three couples, each of them facing different problems of adjustment.

On a X-mas eve, Isabel and George come to Ralph's house as Ralph and George are warmates. Ralph, a middle aged man is alone in his house, as Dorothy, his wife has left him for his being out of job. George- Isabel are married just before a few days but are not on good terms with each other. George leaves his bride at Ralph's house and goes away.

Both Ralph and Isabel are in the same condition. Isabel, a nurse loves George who never understands her tender feelings. The same is the case with Dorothy. This marital relationship is futile as Ralph tries every now and

then to adjust himself. He consols Isabel and tells her, " You're just going through a period of Adjustment ".³² But she feels as if she has lost everything by marrying George. Her behaviour, speech is sad and forlorn. When she tells him that she married a stranger, Ralph says :

Everybody does that. Marriage is an economic arrangement in many ways, let us face it.³³

Both, George and Ralph are jobless. Ralph married a daughter of millionaire who is 'fallen into hands of a psychiatrist' and the doctor dignoses it as "psychological frigidity".

Williams is interested in showing the collapse of marital values. On the x-mas eve, Ralph is alone and waits for his son. Similarly on the next day of their marriage George leaves his wife who waits for him till late night. The meaning of life is not understandable for them. Isabel is sophisticated on the contrary George is wild. Isabel is philosophic when she tells Ralph,

We are all of us born, live and die in the shadow of a giant questionmark that refers to three questions: where do we come from? Why? And where, are we going? ³⁴

Isabel is violent while telling her experience of the previous night in a hotel. Ralph advises her to wait as it is a 'period of adjustment, a little time'. George does

not come till midnight. Ralph is dedicated conformist and says, 'women are vulnerable creatures'. All the while he tries to bring Isabel and George together, and tries to maintain the relationship without any cracks.

Williams has juxtaposed both Ralph, a Sober conformist and George, a wild tempered. Even Ralph telephones Isabel's father and conveys her being all right. But George has lost his faith in marital relations and wants to divorce his wife. But Ralph does not allow them to do it. All the three are married jobless persons.

Next morning Dorothy, alongwith her parents come there to collect her things. Mr. and Mrs. McGillicuddy her parents give impotence to money and not to Ralph as their son in law. It is a sort of quarrel. Then, it is Isabel's turn to advise Ralph, 'It's a period of Adjustment'. She tells George:

Isabel : moods change quickly

George : Basic attitudes don't.

Isabel : It takes a long time to form basic attitudes and to know what they are, and meantime you just have to act according to moods.³⁵

Isabel does not allow Dorothy to go back, because it is a frightening thing for, "Two people living together, two- two- different worlds ! attempting, existence- together !"³⁶

Both, Ralph and Isabel try to continue their marital relationships. The play ends with the coming together of the two pairs.

In this play the husband- wife relationship is a prominent theme. Two couples fight for mutual understanding. Dorothea- Ralph; a matured couple too struggles for their understanding. Ralph is a balanced and dedicated conformist who convinces George and Isabel. George is a wild and rough man, on the contrary Isabel's feelings are tender. Dorothea is just obeying her parents. She is 'psychologically a frigid' woman.

Period of Adjustment, as the title itself indicates, explores the problem of adjustment in marital life. The play touches upon one basic aspect- the institution of marriage. If each individual is a world into himself or herself, if each individual existence is a kind of lonely island; then how can two people come together and live in harmony and understanding? Tennessee Williams has explored this problem in Battle of Angels, and in Orpheus Descending. In all these plays then, Williams offers an analysis of the problematics of the institution of marriage. Though these two plays, The Rose Tattoo and Period of Adjustment seem to provide happy restorations, that does not in anyway, cancel out the tragic implications inherent in the very relationship.