

# The Myth and Dream of Paradise

by John Navone, S.J.

It was Tertullian who coined the phrase, *anima naturaliter christiana*. This means that in the innermost depth of every human being there is alive a sort of natural religion with its standards of true and false, good and evil; it means that man is pre-programmed to a sense of wonder and awe before the mystery of his existence and meaning within the universe.

Plays, like *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in this essay, often imply this basic truth of man's openness to the transcendent when a man's dreams are seen to surpass both his personal resources and those of his society for their attainment, yet dream he must. In fact, his dreams may become more real for him than any other reality of his historical condition, bearing witness to that reality which underlies human awareness and, nevertheless, transcends human definition.

Sometimes the dream is associated with madness when a man, tragically deluded about the meaning of his life, destroys himself in his attempt to force reality to conform to the shape of his illusions. There is a profound pathos in a man's faithful response to a destructive illusion, to the wrong dream: even this, however, is perhaps better than no dream at all. In any case the theatre in general and Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar* in particular reveal much about man and the quality of his dreams; they reveal how much man and his society can be transformed for better or for worse by them.

Men live by their dreams and hopes, defining themselves by their expectations. Hope is the force and power behind the dreams that influence their lives. There is hope in the possibility of realising the dream, in the power of the dream, when realized, to transform and fulfil men's lives. Dreams give concrete expression to hope, and are ultimately judged by that hope. If the dream fails to satisfy that hope, if hope stretches beyond the dream, then the dream is rejected by the very hope which first brought it into being. It is shown to be an illusion, a false dream.

Drama is one of the many means that man has created for communicating his dreams. Expressing man's experience of the world around him and of the world within him, dramas such as Tennessee Williams's are forms of enacted myth, embracing the many-sidedness of man, revealing the simultaneous disparity and coherence of that which is and of that which ought to be. However implicitly, drama communicates the experience of what the playwright believes to be most real in the world.

*Glass Menagerie* and *Streetcar* are highly significant dramas which reflect everyman's odyssey through time in which he searches for answers to the mystery of his existence. They invite us to share the experience of those who seek the fulfilment of a dream for some kind of personal integrity. Williams expresses everyman's odyssey in the symbols and categories of his cultural milieu, creating myths for our time.

Myth is a tissue of symbolism clothing the mystery of everyman's odyssey. There are mythic qualities in any world-view because the ultimate mystery of human living is never completely accessible to discursive reason. There are cultural, psychological, and spiritual realities which underlie myth as the symbolic expression of truths about man's own life and thought. Scholars have noted parallels between myths and dreams, and have seen in them projections of, or objectifications of, man's inner strivings and desires. Myths, they conclude, express man's self-understanding or his groping toward an identity. Myth expresses the experience of that which is most sacred and pre-eminently real in the human life-story of individuals and societies; it attempts to express man's position in a mysterious universe. I have written about this more fully in my book *Everyman's Odyssey* (Seattle University, Seattle, 1974).

The word 'myth' itself is derived from the Greek word for a story, a tale, or the plot of a play. Myth is a vision of the world characterised by a narrative form, images, symbols, personification and dramatisation. These qualities are present in plays. They are supremely present in the plays we are considering, where *Blue Mountain* and *Belle Rêve* are forms of an idealised past paradise, where Jim O'Connor and Harold Mitchell represent two potential saviour-gods, where Laura Wingfield and Blanche DuBois are defeated by the crisis of their lives and retire forever into an illusory world of their own creation.

These two Williams plays recapitulate the characteristics that distinguish the three major categories of myth: (1) beginnings, (2) change and struggle, (3) the final state of things.

Beginnings are the theme of creation and origin myths. Cosmogonies tell how the world began; theogonies relate the origin of the gods; anthropogonies narrate the origin of man. Myths of the original state describe the conditions which obtained after the world came to be. Here we find the myths of the golden age and of paradise.

Transformation myths straddle the first and second categories of myth because they relate how suffering, evil, sin and death originated and changed the idyllic, primeval state of well-being into the present crisis-ridden situation. They tell of seduction, the fall, and the flood. They tell of the struggles of man with the powers of nature, the inner conflicts of man with himself, the problem of death, and the end of all things. As a counterpart to the transformation myths we have the saviour myths in which a saviour-god struggles with the powers of evil and eventually conquers them.

Eschatological myths concern the destruction of the universe by catastrophes at the end of time and of its renewal with the dead rising to life. They deal with the restoration or 'salvation' of the universe, effected by a saviour god or king or hero. They tell of the return to a paradisaical state of existence, characterised by peace and happiness, the condition lost in primeval time.

The three categories of myths focus on different aspects of a time which transcends any particular time: (1) a past, primeval time; (2) a critical present time; (3) a future end-time. These times are characterised by certain qualities.

*Myths of beginnings* like Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve, focus on an idealised past time, paradigmatic of happiness and goodness. It is remembered with nostalgia as a time when we were treated with respect and tenderness and, therefore, experienced self-esteem and security. It was a time of mutual recognition, acceptance and approval in which we enjoyed status in meaningful relationships with others. It is recalled as the benevolent time, devoid of anxiety and tension, in which trust, faith, respect, peace, innocence, and loving kindness were first experienced. It was a time of a blessed environment, of a sustaining family, of belonging and of being at home, where most needs were satisfied almost automatically. Whether the individual's recollection of home or the national recollection of a golden age, it was *the good time* cherished as the measure of every subsequent time.

*Transformation and saviour myths* focus on the problematic of the present time, the time between the primeval and the end-time, the unresolved time of transition, characterised by biological, moral, social, intellectual, and spiritual life-crises. Both myths concern change. Both focus on the present context which furnishes man with the elements, the oppositions and the problems with which he must deal if he is to live. Transformation myths relate how things came to be what they are, how one state of affairs became another. Saviour myths concern the conflict between the forces of life and death, of good and evil. They derive from the hope, provided by the strengths of man's context, of overcoming the death-pull of those evils which threaten the integrity of human life. They look to a person through whose agency we may be delivered from threatening evils. Hence, Amanda looks to Jim O'Connor and Blanche looks to Mitch with the hope that a 'saviour-god' has come to overcome the obstacles to the realisation of the aspirations symbolised by Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve.

*Eschatological myths* concern the future, final, and permanent time that has been achieved at the end of the temporal process. It is that ineluctable and final time that is ushered in by a chain of catastrophic and apocalyptic events. It is akin to that apparently endless permanence of time which Laura and Blanche reach after having been abandoned by their respective gentleman callers.

Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve, like the Garden of Eden, are para-

dises in an idyllic pastoral setting, close to nature at a time when their inhabitants were in harmony with nature. They are remembered as having been pleasant places, recalling 'Eden', the Hebrew word for 'delight'. They are contrasted with the dreadful, urban jungles of St Louis and New Orleans, respectively, to which their former inhabitants have been driven by misfortune or some equivalent of an 'original sin'. The pastoral past is idealised as a type of golden age which contrasts with the meanness, complication, and spiritual poverty of the present urban crisis-setting. Cities, in contrast, are a metaphor for the bewildering, maddening, terrifying complexity of life.

Blue Mountain recalls the Sacred Mountain where heaven and earth meet, the cosmic mountain, the highest point of the earth, the point at which the creation began at the centre of the cosmos, suggesting the centre of human consciousness, a metaphor for the heart of everyman, the point of departure for all human life and activity as well as the point of return. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Blue Mountain is the home of Amanda Wingfield's youth. It is the world of the past, symbolising youth, beauty, gentility, honour and tradition—everything that Amanda sees vanishing from the world around her. Blue is for Williams the colour of memory, and Blue Mountain represents all the beautiful memories to which Amanda attempts to cling. It is, like Laura's glass menagerie, an inspiring world which Amanda recalls in order to derive strength to face a cruel and severe present.

Belle Rêve, or 'Beautiful Dream', is that place to which Blanche DuBois recedes in her memories to relive through imagination the time when her life had purpose, love, hope, and beauty. The 'Beautiful Dream' is a refuge, a sanctuary, which suggests that the possibilities in life for beauty, purity, and love ultimately reside in and issue from the imagination which transforms the everyday experience of occurrences into events, which has the power to fill the void in lives which are incomplete and to ease the pain of their longing. Belle Rêve is that higher vision of every man's possibilities experienced by his suffering and crippled nature; it is the dream of the humane environment in which men could live purposefully as friends. Belle Rêve is that permanent vision of a higher reality without which the attainment of that missing part of reality is unlikely. Belle Rêve motivates the quest for completion, reflecting the power of a myth to shape human development.

Both Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve function as a temporal matrix among those for whom memories of a golden age are meant to make the future. Where memories are longer, identities may be linked with recollections of a glorious past; for example, the collective memories of Nuremberg's citizens include a glorious Sixteenth Century whose signs were visible in its architecture. After the war and bombings, the centre of the city was rebuilt to recapture the atmosphere of that glorious past which still plays a vital role in the self-identity of the

living city. Both Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois aspire to rebuild, to reconstruct, to renew their lives in terms of the paradigmatic first principles of their lives: Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve.

Carl Jung's thought contributes to an appreciation of the mythic quality of Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve. Jung regarded myths as psychological realities, as expressions of the archetypes or primordial images of the collective unconscious. These are real in the sense that they represent inherited forms of patterns (in the Platonic sense of ideas) present in every human being. At first these forms are without specific thought content; content is provided by the specific culture. Myths give a local habitation and a name to these general forms and give them reality by manifesting them to consciousness. Myth, for Jung, is not invented but experienced; myths have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent; they are the mental life of a people.

The Old South as a nostalgic myth, as idea and ideal, exerts an influence on the popular mind in America. The depiction of real situations perforce has to include the pressures exerted by the myth on the Southern mind. Foremost among the complex of attitudes that crystallised in the myth is an acute sense of time and place. The Southerner had a sense of identification with a given segment of the earth, of belonging on the ancestral estate, that the transient Northerner can only admire. As this attachment to the land became less a reality and the agrarian ideal came into conflict with the forces of industrialisation, the Southerner became more aware that there was no compromise between the old modes of Southern life and 'progress'. The sense of alienation from proper place is joined to a preoccupation with time. The inexorable march of progress and the loss of the agrarian system to urbanisation and the machine conflicts with a past that represents a glory and a heritage. The vitality of this noble heritage in the imagination makes adjustment to the variegated society of the present difficult. The passage of time challenges the survival of the old ways and ideals. If Plato called upon myths in the service of human discourse about divine things and the mystery of human existence, Tennessee Williams calls upon Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve for much the same purpose.

Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve share the quality of dreams. They reveal the dreamer's self-image, his expectations for the future, his imagined solutions to pressing problems, his thoughts, desires, impulses, memories, concerns, and mood. They reflect the dreamer's view of the nature and meaning of life, the quality of relationships and the degree of relatedness. They express the dreamer's personality structure, his subjectivity, his attitude towards life. Jung regarded dreams as the most authentic, most autonomous and purest product of the unconscious psychic process, and therefore presenting our subjective state as it really is.

Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve are the earliest recollections of

Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois. Their early recollections tell us much about them. The study of childhood memories reveals that the child makes active choices from the multitude of experiences to which he is exposed daily and that some incidents, places and people are regarded as particularly important and memorable. The nature of these memories—whether pleasant or unpleasant, whether the child's participation in the experience was active or passive, whatever the role played by each person in his environment—will determine the child's and subsequently the adult's apperceptions and expectations. Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve are early recollections from which we may infer a great deal about Amanda and Blanche. They represent a family constellation, the structure of a family, the matrix from which the adult Amanda and Blanche have formed their picture of reality.

Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve are images of hope. Here the study of William Lynch, S.J., *Images of Hope* (Helicon Press, Baltimore, 1965), is apt. The phenomenon of hope, according to Lynch, is possibly the most basic of all religious impulses. He believes that it serves as the starting point for both a psychological and metaphysical understanding of the religious life. What he means by hope, the projecting of one's inward wishing and desiring in the form of images, applies to the dynamic of Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve symbolism in the lives of Amanda and Blanche. Lynch affirms that such a capacity for hope constitutes the first principle of mental wholeness, and its absence in the psychic life of the person is the most fundamental meaning of mental illness. This capacity for hoping or wishing he identifies with the capacity for fantasy. Thus fantasy is the absolutely necessary and indispensable dynamic source for what can become a more stable and pervasive sense of self-transcendence, for it is a moment of opening up of new ranges of energies and symbols which not only lead to religious reality, but which can also be understood psychologically. In fantasy, then, lies the beginning of religion. The longing for everything that Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve represent corresponds to the firm hope that the meanness of the present can be transcended, that there is a state of paradise as the ultimate human possibility.

What Shubert Ogden describes as the religious character of myth complements Lynch's insight into the link between hope and fantasy and contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning of Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve: 'that manner of representation in which the unworldly and divine appears as the worldly and human—or in short, in which the transcendent appears as the immanent' (*Christ without Myth*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1961, p. 24).

Blue Mountain and Belle Rêve are what William Lynch would designate as 'images of limitation' ('The Imagination and the Finite', in *Thought* 33, Summer, 1958, p. 209). In themselves, such images are the path to whatever the self is seeking: to insight, of a human kind, or some transcendent emotional ideal such as peace, to beauty,

or to God. Whatever the self is seeking, it cannot help taking certain attitudes, forming certain judgments, and this in an immediate, intrinsic, spontaneous way, toward what Lynch calls 'the images of limitation' it experiences. Lynch calls these attitudes 'theological', using the word deliberately in its broadest sense, to indicate that there is more in ourselves and in our images, myths, and dreams than meets the eye. These attitudes permeate the images, myths, and dreams so that they are always mutually forming, creating, sometimes even distorting each other.

There is no dream without wish, no Blue Mountain or Belle Rêve without human longing, and no dream-telling, myth-making, *Glass Menagerie* or *Streetcar*, without owning up to one's wish. There is a dream of paradise at the very centre of everyman which works its way out in that tissue of symbols that is myth, expressing through images of limitation the reality of every individual's life-story, personal drama, or 'myth'.

# Paul's Reluctance to Baptise

by Josephine Massyngberde Ford

It has often caused the present writer some *admiratio* that in 1 Cor 1: 14-17 Paul appears to show such reluctance to baptise<sup>1</sup> but upon reading Kildahl's *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*<sup>2</sup> an insight into the situation was suggested to her.

In 1 Cor 1: 14-15 Paul declares:

I am thankful (or I thank God) that I baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius; lest any one should say that you were baptised in my name.

Such a statement is not found elsewhere either in the Pauline Corpus or the rest of the New Testament, or to my knowledge in Christian writings: this would suggest that a special situation in Corinth warranted such reluctance. One main peculiarity of the Corinthian Church was its overenthusiasm and its stress on the gift of tongues.<sup>3</sup> The Acts of the Apostles demonstrates that on extraordinary occasions

<sup>1</sup>Not arising as Barrett suggests from lack of appreciation for the sacrament, C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper & Row, N.Y. 1968, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, Harper and Row, 1972.

<sup>3</sup>This is the only epistle where tongues are explicitly mentioned although one might conjecture that the gift was used at Ephesus because of the reference to it in Acts 19: 1-7.