

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2012

## Disciplining The Body: Societal Controls Of Gender, Race And Sexuality

Michelle Renae Bright  
*University of Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bright, Michelle Renae, "Disciplining The Body: Societal Controls Of Gender, Race And Sexuality" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1164.  
<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/1164>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

DISCIPLINING THE BODY:  
SOCIETAL CONTROLS OF GENDER, RACE AND SEXUALITY IN  
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S DELTA PLAYS

A Thesis  
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
For the degree of Master of Arts

by

Michelle Renae Bright

December 2012

Copyright Michelle R. Bright 2012

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

Tennessee Williams has long been recognized as more than a Southern playwright. While his plays have resonated with international audiences for decades, my thesis argues that the American South, and particularly the Mississippi Delta, is necessary as a representative site of suppressed social freedoms for Gendered, Racial, and Sexual Others. Much of Williams's scholarship is done within the context of drama or performance studies. However, this project demonstrates how Williams's work lends itself to interdisciplinary study by utilizing the social and environmental history of the Delta, as well as gender studies and ecocriticism, to illuminate the cultural hegemony he attempts to dismantle.

## DEDICATION

*“A prayer for the wild at heart that are kept in cages”*- Tennessee Williams.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my thesis committee who each served as mentors guiding me through all the challenges that graduate school encompasses long before I asked them to be a part of this project. To my director, Dr. Katie McKee, thank you most of all for enduring all the many drastic changes until I was certain I had narrowed all my crazy ideas into one feasible thesis topic. Not only did you help me find the confidence and motivation to sit down and finally start writing, but any other growth I did as professional during that time I owe largely to your guidance.

Dr. Colby Kullman, I thank you for your passion and unfaltering belief in me even as an uncertain undergraduate student when all I knew was that I was fascinated by Tennessee Williams, his life and his work. It is because of your enthusiasm that I believed I could one day share this queer bird with all the other fugitive kind. Most of all, I thank you for teaching me that more often than not I need to walk away from the books and enjoy my loved ones.

Dr. Andy Harper, you also served as important reminder to work to live instead of living to work. But while we were working, I appreciate you teaching me how to find the better

way to tell a story and for always being willing to answer all my panicky questions in the field until I gained the confidence to trust my own instincts.

I am also grateful to the other professors who contributed to my scholarship: Ted Ownby, Charles Ragan Wilson, David Wharton, Zandria Robinson, Jodi Skipper, Jaime Harker, Leigh Anne Duck, Jimmy Thomas, Michelle Coffey and Deborah Kehoe. In addition, I owe a huge debt to Pastor Chet Bush and the rest of my Oxford Nazarene family, my lionesses and FaulkNerds, plus countless other friends and cohorts. I am blessed to have you serve me in a million different ways, the least of these which include: proofreading, recommend reading, resolving my computer problems, answering research-related questions, listening to me talk through ideas, offering encouragement, babysitting, nourishing me or even just reminding me to eat when necessary.

To the many folks in Clarksdale who aided in my research: Panny Mayfield, Jen Waller, Reverend Jason Shelby, Dixie Gordon, Kappi Allen, Bill Lockett, Eva Connell, George Wright, Kenneth Holditch, and a special thanks to Scarlett Bright for her hospitality. To my parents, grandparents, brother and the rest of my amazing family, just because it is impossible to count all the ways you each helped me to achieve this goal does not mean that I do not still try from time to time.

And most importantly, I give thanks to my son, Jefferson. No one has had to make more sacrifices than you for this project. I appreciate you allowing me to work, even if it meant you had to be very quiet that day or cook for yourself or miss out on some fun event. I promise now that this is finished, there will be much more time for snuggling and other more important matters.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. DIS(PLACED) BODIES:	
PLACE AS A BODY, AND EVERY BODY IN THEIR PLACE .....	13
2. DISCIPLINING SEXUALITY AND OTHER BORDER CONTROLS .....	38
3. FREEDOM IS FOR THE BIRDS:	
EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM .....	66
“FREEBIRD”: A CONCLUSION AND CODA .....	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	101
VITA .....	108



## INTRODUCTION

*“Place gives shape and boundary to social inequalities...and social change”- (Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place*, 17).*

On March 26, 1911, Reverend Dakin Williams was preaching a Palm Sunday sermon at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Columbus, Mississippi, when his daughter Edwina Dakin Williams went into labor with her second child and first son. Thomas Lanier Williams III was born that day to Cornelius Coffin and Edwina. He later adopted the pen name “Tennessee” even though Williams spent the majority of his childhood living in Mississippi rectories. His father was a traveling salesman, who constantly stayed on the road, mostly because he liked the freedom it gave him away from his family. His mother chose to live with the children in her parents’ home, following them wherever they moved rather than face child-rearing alone. When Williams’s grandfather, Reverend Walter Dakin, accepted a position as minister at St. George’s Episcopal Church in Clarksdale, the Williams and the Dakin family relocated to the Delta town where Williams lived for no more than three years of his childhood, but spent a lifetime remembering in his work.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the influence of his Delta childhood on Williams’s work, see Kenneth Holditch’s *Tennessee Williams and the South*.

Three days shy of one hundred years later, I was driving to Clarksdale to interview visiting scholars and literary tourists at one of the many celebrations planned that week for the centennial celebration of Tennessee Williams's birth. As I slowed to a stop at one of the intersections in Batesville on Hwy 6, I saw a large white truck painted with images that had been tormenting so many Mississippians the past few days. People were gathered on both sides of the intersection, eager to hand out their fliers in support of Initiative 26, a proposal that according to the Mississippi Secretary of State webpage, would amend the "Mississippi Constitution to define the word 'person' or 'persons', as those terms are used in Article III of the state constitution, to include every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning, or the functional equivalent thereof" (Hosemann).

I began rolling my windows up, but not quickly enough. A young man had approached the passenger side of my car and was asking or saying something. I told him I cannot take your flier. He leaned down to look into my car, reached his hands through the passenger window I had not been able to roll even half way up yet, and tried to give me the pamphlet with the same bloody fetus image that was emblazoned on the truck. I told him, no, I cannot take your flier, still trying to be polite despite the tears that were beginning to form as a result of my anger.

He made a comment about me going to hell for my choice, and I began yelling for him to get out of my car and quickly began rolling up my window up as I drove away. After driving a mile or so down the road, my anger had magnified to where I could no longer see through my tears so I pulled off the road, parked on the edge of someone's

soybean field, and called the pastor of my church to help me through this emotional crisis so I could continue with my research trip, not knowing yet how all these events and emotions would coalesce in my thesis. I belonged to a multi-racial congregation with a pastor who very often says things like, “Jesus was not afraid to reach out to others across social boundaries like race and gender, and I think we as a church should model the same behavior.” It seemed logical to me that a pastor who very frequently reminds his congregants that women were just as important to Jesus’s ministry as men, and just as capable to be leaders in the church, and that Jesus was not above reaching outside social and ethnic boundaries to minister to anyone, would be just the right person to help me figure out what my response should be.

“You’re describing this as if you’ve been assaulted,” he said as I tried to describe what had happened without too much interruption from my tears and hiccups.

“I feel like I have,” I told him. I continued talking and my anger grew until I was practically shouting: “I’m just so angry! They wouldn’t allow pornographic images to be shown like this in public! So, why this? Why is this allowed?”

“I think it’s important to explore why it is you associate this image with pornography. I think that’s an interesting association,” he said.

I was first trying to make a point about limits to free speech. But then the more we talked, he helped me to realize that just as these protesters were saying abortion objectifies humanity, their method of protest was also objectifying. As a journalist, it hurt me to consider limitations to free speech, but this assault on human rights hurt me even more.

After my pastor and I finished our conversation, I continued to sit in my car and let myself grieve for people I knew who had abortions and would see this attack being led by a group proclaiming to be Christians and would have one more reason to believe Christians did not care about them. I ached for women who longed for children in which *in vitro fertilization* was the only choice for them and for those imprisoned in a social system in which their rights were deemed insignificant. And I angrily wiped away tears thinking about how this proposed amendment seemed yet another way in which men were trying to assert their power over women, even though there were some women campaigning for this legislation.

Later, as I looked for a focus for my thesis, I could not ignore the compulsion to see how the issues that were emerging in the 2012 campaign season were related to my research on Tennessee Williams and his Mississippi Delta childhood. Clarksdale and the surrounding Coahoma County landscape provide the setting for thirteen of his major plays, several one-act plays, poems, and short stories, but this study narrows in on four of his full-length Delta plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Summer and Smoke*, and *Orpheus Descending*. The first two plays are not typically labeled as Delta plays, but the characters have very important off-stage memories in the Delta and all four plays speak specifically to disciplining the body as it applies to the major themes of this study: 1) imagining place as a body, 2) boundaries of a body, such as gender, race, and sexuality, as social constructions 3) using the body to signify revolutionary insurgencies and 4) looking at birds as a queer, or non-normative, body and what their movements or immobility says about freedom.

As I began to narrow my focus to these four Delta plays and their commentaries on the limitations of social freedoms for some groups in the southern United States, I began to see how the fight for these freedoms has not ended in the U.S. The current political climate in this country suggests these age-old anxieties are not only toward female sexuality, but also toward what Michel Foucault argued was the power structure inherent in sexuality. It is also important to consider what Riche Richardson says about how black masculinity was imagined in the south as something dangerous and hyper-sexual and how that stereotype permeated the national imaginary, thus creating a distrust of black men in power, like we see with the current presidential administration.

For the first time in American history, there is a black man leading the country. The result has been four years of anxiety-riddled rhetoric such as questioning President Barack Obama's nationality, and consequently his commitment to serving the country's best interest. On June 9, 2012, *The New York Times* published dissertation findings of Seth Stevens-Davidowitz, a doctoral candidate in economics at Harvard, suggesting that Google searches have become more racist in the United States since Obama took office. His research indicates that racism will be more prevalent in the 2012 presidential election than in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Then, on September 20, 2012, *Salon* magazine reported that "two people may have single-handedly set back civil liberties by nearly 100 years by hanging Obama effigies in their yards" (Gupta). These hangings, also referred to as chair lynchings, are a response to Clint Eastwood's August 30<sup>th</sup> speech at the Republican National Convention where he addressed an invisible President Obama in an empty chair on the stage. The

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information about Seth Stevens-Davidowitz's research, see his article "How Racist Are We? Ask Google" in the *New York Times*.

racial implications of these lynchings are also indicative of the racist behavior Stevens-Davidowitz predicted will increase leading up to the November election as the fight continues in the U.S. for the Republican party to hold on to a white-male dominant heteronormative society.

These anxieties that are being enacted now through legislation that hinders liberties for some groups mirror the white male apprehensions that were prevalent in the U.S. when Williams was publishing. The current president's non-whiteness, his support for gay marriage after the 2012 North Carolina Republican primary which included an amendment banning gay marriage, and his alignment with women's health rights that are inadvertently connected to female sexuality have become the greatest threats to this white male-centric social system that has dominated the United States since its inception. Essentially, it seems anyone who threatens the existence of a patriarchal social system stands at risk to have their autonomy regulated by political leaders who stand in opposition in granting liberties to any who threaten their power.

This past year, as Mississippi was once again thrust in the national spotlight as a battleground for some of these human rights issues, it became even more apparent to me how essential it was to study the social inadequacies that Williams dramatized. Suddenly, I felt a pressing need to examine the limitations that were prevalent then as U.S. citizens are once again divided on what freedoms should be available to certain groups. I had always seen Williams as a very subversive playwright when it comes to undermining hegemonic standards, but it would take the current political climate to remind me just how necessary art is for putting ideas for social change into the public imagination.

Opponents of Initiative 26 were concerned that such an ambiguously worded bill could have long-reaching ramifications for women who suffer miscarriages, the ability to access various forms of birth control, and other women's health issues. Proponents for Amendment 26 thought Mississippi would be an easy battle to win. Mississippi currently only has one abortion clinic and tighter restrictions for obtaining an abortion than other states. Governor Phil Bryant even signed a bill in April 2012 that states that only board-certified obstetrician-gynecologists can perform abortions, making Mississippi so far the only state with that requirement. After the 2011 election returns, *The New York Times* called it "one of the biggest surprises of the night" when 55 percent of Mississippi voters rejected Initiative 26 (Seelye). Clearly Mississippi's social history does not elicit a progressive stance in the public imagination, but as the voters against the personhood amendment demonstrated, when enough people speak out against injustice, the identity of a place can be reclaimed and appropriated for a different purpose.

Williams's plays are exemplary for trying to make similar recuperations within white male-dominated southern spaces. However, the need to make these recoveries exists because of social policing that inhibits freedoms of certain bodies. For the purpose of this study, the body is used metaphorically as well as physically to demonstrate social inequality. There is much to be said about the way that place or property is controlled and the way bodies are disciplined, or controlled, in these plays. Chapter One shows how the environmental history of the Delta makes Clarksdale not only a logical setting for plays that rail against social injustice, but how it is also a practical backdrop for discussing place as a marginalized body.

Chapter Two explores how Williams uses military revolutions to connect his characters to internal ideas about social liberties. For Williams, sexuality was the key to creating a revolutionary new power dynamic. This chapter will also discuss how he uses characters who are transcending geographical, cultural and socially constructed boundaries like race, gender and sexuality to try to revolutionize the white-male dominated heteronormative southern patriarch.

Chapter Three examines how Williams uses bird imagery to further complicate how social constructions are enacted upon the body. His birds, which are usually depicted as injured or trapped somehow, are connected to a non-normative sexuality that he associates with subversion of the patriarchal system. This chapter also discusses the American Dream as a heteronormative construct and how he connects his queer characters to flight imagery as a way of destabilizing the static notions of the Dream – working at one location one moves up the corporate ladder, living in one place, creating a family and establishing roots in a local community.

Wanda Rushing's sociological research on how place is critical for examining social processes is essential for understanding how Williams's fictionalized Delta tells a larger story of bodily injustices in America. She argues that place is necessary because it is often where the need for change is identified and contributes to the factors that determine what sort of change can be enacted. Williams's purposeful selection of the Delta as the place to examine social inequalities and imagine what happens when people resist these limitations affirms the idea that geography and identity cannot be divorced.



Using Memphis as a case study, Rushing argues that not only does the local matter, but it actually influences social, economic, cultural and material productions on a global scale. Williams proves this by extensively using the local in his plays “to interpret the complex historical role of the American on the world stage” (Bloom 36). Rushing also stresses that “place gives shape and boundary to social inequalities, culture, personal identity, family history, economic development, and social change” (17). The fact that his plays address social liberties about these issues when the nation is on the cusp of World War I and dealing with the after effects of World War II demonstrates how social freedoms are dealt with locally, or the denial of such freedoms, will impact global societies.

World War I’s designation as the impetus for modernity makes time just as fundamental as place for this study of American freedoms as they were performed in the South. Like African-American men, white women served in World War I before they were even allowed to vote. They were regulated to non-combat positions like nursing and physical and occupational therapists or bureaucratic stations, but their service inspired President Woodrow Wilson to push the Nineteenth Amendment. In an attempt to sway the Senate to pass the bill that would give women the chance to become full citizens, he acknowledged the nation’s debt to their war efforts: “[W]e have made partners of the women in this war...Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?” (“President Woodrow Wilson Speaks in Favor of Female Suffrage”). Setting a play that deals most directly with women’s freedoms, *Summer and Smoke*, in 1916 - the year before the United States

entered the war – alludes to important social changes that were about to happen in this country.

*Summer and Smoke* also has the earliest time setting of any of Williams's plays. Its connection to World War I is essential. Scholars like Norma Jean Lutz designate that war as the first event that led to “an almost total breakdown of the social systems of the nineteenth century.” (19). Williams's desire to revolutionize these old social systems makes this a perfect time setting. The nation was on the brink of entering a war that not only ushered the world into modernity but also challenged Americans to examine the social limitations for all groups outside the white-male power structure that dominated most of the United States, but most certainly the South at that time.

*The Glass Menagerie's* main setting is during the Great Depression in America, yet references are made to World War I and II as idealizations of the past and future. The past and future are seen as particularly idyllic when compared to a single mother's struggle to cope with changing gender and economic roles during these interwar years and the anxieties these changes produced both nationally and within her household. *A Streetcar Named Desire* was published in 1947, two years after World War II ended. Stanley is a returning soldier who is looking to capitalize on the promises that the government made that anyone can achieve the American Dream if they are willing to work hard. *Orpheus Descending* is perhaps Williams's most explicit critique of social freedom. The setting is 1957, when the Civil Rights' movement was in full force, and is the only play that deals specifically with lynching as a way of disciplining behavior. In an attempt to exert their control over the bodies of others, a town mob made up of white men

burn two men who are deemed socially non-white for stepping outside the strict social boundaries of this small Delta town.

If one were to study the limitations of American freedoms in the early to mid-twentieth century by looking at the South, then Mississippi, and even more specifically the geographical area that encompasses the floodplain of the Yazoo and the Mississippi Rivers known as the “Delta”, would be the most logical place to start. James Cobb famously declared the Delta to be “the most southern place on earth” because it contains in one limited geographic area the most severe concentration of the problems of the south: racism, a vast division between wealthy white planters and impoverished blacks, low literacy rates and limited access to proper healthcare. (vii). Cobb also recognizes the Delta as a microcosm that signifies, “the conscience and character of a nation as well” (xi). Jennifer Rae Greeson asserts that the South was constructed in the U.S. imagination “so that we may re-present the moral failings of U.S. life to ourselves as matters of geography” (4). If so, then the Mississippi Delta, as representative of the South or the United States, is the most logical place for Williams to assess American ideas of social freedom.

My research interest also evolved out of a desire to disprove the once-popular notion among queer theorists that Williams was not a gay positive writer. In fact, his plays, even when not explicitly dealing with homosexuality, are blatant attacks on heteronormativity. His intentions are clear in the way he uses the rejection of heteronormative standards tirelessly as a theme, and the way he pushes his characters to at least imagine a revolutionary new system of equality and freedom.

When I think back to my uncontrollable emotional response during the campaign for Initiative 26, I realized that it was not for me that I was crying out “to the angelic orders” as Williams, borrowing from the Maria Rilke, asks if it would even be worth doing (1:565). I realize such an outcry to what I see is a bullying of human rights in our country right now might not be the most effective way to find a solution for these problems, and analyzing the works of the most compassionate American playwright in light of the current political turmoil may not do the sort of revolutionary work Williams himself wanted to achieve. But, there can be no doubt that whenever human rights are being questioned, his plays will always be relevant.

## 1. (DIS)PLACED BODIES:

### PLACE AS A BODY, AND EVERY BODY IN THEIR PLACE

The Mississippi Delta became such a vital part of Williams's canon that it seems necessary to inspect how it functions in his work as more than just the common southern literary trope of using place as a character. Kenneth Holditch asserts that the "locale and the characters' predicaments are intertwined" in Williams's plays (xi). Taking that one step farther, this chapter will prove that Williams's portrayal of place as an abject other symbolizes the marginalized bodies that inhabit his Delta towns. My formulation of this place-as-a-body metaphor developed in part from Patricia Yaeger's ideas on reverse autochthony. Autochthony is derived from the Greek words *auto* meaning "self" and *kthon* meaning "earth" and is defined as "sprung from the earth" (wordreference.com). This traditional literary device typically involves characters who arise from the land or waterscape. Yaeger's term, reverse autochthony, describes a southern literary twist on this classic standard where bodies are instead often tossed carelessly into the earth or water usually following violent actions.

Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire* influenced my interest in examining how place in southern literature is often characterized and treated like the bodies that inhabit it and how the disciplining of the body is usually somehow connected to the surrounding

landscape in these plays. Mixing Yaeger's idea of the foundation of the South being made out of "repudiated, throwaway bodies that mire the earth: a landscape built over and upon the melancholic detritus, ...[of] the disposable bodies denied by white culture" with Greeson's study on the literary history of using the South as an abject place, creates a basis for thinking of place-as-an-abject. The four Delta plays I have selected from Williams's canon for this study were chosen because they best illustrate Yaeger's interest in how "bodies that bear witness become racially or sexually marked," and how a landscape built on these throwaway bodies can reflect the social history of the place (33). Yaeger says that these "southern, subterranean bodies...present 'place' ...as a trash heap with profound economic resonance, describing a world whose foundations have been built on men and women who have 'worked all day' and have been thrown away" (18). In Williams's plays, these trashed bodies encompass more than the subservient class; they represent all marginalized bodies, or characters living outside the norms established by the white male ruling class. These characters' nonconformity testifies to a controlling social paradigm that often initiates horrifying violence upon these rebellious bodies as a way to discipline social behavior.

Moon Lake, more than any other place in Williams's plays, serves as a testimony to the atrocities of such oppressions. In that sense, Moon Lake becomes like the marginalized body that Yaeger finds testifying to the social horrors of a place. As a collective body, it is a place that witnesses brutalities upon those living outside the hegemonic social system. Therefore, in a twist on Yaeger's assertion that bodies become sexually or racially othered when they exhibit the social wrongs of a place, Moon Lake

stands in for all the violence and oppression enacted upon the brutalized and neglected bodies that make up surrounding environs. The lake also serves as a disciplinary figure. My use of the term disciplining refers to “behavior and order maintained by training and control” (dictionary.com). Moon Lake works as a disciplinarian metaphor because it is also a place where characters mourn the loss of their youth, and perhaps when they lose their association with the Lake they are losing their parental figures who try to guide them toward a certain model of behavior.

This lake also marks the locale of these fictional Delta towns as Clarksdale, even when Williams names them after real Mississippi towns like Laurel and Blue Mountain. Laurel is actually located in the southeast part of the state, hundreds of miles away from the lake. Similarly, Blue Mountain is at least a hundred miles from the nearest Delta town, nestled in a part of the state known as the northeast hill country. Williams liked the poetic sound of the names, and could very well have made his characters from the real towns and made similar statements about social inequality in the non-Delta Mississippi, but instead he chose to fictionalize those places as Delta towns.

Tension between the differing cultures of the Delta and the remainder of Mississippi further complicates Williams’s ideas of freedom. Holditch describes this tension as a result of the Delta’s disdain for all outsiders, particularly “hill dwellers in the eastern part of the state...who were, traditionally, never as affluent or, as it seemed to many of the Deltans, as sophisticated as they” (44). The “hill dwellers,” however, were just as derisive toward the Deltans, whose reputations for openly drinking and gambling and carousing were unsettling for the other Mississippians who believed such revelry to

be sinful. But as Cobb points out, “[f]rom the standpoint of their moralistic antagonists in the hills, the problem with Delta whites was not just that they drank so much but that they made no effort to conceal it” (140).

Cobb also concedes that this rivalry between the two divisions of the northern part of the state was more than likely centered on the hill country’s jealousy of the white Delta planter’s prosperity that gave them the free time to be so felicitous. It is curious that two of Williams’s characters, Alma and Dr. Johnny in *Summer and Smoke*, are considered outsiders in this play because they seem to represent the extreme expectations of white feminine and masculine roles in the south. Alma also embodies the hill country’s spiritual nature, contrasting with the Deltan emphasis on fleshly pursuits as portrayed by Dr. Johnny. However, the Delta certainly does not have a reputation for disapproving of extreme behavior, so why would these characters be ostracized in a community that supposedly relishes in the abnormal and outrageous? The fact that someone could become abject simply because they perform their expected identities to an extreme seems to indicate that the southern hegemonic power structure is uncomfortable with facing the reality that identities are performative. This disavowal stems from rejecting the ability to transgress social barriers like race, gender, class or sexuality. Regardless, these dichotomous natures were emblematic of Williams’s own contradictory temperament and he sets up this duality in the plays when he moves a hill country town like Blue Mountain onto the Delta landscape.

When Williams writes about this land of his childhood, it is a recollecting or imagining of what it must have been like. He describes his time living in Clarksdale as a



time when he and his sister, Rose, were “gloriously happy. We sailed paper boats in washtubs of water, cut lovely paper dolls out of huge mail-order catalogs, kept two white rabbits under the back porch, baked mud pies in the sun upon the front walk, climbed up and slid down the wood pile, collected from neighboring alleys and trash-piles bits of colored glass that were diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds” (Holditch 21). This idealization of the past is not so unusual for modernist writers, but the rupture from “an idyllic life” to the “abrupt transference of the family to St. Louis” had such a traumatizing effect that Williams spent his writing career repeating the stories of his childhood as if in mourning for it (Williams 11). Holditch also believes the move from Mississippi and the psychic pain of losing what that place represented for Williams is omnipresent in his work. For Holditch, it seems that the move to St. Louis is so momentous that “[s]ubconsciously, Tennessee seems to have blamed most of their subsequent problems, including Rose’s mental deterioration, on that displacement from the Delta” (Holditch 48). This desire to reclaim his childhood is evident not just in the fact that he wrote more about the Delta than any other locale, but also his characters are constantly trying to reclaim their youth as well as salvage a particular moment at a place (Moon Lake) that signifies an important time in their youth.

Williams abhorred St. Louis, which he called the City of St. Pollution, but he hated most the adjustment to living full-time with his father. Cornelius had accepted a management position at the International Shoe Company, which meant he would be home with his family instead of traveling constantly. None of the family members were thrilled with that arrangement, Cornelius included. Biographer Lyle Leverich reveals how

unhappy their homelife became after Cornelius began living with his family full-time when he tells how Edwina upbraided her husband “for his drinking and other un-Christian ways, and he complained about her spoiling the children by giving them the attention he wanted” (53). Edwina unrelentingly voiced her disapproval of Cornelius’s crude behaviors; his alcoholism, all-night poker parties, and obscene language clashed with her strict Christian beliefs. In return, Cornelius was greatly displeased that he had to compete with his children for his wife’s attention, so they fought constantly. This animosity created an atmosphere that frightened their children, who were used to a quiet life in the country with the gentle Dakins.

Nevertheless, Williams at age seven, had been "dragged to that cold northern city which he hated" and then spent his lifetime trying to recapture the childhood he lost in Mississippi (Holditch interview 2011). Leverich’s biography reveals that Williams and his sister, Rose, lamented leaving the South because as the grandchildren of a small town’s Episcopalian minister they enjoyed a privileged social standing they did not experience in St. Louis. In 1920, nine-year-old Williams returned to Clarksdale for the final year that he would ever live in the town he would always associate with the paradise of youth. He was sent to stay with his grandfather while his grandmother came to St. Louis to help Edwina who had just given birth to his younger brother, Dakin. Leverich notes that “Rose was of some help around the house, particularly in watching over her baby brother,” so she was left in St. Louis (54). But, with tension growing in the household among Rose and her father as Rose grew into adolescence and began her mental decline, after Williams returned from his extended visit in Clarksdale, “it was

decided that Rose, too, would benefit from a year with the Dakins” (Leverich 57). Williams’s time there resulted in his collecting the stories that would come to represent the rupture he and his sister felt in being removed from the Mississippi of their childhood.

Living alone with his grandfather, Williams now had the chance to go on parish calls and absorb those local stories that he would later make world famous. He was captivated by his encounters with the townspeople and their behaviors. One family that he borrowed the most material from was John Wesley and Blanche Clark Cutrer, one of the most politically prominent and opulent families in Clarksdale. J.W. Cutrer was a lawyer and state senator and his wife, Blanche, was the daughter of the town’s founder, John Clark, who was in turn married to the sister of the state’s first Republican governor, James Alcorn. (Cobb 94) During Reconstruction, Alcorn was instrumental in providing some civil liberties for black men, if only to ensure his political position and that black laborers would continue to pick the cotton on the five thousand acres in Coahoma County that he owned. The Cutrers large white Italian Renaissance villa-style mansion, which they built in 1916 when Williams and his family first moved to town, was believed by Holditch to be the inspiration for Belle Reve.

Williams added an *e* and used the name Cutrere in *Spring Storm*, *Orpheus Descending*, and two of Amanda’s beaux in *The Glass Menagerie* were “the Cutrere brothers-Wesley and Bates” (1:403). The Cutrers’ son, John Clark, drowned in Moon Lake, a story Williams borrowed for another one of Amanda’s beaux who all left their widows “well provided for” (1:404). Blanche Cutrer, who is remembered for her lawn parties with Japanese lanterns in the trees and guests as famous as Alva Vanderbilt and

actor William Farnham, and her daughter-in-law, Stella, likely inspired the sisters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, arguably the most famous characters in American theater.

The way Williams describes those parish visits is reminiscent of the way he uses light and music and other strategic noises in his stage directions to induce the way he thinks memory should look and sound. In his essay about *The Glass Menagerie's* inception, "The History of a Play," Williams recounts "afternoons [that] were always spent in tremendously tall interiors to which memory gives a Gothic architecture, and that the light was always rather dustily golden" (277). He makes a similar comparison in his production notes for lighting in *The Glass Menagerie*: The lighting in the play is not realistic. In keeping with the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim...[a] certain correspondence to light in religious paintings, such as El Greco's, where the figures are radiant in atmosphere that is relatively dusky, could be effectively used throughout the play" (397). This is also similar to the golden light he gives in the stage directions to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, further supporting Williams idea that his memory of the Delta was bathed in a golden light perfect for the almost heavenly veneration he gives to his childhood memories.

His memory, or else his penchant for poetics and theatrics, creates some discrepancies between Williams's claims about where he gets inspiration for his work. For instance, there are no homes in Clarksdale with Gothic architecture; the closest structure would include the windows in St. George's Episcopal Church. One seemingly sad young woman named Laura Young who they visited more often than anyone else, or so it seemed to Williams in his memory, "lived in a white house near an orchard and in

an arch between two rooms were hung some pendants of glass that were a thousand colors...[t]his prism became a play” (277). Williams claimed they visited this woman because she was dying, although he did not learn this until years later, but his mother discounts this in the biography she wrote about her son, *Remember Me to Tom*: "I don't think many of Father's parishioners actually died, although Tom may have imagined they were dying” (21). Regardless, it is true that Williams drew from a variety of real-life sources for his characters and their characterizations. Alida Clark Heidelberg, reported that her cousin, Phil Clark “was one of the few Clarksdale friends that Tom made in his own age group” (Leverich 55).<sup>3</sup> Heidelberg also revealed that Williams was bullied by a local boy named Brick Gotcher and used that name to create Brick Pollitt, a possibly latent homosexual in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. He also modeled the story of Brick’s broken ankle from a drunken late night hurdle jumping injury on the story of John Wesley Cutrer who was said to have broken his ankle after drunkenly jumping over a massive Elk statue in downtown Clarksdale.

### **Will the Real Two-River County Please Stand Up?**

Williams called his imagined Clarksdale by names such as Glorious Hill, Heavenly Hill, and Blue Mountain -ironic choices for a place so flat he describes it in the poem “The Couple” as "so wide...and so level! The seasons could walk across it four abreast!” (Roessel, David and Moschovakis, Nicholas 102). He named Coahoma County,

---

<sup>3</sup> Heidburg, was wife of Superintendent Harvey Heidelberg, great-granddaughter of James Alcorn, granddaughter of John Clark and niece to Blanche Cutrer, all citizens who shaped the early identity of Clarksdale, and just a sampling of some of the identities Williams uses ironically in his plays to subvert the social system they helped construct.

a place he associated with the duality of the spirit, Two-River County after the real Tallahatchie and Sunflower Rivers that run through the town. The County becomes the perfect backdrop for Williams' explorations of man's dichotomous nature: the body versus the soul, the conformist versus the non-conformist, and most importantly, the ideal dream-like world versus harsh reality.

Williams's renaming of Coahoma County as Two-River County indicates a duality within not only this imagined space, but also the Delta and Mississippi. Cobb called Mississippi "the lynchingest state." Its status as one of the bloodiest battlegrounds for civil liberties makes it an even more compelling setting for the revolutionary new social system Williams is trying to imagine (91). Within the state, the Delta serves as both a place that is extremely repressive, and then, sometimes seems to present itself as more progressive than the rest of the state. One Kansas City newspaper reported that during Reconstruction, the Delta's Bolivar County had "more colored elected officeholders than any whole northern state, possibly a series of northern states" (Cobb 89). Cobb concedes the need to keep the dearth of laborers placated as the reason whites yielded some political power to blacks in the Delta after the Civil War. However, in 1890, white officials in the Delta began pushing for disenfranchisement laws with the intention of taking political power from blacks through indirect measures that would not discriminate against poor whites or invite federal intervention.

Roughly ten years before the push for disenfranchisement, though, black sharecroppers had flocked en masse to the Delta from the north Mississippi hill country because of the potential economic opportunity white planters assured them was waiting.

One Mississippi newspaper reported that “five hundred blacks had been led from Oktibbeha County to a single plantation in the Delta” (Cobb 83). These mass recruitment measures resulted in other farmers from around the state developing hostility toward Delta planters because they were robbing them of their work force and experiencing greater prosperity in their region than the rest of Mississippi at that time.

While the social structure in Clarksdale remained oppressive for blacks, a few places of autonomy emerged. The first was Nelson Johnson’s New World, which was at first just a black-only rooming house but eventually became the name of the section of town where other black-owned businesses flourished and blues music thrived in the dancehalls and juke joints. Weeks gives the impression that this was a transformative space where “after a long day in the cotton fields, people came along on the streets of the New World...[w]hite folks and black folks alike...” (105). W.C. Handy’s version of the social dynamic in the New World district gives a different impression and his firsthand account of the racial intermingling in this predominantly African-American section of town was probably more accurate: “[o]ccasionally they caught glimpses of white men lounging with the pretty near-white ‘imports.’ By using their imaginations they could assume what went on in the dim room beyond” (78). Handy’s version of the racial intermingling demonstrates a different power dynamic reminiscent of plantation owners who took pleasure from their slaves or sharecroppers.

Linton Weeks describes the Delta as a place where people of multiple ethnicities and religions comfortably intermingled. He claims that “through struggles and serendipity, labor and love, people adjusted to one another,” yet the educational policies

in Clarksdale in the early to late twentieth century suggest otherwise (109). Harvey Heidelberg, grandson-in-law to John Clark, was a twenty-two year old passionate and determined young man who became Superintendent of Education in 1905. By 1920, when Williams returned to visit his grandfather for his fourth grade school year, Heidelberg had spent fifteen years pushing for a stronger public education for Clarksdale children. The results made “Clarksdale’s white schools...the vanguard of Mississippi public schools” (Weeks 149) Heidelberg’s efforts for black students were thwarted by a Board of Education that acquiesced to his request by extending the black school system to include a ninth grade, but refused to extend the curriculum to include a tenth grade. Continued efforts to extend education for black students did, however, result in the creation of Coahoma Community College in 1949, the first junior college for blacks in Mississippi.

The Chinese in the Delta were allowed to intermix with the white population more so than the black populace could, but neither minority groups were allowed to attend the white public schools until 1941. After some parents tried for more than twenty years, the Board finally allowed one Chinese student to enroll after the nearest Chinese school closed down. Although the infamous Brown vs Board of Education ruling decreed in 1954 that separating school systems based on race was unconstitutional, it was not until 1970 that Clarksdale, like many other Mississippi schools, began enforcing desegregation. Weeks reports that of the 381 white students attending junior high in Clarksdale in 1970, “378 were withdrawn” after black students enrolled (161). These examples of systematic oppression foster an atmosphere of marginalized bodies making



Clarksdale a logical setting for Williams to imagine the atrocities that happen in a caste system where bodies are so strictly controlled.

Cobb admits that before enforced legislation was enacted, any physical restraint or political levity given to blacks was because white planters wanted above all to ensure their cotton would be picked. He observes that “the localized instability of the work force sometimes discouraged individual planters from engaging in consistently abusive and outrageously unfair treatment of their tenants, but blacks enjoyed little in the way of formal legal protection” (Cobb 124). Still during Reconstruction, Ku Klux Klan activity was so prevalent in Coahoma County, where founder Nathan Bedford Forrest was a landowner, that Governor Alcorn was “compelled to impose a law which prohibited night riders from wearing masks or costumes” (Weeks 53). The Klan retaliated by burning some of Alcorn’s property. These methods were part of a larger pattern of disciplining social behavior that continued well into the twentieth century, limiting the number of people who were willing to resist their placement within the established caste system.

The creation of the Delta itself is similar to the subjugation experienced by the bodies who lived there. Just as black laborers were once coerced into moving to the Delta under false economic pretenses, historian John F. H. Claiborne, who was appointed to “hear Choctaw grievances following the signing of the [Dancing Rabbit Creek] treaty” that turned Coahoma County over to the U.S. government, reports that ruthless, coercive measures were used as part of Andrew Jackson’s plan to remove the Choctaws from the region entirely (Weeks 9). John Clark, father –in-law to John Cutrere, was one of the first to move inland from settlements that began springing up along the river and begin the

mass deforestation and swamp draining necessary to establish what would become Clarksdale. Realizing that Williams's borrowed these families' stories becomes more impactful in light of the fact that these same people created the landscape that Williams would use more than any other place in his enormous canon of writings to illustrate societal controls of the body.

Stripping the land of its natural resources and expecting it to replenish itself every year is comparable to how several white planters treated bodies not belonging to white, land-owning, heterosexual males. No matter how the land was treated it was expected to reproduce profitable crops every year, similar to the black men and women who were expected to labor relentlessly. It is also suggestive of when black women were enslaved and expected to reproduce children who would increase the white planter's labor force. Even freed black sharecroppers who lived on "unimproved land," were expected to clear the land and make it profitable for the white planters, providing a very telling example of how the land and many of its inhabitants were subjugated to an overriding white male majority (Cobb 72).

Because of these socioeconomic reasons, Cobb argues in *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* that it is generally middle or upper-class white southern writers who seem distressed at their loss of connection to place. Although Williams is not from the planter class, his characters, who do not typically fit this description, repeatedly demonstrate the breakdown of a person's psyche when they become disconnected from the place that hosted powerful memories. It is likely Williams's heartbreak over his disconnection from his native land enabled him to create characters whose identities are

very much bound to the land even though he does not fit into the category of the wealthy planter class that Cobb describes. For the planter class, their identity was understandably connected to the land because without it they had no social or economic prominence. For Williams, his characters have different emotional attachments to the land. For them, it is typically a site of great trauma, and they remain obsessed with the place as a way of mourning what they lost there.

Although most of the female characters in this study are from white middle class families, or formerly middle class, their marginalized status allows them to exemplify Williams's seemingly conflicting views of his beloved south. At the 2005 unveiling of the Tennessee Williams commemorative stamp, Kenneth Holditch deliberated on how Williams's characters were searching for that indescribable something that the playwright was also perpetually seeking:

When Amanda Wingfield pronounces a plaintive valedictory for the Old South in *The Glass Menagerie*, some of the sorrow she...expresses is that of the author himself: 'Gone, gone, gone. All vestiges of gracious living! Gone completely!' Commenting on the Old South and what had been lost with its passing, Williams said, 'I write out of grief for what is past' (Holditch lecture, October 13, 2005).

This viewpoint, which seems to glorify the systematic oppression inherent in the Old South, contradicts Williams's desire to create a new social system. The duality inherent in a place he would call Two-River County meant Williams could revere it as his childhood home, yet as a gay man, he knew that he would have suffered limitations to his

personal freedoms if he lived there as an adult because, as he establishes in his plays, sexuality was as central to southern hegemony as race and gender.

Amanda Wingfield probably exhibits the most direct lamentations Williams had toward losing his childhood home. Amanda marries a man and follows him to St. Louis, much like Williams's own mother did, but, unlike Edwina, she exchanges a privileged carefree life for an impoverished existence in a tenement apartment Williams describes as "flanked on both sides by dark narrow alleys which run into murky canyons of tangled clotheslines, garbage cans and the sinister lattice-work of neighboring fire-escapes" (1: 399) Amanda is certainly scarred by the trauma of leaving Blue Mountain, and like many who suffer traumatic events, she mourns the loss by repeatedly telling stories about it to her children.

Blue Mountain is a real place in the foothills of Mississippi, but in *The Glass Menagerie* and the one-act play *Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton* it becomes a fictional name for a Delta town. It most likely refers to Clarksdale because the setting is near Moon Lake, which is in Covich County, or Two-River County as Williams called it. The Delta of Amanda's memory serves as a place of economic freedom if nothing else. It was a place where she never had to learn to do anything more domestic than make angel-food cake because as she likes to remind others, "in the South we had so many servants," but now that she is living in St. Louis everything about that life, both her financial and emotional security, is "[g]one completely!" (1: 442). Either Edwina or Amanda could express similar sentiments in relation to the loss of their Mississippi youth. However, Amanda, who is impoverished in St. Louis with no hope of escape, differs from Edwina

at least economically. When Edwina moved with Cornelius to St. Louis, they were more financially secure than they had been in Mississippi. Nevertheless, their social position was not as strong in a larger city as it had been in small towns where her father ministered to the most socially prominent. Like both Amanda and Williams, Edwina was more interested in trying to retrieve the paradise of the past, if only through memory, than face the grim present or the future. She entertained her children with her incessant tales of cotillions and garden parties from her debutante days, which Williams would later recount in *The Glass Menagerie*, because, for Edwina and her two oldest children, “the comparison of city life with her happy memories of less populous towns like Clarksdale...made the past an idyllic refuge” (Leverich 49).

When Williams employs memory in his work, he is developing a built-in tragedy because all memory is inherently connected to a loss. This technique followed popular white southern constructions of identity during the interwar years in America. Social geographer David Goldfield assesses how southern writers have used nostalgia to bemoan the creation of southern urbanization. He recognizes that often these urban sites offered spaces of freedom that were not available in the rural south for some marginalized groups. He also acknowledges the allure of the past for white upper-class southern writers who wish to venerate the rural south when he says, “There is splendid tragedy in writing about something soon to be irretrievable, except in memory” (95). The newly developing cultural heritage tourism industry also began capitalizing on white southerners’ predisposition for nostalgia with what William Fitzhugh Brundage calls “memory theaters-...settings in which Southerners performed their ‘southernness’ before

eager audiences” (184). Brundage even cites the years between the World Wars as “a watershed in self-conscious commercialization” and the beginnings of incorporating “historical memory...into the commerce of tourism” (184). These memory theaters, which sometimes just included a costumed tour guide, were created as a public response against the onslaught of modernization. For Brundage, public spaces were an inventive way to frame issues of race and power in the post-Civil War south.

Following my reading of place-as-a-body, it is important to realize that it is not just that southerners perform a certain identity in these spaces, but that these southern spaces perform identities, too, or rather the characterization that people stage with architecture or landscaping or décor performs an identity. These spaces represent something more than just being nostalgic for memories – they serve as a sight of mourning because the nostalgia is indicative of loss and these sites are created out of a desire to belong to something or somewhere that is gone. These memory theaters are reminiscent of how Williams’s characters, much like himself, were always trying to reconnect to specific places through their memories.

### **Moon Lake- more than just a body (of water)**

In Williams’s Delta plays, Moon Lake serves as both a private and public space, with most of the land surrounding the lake belonging to private landowners who use the space for businesses that are open for the paying public to enjoy. When Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* loses Belle Reve, the Delta plantation home named after the French phrase, “Beautiful Dream,” she is then forcibly displaced to her sister’s tenement apartment in New Orleans. Many scholars have noted Blanche’s inextricable connection

to Belle Reve as the most visible symbol of her social and economic status while overlooking how integral her association to Moon Lake is to her mental health. Yaeger even mentions Moon Lake as an example of how bodies of water in southern literature are “never simply sites for leisure or hauling cotton or crossing over but sites for recycling sadness” (13). In fact, Blanche’s loss of Belle Reve and her socioeconomic position is a direct result of her grief over her young husband’s death at Moon Lake and her subsequent guilt for the role she played in his demise.

The audience discovers the source of her mental fragility when she tells her latest beau, Mitch, about the night she discovered her husband alone in a dark room with his male lover:

Afterwards we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way. We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later- a shot! He’d stuck the revolver in his mouth and fired- so that the back of his head had been blown away! It was because--- on the dance floor--- unable to stop myself---I’d suddenly said---‘I saw! I know! You disgust me! (1: 528).

Allen’s homosexuality, just like Blanche’s own sexual otherness, labels him as socially insignificant. As Yaeger notes, it is typically those of an inferior social status, and more specifically “the disposable bodies denied by white culture” that are tossed carelessly into the waterscape in southern literature (15). According to traditional literary notions that Yaeger sets out to debunk, Allen’s death should not be that substantial to the plot since

his homosexuality places him outside the dominant heteronormative structure. But Williams rejects this convention in his endeavor to have his characters create a new social system.

Allen's death at Moon Lake becomes the definitive moment for Blanche's emotional development, linking her to the landscape for the rest of her life. She hears the music from this night for years in her memory and each time she cannot stop it in her mind until she hears the gunshot. By the end of the play, she is so incapable of distinguishing these images in her imagination from the reality of the dangerous situation she is in with Stanley, that she is unable to escape before he rapes her.

For Williams's characters, the places they inhabit serve as disjointed places of freedom and oppression. *Streetcar* is most often associated with being a distinctly New Orleans play. Yet, Blanche spends the entire play haunted by her past in the Mississippi Delta town, Laurel, and her husband's suicide on the banks of Moon Lake. It is surprising that when Blanche is exiled from the Delta and sent to a seemingly more progressive place that her experience in New Orleans is more hopeless and oppressive because she has no connection to community that will help her. Perhaps it is because she is disingenuously performing the role of the white southern upper-middle class woman that she is not granted autonomy in the Quarter, a place of liberation for the working class characters who perform their identities more overtly than Blanche. Blanche's Delta memories mark it as a place of social and economic freedom for her for a while, but then she loses both privileges because of her "epic fornications" (1: 490). In *Summer and Smoke*, Alma's battle within herself to become liberated from the social constraints in her



small town signifies both the freedom Williams found in his personal New Orleans experiences and the oppressive social problems he felt a small town in the Mississippi Delta represented for the rest of the nation. Although Alma experiences an unjust social system in *Summer and Smoke*, she exerts some autonomy at the expense of being socially ostracized even before she becomes a more liberated character in the end.

Lady Torrence in *Orpheus Descending* also has a dichotomous experience with freedom and oppression in the aptly named Two-River County. As the daughter of an Italian immigrant who is viewed as non-white in Delta society, she has the privilege to engage in pre-marital sex without social consequence because she already lives outside the social boundaries. This freedom is not available to the heroines in the other three plays. Still, she suffers from racial prejudices in this town-her Italian immigrant father is burned alive on his property at Moon Lake that was set afire by a local Klan-like group of men called, the Mystic Crew. Lady spends the entirety of the play trying to rebuild a replica of her father's Moon Lake vineyard in her store- a vain attempt to recapture the memories of her past. Unlike Lady, Blanche does not overtly try to replicate her Moon Lake memories, but she is so haunted by her husband's suicide that she cannot stop replaying the scene in her mind. However, for all of them, Moon Lake is important as a space that belies the tradition that public spaces exist predominantly as sites of power and memory for white southern males.

Alma in *Summer and Smoke* is the only female character in this study who does not suffer mental anguish in relation to Moon Lake. She is also the only character who is not separated from the lake. However, while she does not lose her connection to this

important place, she has the same longing to return to it as the other characters, and will repeatedly return to this place trying to retrieve a memory that does not even exist. During her first visit to the lake with Dr. Johnny, he traumatizes her with his sexual advances, and so she retreats from society for several months. Then she begins to discover surprising changes in her personality, further reinforcing the lake's significance to Williams's characters' identities. In the end, after she tries to seduce Dr. Johnny and he refuses her advances, she takes the first of her many lovers to Moon Lake, which could indicate a type of grieving for the love she never even had but felt that she lost there. Considering the way Williams portrays his characters' attachment and mourning of Moon Lake and their subsequent memories of the place, it is fitting that Kenneth Holditch describes the name Moon Lake, as "an invocation to a beautiful soothing memory of the past" (46). It is evident that even the characters who mourn the events of their past at the Lake still hold this space in high regard in their memories

Most of the characters who lose loved ones in Moon Lake-related episodes are despondent and the trauma significantly influences their identity. Brundage argues that public space "serves to reproduce social relations that define some members of a society as worthy of access to public life and others as unworthy," and most of the people who die at Moon Lake are considered socially insignificant in the traditional patriarchal system (6). Williams's misfit characters who are linked to Moon Lake tragedies include racial and sexual others, except for in *The Glass Menagerie*. However, heartrending incidents at Moon Lake are only mere anecdotes when Amanda Wingfield glibly recalls how two of her former beaux died, demonstrating her inability to face an unpleasant truth:

Hadley Stevenson ... was drowned in Moon Lake and left his widow one hundred and fifty thousand in Government bonds. [And,] there were the Cutrere brothers, Wesley and Bates. Bates was one of my bright particular beaux! He got shot in a quarrel with that wild Wainwright boy. They shot it out on the floor of Moon Lake Casino (*Tennessee Williams Plays*, 1:403).

Since it is typically Williams's socially insignificant characters who die there, it is astounding to realize that Amanda's misfortunate beaux were white gentleman planters. The throwaway characters in both *Summer and Smoke* and *The Glass Menagerie* would not be considered disposable in other southern stories because white men are part of "white southern culture's dominant emotional economy" (Yaeger 68). Yet in Williams's world, it is the renegades who are valuable and the conformists that are insignificant.

Every character, except Alma, whose identity is attached to Moon Lake speaks of it as an offstage locale, marking the lake as only a place of memory. But, even for Alma, the lake serves as a remote place because she insists that she and Dr. Johnny stay outside Moon Lake Casino where there are tables under white arbors. Still, she and the other characters in *Summer and Smoke* get closer to being there in the present tense than any of the other character in Williams's canon.

In his study on the development of the southern urban history, *Region, Race and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South*, Goldfield compares southerners' inexplicable desire to stay bonded with the land to Antaeus, a grecian half-giant, half-god who was undefeatable as long as his feet were always touching the ground. Harkening back to the Agrarians devotion to the land, he claims that "the southerner loses his or her identity if

contact with the Earth is lost,” (89). His research shows that the urban south which would seem removed from the Earth was very much dependent on the rural south for its identity, more so than other urban areas, because southern cities were developed as a response to whatever natural resource needed to be marketed and sold. Goldfield’s work reveals that while the infrastructure for cities in the northern or southern U.S. might be the same, the decisions behind where to provide services and how efficiently would still be distinctly southern because it “might reflect some regional, class and racial distinctions” (8). Williams’s characters demonstrate this southern peculiarity of place attachment by suffering identity crises when they are removed from places that contain significant memories for them.

However, *Orpheus Descending* may give us some insight into Williams’s view of traditional literary imagining of the South as a mythical place. The play is a modern retelling of the Greek myth about Orpheus, the son of Apollo, who descends into Hades to rescue his wife, Eurydice. But in Williams’s play, the white male leaders in the Delta community represent hellish figures, and the mythical southern landscape is Hades, complete with the sounds of the hellish hounds. The heroes, or anti-heroes, cannot escape this hell except through death, demonstrating Williams’s belief that although he sought to create a new social system, he knew it actually could not exist.

Williams’s prodigious use of Clarksdale, Moon Lake and the surrounding Delta landscape has been largely ignored in favor of studying him as an American dramatist with international appeal. When one looks at Williams through traditional southern literary studies that is replete with the study of place significance, it becomes apparent

why a scholar like Holditch says “Clarksdale represents the most geographically important place in Williams’s life” (Holditch interview). It was a land he felt he could breathe in versus the claustrophobic dreariness of St. Louis. Williams’s friend Oliver Evans said, “[T]he type of character...[Williams]made famous are, of course, women characters who embody many of the attitudes that made it such an interesting place to live” (Rasky 19). Williams describes his strong female characters as neurasthenics. It is precisely their neurasthenia, a nervousness resulting from trying to cope with their emerging sexuality and modernity, which threatens the white patriarchal system. While all four heroines in the four plays I have discussed exhibit neurasthenic characteristics, it is Alma whom Williams uses to most explicitly illustrate repressed sexuality as indicative of repressed social freedoms.

## 2. DISCIPLINING SEXUALITY AND OTHER BORDER CONTROLS

As chapter one demonstrated, place and body have become almost interchangeable in the southern imaginary. This is not too difficult to conceptualize when one imagines how women's bodies were instrumental for building the idea of the south, and how the Agrarians influenced the literary trope of using the landscape as a character in southern literature. However scholars like Greeson and Richardson are developing new systems for southern studies scholarship to rethink how geography determines identity in more complex ways than the Agrarians first proposed.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, Greeson distinguishes the geography of the American South as an "internal other for the nation, an intrinsic part of the national body that nonetheless is differentiated and held apart from the whole" (1). Richardson also acknowledges that furthermore this geography "constitutes difference and otherness within the category of African Americans, particularly among black men" (3). Richardson's book, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South*, illuminates how social constructs like race and gender and geography are not unrelated entities.

Thadious Davis makes a similar proposal in *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* by first expanding on bell hooks's postulation that space itself is

---

<sup>4</sup> For more information about how southern identity is inherently tied to agrarianism, read *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* by The Twelve Southerners.

developed out of a hegemonic discourse. Davis uses African-American literature to demonstrate how these southern spaces that were developed with the intention of being dominated by white male power, are in fact, fluid and virtually incapable of being regulated, heightening the anxiety of the male patriarchy to create borders and control the spaces. Williams's plays further exemplify how arbitrary boundaries such as gender, race, and national borders are essential to the systematic oppression inherent in southern hegemony. In the U.S. South, white women's chastity moved from being just an important aspect of a Western hegemonic social system to the central element constructing the myth of southern exceptionalism<sup>5</sup>. The terrain, therefore, contains not only the bodies of exploited slaves who built the region and other marginalized bodies atop that who have experienced violence and oppression as Patricia Yaeger suggests in *Dirt and Desire*, but the trauma-filled landscape is also symbolically feminized.

Editors Anne Goodywn Jones and Susan Donaldson reify in their introductory chapter to *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* how southern bodies, or southern sexuality, are inter-connected to the construction of southern identity. They illuminate how sexuality has long-been dictated in the south by "hierarchal relationships among race, class and gender" (1). Black men's sexuality was so fearsome that white men deemed it necessary to periodically lynch black men to give the impression that 1) black

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, southern exceptionalism is a southern version of the American exceptionalism myth which they outline in the introduction to their collected essays, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*. They describe this myth as "a story of white racial innocence (occasionally compromised by the 'southernization' of northern race relations), of a benevolent superpower (that temporarily tasted the 'southern experience' of defeat after Vietnam), of an essentially liberal national project (if only the red states would stop preventing the blue states from resurrecting the Great Society)." Their collection of essays further illustrates the idea that the south is just a geographical consolidation of social problems that exist across the map of the United States.

men were sexual beasts and not to be trusted, and 2) that white men would protect white women from the imagined terrors of this rampant black sexuality. This leaves black women further marginalized because while their sexuality was also deemed excessive, except in the case of the supposed non-sexual mammy-figure, miscegenation between a white man and black woman did not threaten the social fabric of the South. However, the thought of a black man having sex with the sexually pure white southern woman was too dangerous for the southern hegemonic structure. White southern men, like all adherents to the importance of the patriarch, needed to believe that their white women's bloodlines were pure and that they were sexually pristine and could produce strong, white males to perpetuate their immaculate southern lineage.

Of course, white women's bodies were not only central to the construction of, but also the fight for, the Confederacy. W.J. Cash's description of white women's chastity as a cult-like worship of white southern femininity illuminates the importance of their sexuality in the identity and the Confederacy and Lost Cause mythology:

She was the South's Palladium, this Southern woman - the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of the foe...There was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close with...the flourishing of swords for her glory. At last I verily believe, the ranks of the Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her they fought (Cash 86).



This idolization of white southern women's sexuality was actually a strategic way to socially pressure these women to conform to a standard of purity white male southerners felt was necessary to ensure the perpetuation of what they believed was their superiority as a race.

Meanwhile black men suffered greatly because of this deification of white southern women's bodies. As mentioned before, white southern men viewed lynching as necessary to containing what they claimed were black men's insatiable sexual proclivities. The effects of this systematic oppression were more than just physically heinous for black men. Richardson's text explores how the psychological impact of being dehumanized and overly sexualized continues to have repercussion for black males in American society and it stems from the mythology developed in the south toward black male sexuality. This fear of miscegenation and its subsequent emphasis on white female purity also created a culture of sexual repression for southern white women. While white women in all patriarchal societies were encouraged to think of sexual intercourse as a duty that must be endured (with their white male husbands only, of course) - to reproduce strong male children to fight and protect the nation - many developed anxieties about their sexuality that hindered their ability to fulfill their obligations. In *Summer and Smoke*, Williams illustrates how the freedom of sexual expression was obstructed for white women in the early twentieth century, particularly in the American South, and how this corresponds to their other limited social freedoms.

It is not so extraordinary to link sexual freedom with social freedoms because there were strict social limitations on sexual activities, and severe consequences for

stepping outside those social boundaries. Black men who were even suspected of sleeping with white women or believed to have made any contact with a white woman were often lynched without question. Cobb observes how white southern men viewed black men having sex with white women as an assertion of equality, “more so than if the black man had purchased the largest plantation in the county, cast his ballot for governor, or dined in a white restaurant” (159). This Foucauldian model of using sex as a power equalizer is central to understanding why sexuality, and by default, the body is disciplined in the American South through social oppression and violent means.

Michael Bibler’s *Cottons Queer Relations: Same-sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation* is a study of plantation power dynamics that reveals how texts like William Styron’s *Confessions of Nat Turner* and Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* have used sexuality in a surprising way to subvert the southern patriarchal model. Bibler borrows the term homo-ness from Leo Barsani to demonstrate how “sexual sameness supersedes all of factors of identity to establish...an egalitarian social bond between individuals” (Bibler 7). Yet, according to his examples, it seems that same-sex relationships alone do not disturb the power structure. For homo-ness to operate in the way Bibler suggests, the couple must also be of the same race; otherwise there still exists an extortion of power between master and servant. Bibler argues differently, though, that just the existence of same-sex desire or a same-sex social bond is the great equalizer. This contrasts with the prevailing belief in some cultures, like ancient Rome, that same-sex but different social position was problematic for men because the penetrated male was considered lowering himself in the power dynamic.

The ingenuity of Bibler's text, though, is his assertion that queer relations between white men of the same economic station actually strengthen the power structure of the plantation patriarchal system. He uses Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to demonstrate how Brick's resistance to a white male homo-ness with his friend Skipper stymies the continuation of the white patriarchal lineage. Brick's inability to claim his inheritance, which was given to his own father by a male homosexual couple, subverts the heteronormative patrinal lineage. The fact that Brick and his wife, Maggie, for whom he no longer has a sexual attraction, share the bed of his metaphorical forefathers represents how adhering to the appearance of a heterosexual marriage in this play destabilizes the hegemonic system because it cannot thrive without the strength of white men asserting their power, which a white male homo-ness promotes.

**“Some women are what is called frigid”**

Since Williams is writing about a time when both women and minorities experienced limited freedom, particularly with their bodies, it becomes vital to look at bodies as the incarnation of revolutionary ideas. Alma's neurasthenia, a form of anxiety prevalent in women thought to be suffering from sexual repression, symbolizes a white woman's fight for autonomy in the early twentieth century American south. Neurasthenia is a disorder that was “an invention of the second half of the nineteenth century, and those who believed in its existence considered it a new disease caused by the stresses of modern life” (Maines 35). In Williams's plays this term is usually applied to nervous, chatty women who feel socially pressured to restrict their passions, whether sexual or not,

and this constraint also makes it a challenge for them to cope with the changing world around them.

Williams was convinced it was his mother's own sexual repression that was the source of her marital problems and his own sexual anxieties for many years into his adult life. Although we have no evidence of what Edwina thought, Williams describes his mother's protests of her husband's sexual advances as moving from "crying...[to eventually] screams emanating from the bedroom" giving him the impression his mother was being raped (Leverich 61). He believed his mother could not even passively accept sex as her wifely duty (as the patriarchal system had taught her) because her unrealistic expectations of romantic love encumbered her ability to respond to what she called her husband's "fumbling and crude" romantic attempts (Leverich 50). Isabel, a lead character in one of Williams's lesser-known plays, *A Period of Adjustment*, describes her husband's behavior on their honeymoon in similar terms. Isabel is of a younger generation than Alma, and, therefore, despite her refusal to sleep with her husband does not seem to have the same anxieties regarding sex. She proudly declares that her husband "married a virgin" while also admitting that she is not sure "that it was [her] strength of will and not his that--- deserves the credit" (2: 262). Still, like Edwina, Isabel was adamant about not sleeping with her husband if he did not at least try to romance her.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Isabel was also the middle name of Williams's sister, Rose. Much of Williams's work involves re-imagining what life might have been like if society had not enforced his mother and sister's sexual repression. He suspected Rose's lobotomy, for which he always blamed himself because he was away at college when it happened, was an attempt to stifle his sister's sexual impulses because her doctor prescribed that she marry. Sex was a common treatment for hysteria at that time, and of course, the only form of socially acceptable sexual intercourse was within the boundaries of marriage.

Unlike the newlyweds in Williams's play, his own parents, perhaps because of Edwina's southern and religious conditioning, were not able to come to an understanding about sexual expectations. As a result, Cornelius would lash out at Edwina, sometimes physically, and then spend almost all of his time after work drinking with friends, playing cards, or having numerous affairs. If he was at home, Williams's father would either completely ignore his two oldest children or neglect their financial needs, preferring his youngest son to his other children. *Summer and Smoke* can be seen as an imagining of how different Edwina's and consequently Williams's life would have been had his mother rejected the social codes that impacted her attitudes toward sex. He believed that his mother and sister "were both victims of excessive propriety;" and if they had achieved sexual liberation that he gives to Alma, then their lives would have been significantly improved (Leverich 61).

Before she undergoes a great change, Alma shares many similarities with Williams's mother, Edwina, who lived in Clarksdale, Mississippi, the model for the fictional Glorious Hill where *Summer and Smoke* is set. Both women are daughters of Episcopal ministers with nervous dispositions living in small towns in the Mississippi Delta during World War I. As a matter of fact Leverich describes Edwina's speech as "nervous chatter [that] bordered on hysteria and created panic in any would-be suitor" (25). Alma's speech is characterized similarly, yet her speech is more noticeably formal. She is accused of "putting on airs a little---for gilding the lily a bit" (1:585). Like Alma, Edwina was also quick to remind "any overzealous man with excited ideas...that [she] was very much the minister's daughter" (Leverich 25). Both women are seemingly

prominent members of society, but oddly both remain outliers within their social group, despite obsessive concerns with living up to social expectations, particularly the belief that white southern women must remain chaste until they were married. For Williams, these women represent the sexual oppression that was enforced through what Micheal Kreyling calls the “innate religiousness” of southern society (29).

Female frigidity is not a twentieth century construct, but Sigmund Freud was just one of many who have perpetuated the centuries-old myth that any woman who does not accept the heteronormative model of sexuality suffers from sexual pathologies. Rachel P. Maines points to the andocentric model of sexuality, which she defines as the penetration of the vagina by the penis resulting in at least the male orgasm (because the female orgasm is considered irrelevant), as the contributing factor to female sexual pathologies like neurasthenia and hysteria. For Maines, Freud’s assertions that real women did not accept substitutions for the andocentric model of sexual pleasure marks the introduction of the idea of “‘frigidity’ in the context of penetration” into the paradigm of female medical and sexual studies (9).

Alma’s physician and source of her lifelong infatuation and possible neurasthenia, Dr. Johnny, adopts this pathologizing rhetoric when he asks Alma if she is able to feel passionately for men she has dated. When she asks him, “[d]oesn’t everyone - sometimes?” he responds with Freudian teachings that presumed if a woman was uninterested in having sex with a man, then something was must be wrong with the woman, not the man’s ability to sexually interest the woman. Dr. Johnny tells her that “[s]ome women are cold. Some women are what is called frigid,” but he also

acknowledges that he senses Alma has a “great deal more [passion] than any other woman” he has ever known (1: 613). He attributes the fact that he has to prescribe her sleeping tablets to calm her neurasthenia to these unleashed passions, or repressed desires. These pathologies were a symptom or result of “conflict between [women’s] hypersexualized role and the social denial of their... sexual feelings” (Smith-Rosenberg).

*Summer and Smoke* illuminates the paradox that women’s value in a patriarchal society was connected to their sexual roles, or rather their ability to reproduce. Meanwhile, women’s sexual desires were disregarded, and even discouraged, for fear that disturbing the androcentric model of sexuality would destabilize the patriarchal structure of Western society. Dr. Johnny diagnoses Alma as just being lonely because she always seeks treatment late at night, feeling panicky because she cannot breathe very well and her heart is racing. He treats her loneliness with some tablets that she says makes her “feel like a water-lily on a Chinese lagoon” which could indicate her subconscious desire to open up sexually like the blooming water-lily (1: 642). The play follows how she copes with the emotional torment of her sexual abstinence. Her eventual decision to reject the lifestyle expected of her as an unmarried middle-class white woman and a minister’s daughter is revolutionary for Alma’s time and place. This social stigma of purity that undergirds the cult of southern womanhood makes Alma’s sexual revolution even more radical, signifying a need for the upheaval of this patriarchal system that inhibited social freedom for women and minorities.

Williams appraises these limitations of twentieth century American social liberties in *Summer and Smoke* by juxtaposing ideas about sexual autonomy with military

revolutions. Williams uses the 18th Century French Revolution and the United States' imperialistic designs toward Latin America that were prevalent in 1916 as an indicator of the need for social reform because war represents the ultimate measure for disciplining bodies and border controls. Williams also uses allusions to French Decadent writers who were concerned with social revolutions to critique southern white female's sexual and social freedoms, and by default, America's contrary ideas about social freedoms for different groups.

### **Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite**

Williams describes Alma in Scene One as belonging "to a more elegant age, such as the Eighteenth Century in France" because of a distinguished manner that the townspeople in the Mississippi Delta find odd (1: 582). It is unclear at first whether Williams by linking Alma with a revolutionary age in France was hinting at the revolution she will undergo to free herself from social confines that have been imposed upon her, but it is easier after a closer reading to understand why he begins the play in 1916, the year before the United States entered World War I. Williams was aware of the great impact Americans soldiers' experiences in France, particularly for African-American soldiers, had on the civil rights' movement in America. White women and African-American men's involvement in the War revealed the great hypocrisy surrounding the American fight for freedom abroad while denying it to so many people at home. Beginning the play the year before these socially inhibited groups would begin to witness liberation abroad and question their subjugated positions at home hints at the social rebellion that was coming in the United States and for his lead character.



Williams also references Bastille Day at the literary meeting where Alma first begins liberating herself from adhering to the town's ideas of social propriety. His choice to have Alma begin her social insurrection on Bastille Day rather than the American Independence Day reveals a complicated interpretation of social freedoms in France that were non-existent for some groups in America, and specifically the rural South, at that time. Williams reports in his *Memoirs* that that he had more difficulty with having men share his hotel room in France during the interwar years than in Italy. His difficulty was likely based more on a greater cultural acceptance of male homosexuality in Italy rather than in France because according to the *International Commission of Jurists, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Justice: A Comparative Casebook*, France abolished its laws that prohibited same-sex activity in 1791.

In the United States, which had homosexuality criminalization laws until 2003, the military started an aggressive campaign during World War II to arrest homosexuals in order to prevent men from pretending to be gay to avoid military service. Still, when Williams visits Paris in 1928 he writes to his mother "conventions learned at home had best be forgotten when in Paris," (Spoto 29). He was assuring his mother that the shows he saw in the red light district in Paris at Folies Bergere and Moulin Rouge were more tasteful than she feared, but this dichotomous attitude toward sexuality between her Puritan background and this more cosmopolitan Parisian attitude would resurface when he wrote *Summer in Smoke* nearly twenty years later.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not the first play, though, where Williams associates Frenchness with freedom. In *Streetcar*, Blanche associates her fight against conformity and social inhibitions with Paris's Left Bank Bohemia. Once she is assured that Mitch does not know French, she asks "voulez vous couche avec moi ce

Williams also uses the literary meeting scene to align the sexually oppressive Alma with French Decadent writers, Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, and the British poet William Blake, who was both a French revolutionist sympathizer and proponent of women's sexual freedom. Mrs. Bassett starts the conversation by mistaking Blake as, "the one who wrote about 'the bought red lips'" (1: 600), when in fact she is quoting a line from an Ernest Dowson poem. Blake is an excellent choice to align female sexuality with freedom because as a proponent of social equality, he used themes of sexual liberation to designate social liberty.

One would think these writers with their revolutionary ideas about sexuality and social nonconformity would be expelled from the literary group conversations, as Mrs. Bassett tries to do with Blake. However, Mrs. Bassett not only mistakes Dowson for Blake, but she also cannot distinguish between Blake and Rimbaud. When Alma tries to correct her, Mrs. Bassett insists she knows the difference: "He traveled around with that Frenchman who took a shot at him and landed them both in jail! Brussels, Brussels!...That's where it happened, fired a gun at him in a drunken stupor, and later one of them died of T.B. in the gutter!" (1: 599). This erroneous anecdote refers to Rimbaud and Verlaine, but Williams never reveals this. Mrs. Bassett's mistake could simply be a result of forgetting various writers they have discussed at their literary meetings, or it could reveal a dilettantish understanding of writers she has not had much exposure to because their work was deemed socially inappropriate. The latter seems more likely, and

---

soir?" because if he cannot understand that she is saying, "Would you like to sleep with me tonight?" then she can safely express sexual desire without dropping her façade as the sexually pious southern belle (1:523).

Alma's knowledge of writers unknown to the rest of her group attests to her non-judgmental nature the audience glimpses when she tells Dr. Johnny that "life is such a mysteriously complicated thing that no one should really presume to judge and condemn the behavior of anyone else!" (1:584). Ironically, Alma says this when she was still in her pre-liberation stage and preoccupied with making sure no one thought her behavior beyond reproach, while not hesitating to make judgments on Rosa's actions, whose behavior she eventually begins to emulate.

Williams admired Rimbaud because he, too, was interested in creating a new social system through his work. One of Rimbaud's biographers describes his work as an attempt "to destroy the old world and to create a new world as the domain of poetry alone" (White 73). While Rimbaud supported anarchy and the overthrowing the monarchy and bourgeoisie in France, his revolutionary ideas were more centered on changing poetry. By contrast, Williams said he was "interested in the discovery of a new social system - certainly not Communist, but an enlightened form of socialism, I would suppose" (94). Williams writing, especially when viewed as a constant resistance to heterosexism, presents a desperate and constant plea to create a new social system along with the inherent impossibility of actually accomplishing it.

The playwright was also inspired by Rimbaud's revolutionary style. He was the first poet to move away from the conventional French alexandrine meter and use prose as poetry instead (White 75). In Williams's opinion "Rimbaud [was] the only writer...who could escape from words into the sensations of being," a trait that came to define the French Decadent writers. The Decadent writers adopted the name for their style from a

Verlaine poem where he says, “I am the Empire at the end of its decadence” (White 75). The defining characteristics of French Decadence - a contempt for bourgeois society, the idea that art could revolutionize a social system, and the yearning to “burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” - are prevalent in Williams’s work, too (Nassar 122). It takes Alma a while to warm up to decadent ideals that Blanche readily accepts in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but by the plays end, she, too has rejected the bourgeois heteronormative lifestyle that dictates she as a white woman should remain chaste.

Williams’s choice to include Rimbaud and Verlaine was not only because both were French Decadents but also homosexual lovers. Mrs. Bassett’s allusion to when Rimbaud was arrested for shooting Verlaine in the streets in Brussels, ruining both men’s reputations and their careers, may be the playwright’s way of commenting that even the seemingly liberated France was not a place of total sexual freedom, and therefore total freedom cannot exist. More importantly, this commentary indicates Williams’s realization that these attempts at revolutionizing the white-male dominated heterosexual paradigm were fruitless, and perhaps point toward the idea that system has to be completely eradicated before it can improved. Even though the shooting and the trial takes place outside of France, the writers experienced personal and professional persecution in their home country, despite its reputation for social liberty. Rimbaud often threatened to have Verlaine arrested for homosexuality as a means of psychologically controlling the man who was married and always threatening to leave him. While same-sex relationships were not illegal in France, policeman were known to arrest homosexuals

on other charges, such as indecent exposure. When Rimbaud did have Verlaine arrested for homosexuality after he shot Rimbaud in the wrist, he ended up ruining both their careers because after their homosexuality was revealed in court publishers were no longer interested in their work.

Williams talks more explicitly about homosexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which was written the year before *Summer and Smoke* was finished, so it is improbable that he refrains from an open discussion about homosexuality because of any censorship reasons. It is more likely that he is not as open with homosexual references in this play because, while it is primarily about the move from sexual oppression to sexual liberty in World War I America, he is interested in looking at these themes through a white woman's heterosexuality as part of a broader discourse on patriarchal structures of heterosexism that undermine the idea of independence for all American citizens.

With Alma's social and sexual rebellion linked to the French Revolutionary War, it is fitting that Williams selects Blake as the poet that the literary group discusses, albeit it erroneously. In an attempt to clear up the group's misunderstanding over who Blake is, Alma reads his poem, "Love's Secret" aloud. The speaker admonishes readers to "never seek to tell thy love" how you feel because after revealing his feelings, he adds, "trembling, cold in ghastly fear did my love depart" (1: 600). Similarly to the speaker in the poem, Alma wants to poetically express her feelings to her crush, but when she finishes reading, Dr. Johnny abruptly leaves the meeting. She later discovers that he went to see Rosa, the Mexican immigrant he repeatedly chooses over her. The last stanza of Blake's poem also mirrors the romantic triangle because as the speaker admits that a

stranger, rather than using words to entice them with just a sigh. In contrast to Alma's passionate outbursts, Rosa acts coy and flirtatious and draws Dr. Johnny's attention to her rather than seeking it out as Alma does.

Williams reprints Blake's poem using the masculine pronoun, indicating that Alma was purposefully addressing Dr. Johnny while reading the poem instead of the anonymous "she" that Blake refers to. However, Alma does not consciously understand that the poem is mirroring her relationship with Dr. Johnny. Instead, she thinks he left because the literary group was judgmental of his lifestyle. When she defends Dr. Johnny to the literary society, who represents the townsfolk who have collectively classified the young doctor as reprobate and someone with whom a minister's daughter should not associate, she is rebuking the town's oppressive social positions. Ironically, when Dr. Johnny rejects Blake, it may indicate he is beginning to reject his own decadent lifestyle wherein he had once followed Blake's creed that "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." (Blake 140). But by the play's end he rejects a life of excess and sexual freedom for the conventionalities dictated by a southern hegemonic system.

### **Your Body is a Borderland**

Rosa's link with the Mexican Revolution conjoins Williams's use of bodies as examples of permeable sociocultural borders. The fact that they emigrated from Pedras Negras, a border town that was significant in the Revolution, points to the fact that the Gonzaleses might be refugees from the war. It is also significant that the time of the play, 1916, was the second and last time that the U.S. sent troops in to secure their interest in the Mexican conflict. President Woodrow Wilson ordered troops to go into Mexico and

capture Pancho Villa as retribution for Villa's raid on New Mexico. Williams's portrayal of what happens to the Gonzaleses family could signify what happens when the U.S., which represents suppression of freedom in this play, intervenes in Villa's fight for his people's social and economic independence. The Gonzaleses lose their property and their already tenuous social position in Glorious Hill when Rosa's father kills Dr. Johnny's father, Dr. Buchanan. Before Senor Gonzales kills Dr. Buchanan, he tells a story about threatening a man with his gun in order to get a gold necklace that his daughter wanted:

I don't have money to buy a gold bead so I go for a ride up to Eagle Pass and I walk in a dry good store and I say to the man: 'Please give me a string a gold bead.' He say: 'Show me the money,'" and I say: 'Here is the money'" And I reach down to my belt and I pull out--- not the money--- but this! (*He pulls out a revolver*). Now---now I have money, but I still have this!...Anything that she want I get for her with this (He pulls out a roll of bills.) or this! (He waves the revolver) (1: 620).

This reference to Eagle Pass, the Texas/Mexico border town, opens up the chance to talk about permeable borders and Mexican freedom in the context of this play. Eagle Pass was the first United States settlement on the Rio Grande and was under U.S. military control until 1916.<sup>8</sup>

Senor Gonzalez could be a symbol of the Mexican revolutionaries who were making their demands against both the Mexican government and the United States for interfering with their fight for freedom. When he kills Dr. Buchanan, it further illustrates

---

<sup>8</sup> Dictionary.com [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/eagle pass](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/eagle%20pass).

Gonzalez's revolt against the white male patriarchal system, or U.S. colonialism, that was threatening to thwart his social or economic liberties. The U.S. intervention in the Mexican revolution was one of many in a decades-long fight for control of Mexican lands after taking Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California from Mexican rule, which shows how borders shift in accordance to power. Yet, it becomes necessary for many Mexicans to cross these borders in search of economic freedom in the U. S. However, many Mexican women, even now face not only the danger of being caught entering the country illegally, but threats of sexual and other physical abuses by the coyote, the term used for the person who smuggles them into the country. Despite these dangers, and little hope for significant financial gain, the alternative crippling poverty pushes these women to risk crossing the border.

Gloria Anzaldua describes borders as something constructed to "define the places that are safe and unsafe" (25). Her study on border cultures illuminates how sexually, psychologically and socially constructed boundaries are permeable. Williams's portrayal of a Mexican woman representing sexual freedom in America is unusual because, as Anzaldua explains, the Mexican culture enforces sexually oppressive codes for their women as strictly as those present in the American south in the early twentieth century. She describes how the women were expected to follow these strict rules so that "social categories and hierarchies will be kept in order" and how Mexican women were also "at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants" (40). It is likely that Rosa's placement outside her original cultural context allows her to move beyond her cultural boundaries, too. Therefore, the sexual freedom Rosa exerts over Alma, at the American Independence



Day celebration would be unusual within her previous social boundaries in Mexico. In the United States, she is a racial other, and so, particularly in the American south, she does not have pressure that Alma does of socially-imposed borders on her sexuality.

Until Alma rebels against the social conformity imposed by the white patriarchal structure of the south, she lives within the parameters of a seemingly safe space where she has little autonomy. Once she asserts her desires, she is then regulated to the borderlands, where “the prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (25). This new space is reminiscent of the space Rosa occupies as an immigrant. Both characters are allowed to behave outside the restrictions imposed on them by their social upbringing, yet, like Rosa, Alma’s position in this freedom space will be tenuous, because her economic power will be determined by how she can use her body.

While Williams initially connects Alma’s impending liberation to both the French Revolution and French Decadent literature, Dr. Johnny makes allusions to Latin America to express his desired autonomy. As a young boy, Dr. Johnny wishes to “go to South America on a boat,” and then he continually chooses Rosa Gonzalez over Alma, perhaps echoing his childhood wish to leave Mississippi for a more tropical climate (1: 574). Likewise, Alma’s constant reminder throughout the play that her name is Spanish for “soul” may be her attempt to appeal to his Latin desires. It may also be Williams hint that perhaps she unknowingly embodies the ideals that Dr. Johnny thinks he wants. At first, though, Alma rejects the sensual nature attributed to Hispanics and Latin Americans, and she even echoes early twentieth century U.S. imperialist rhetoric regarding Latin American countries when she says, “those Latins all dream in the sun---and indulge their

senses” (1: 611). Prior to World War I, the U.S. had plans to extend its borders further south. To rally support among the North for border expansions, it became part of the national lexicon to attribute these tropical climates of the U.S. South and further south with the belief that it “causes the degeneration of the lifeforms that inhabit them” (Greeson 6). As a result, the U.S. began designating these warmer climates as sites of tropical degeneracy.

Alma’s comment is also reminiscent of a remark she made earlier when she is attempting to dissuade another young woman’s interest in Dr. Johnny. “All the gifts of the gods were showered on him...But all he cares about is indulging his senses!” she tells Nellie, a teenage girl that she gives voice lessons to who ends up engaged to Dr. Johnny in the end. Alma’s remarks suggest her disapproval of Rosa and Dr. Johnny’s relationship and how it represents a direct connection to Dr. Johnny’s Latin American freedom fantasies. Even earlier in the play, when Dr. Johnny finally asks Alma for a date and Rosa distracted him by walking by, Alma expresses her obvious disapproval of his choice. “I’ve yet to see you in the company of a---well, a---reputable young woman---And the pity of it is that you are preparing to be a doctor---” (1: 587). Her displeasure is not just because he is rejecting her, but because his choice to pursue Rosa is a rejection of the white patriarchal standard Alma believes he should follow.

It is peculiar that Williams uses French allusions to foreshadow Alma’s move toward sexual liberation, but has her blatantly reject Latin American connections to social freedom before she undergoes her personality shift. After the transformation, though, when she is about to have her first sexual encounter, she asks the salesman, “Usted habla

Espanol, señor?” – or, “Do you speak Spanish, mister?” (1: 642). When they both admit to speaking un poquito, or a little, the salesman responds by saying, “Sometimes un poquito is plenty” (1: 642), indicating that his plans with her for the evening will probably not include much talking anyway.

Like Williams’s French allusions, his brief Spanish references are not inconsequential to the plot of the play. One of Williams’s often overlooked literary influences is Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca. He mentions reading Lorca frequently in letters to Margo Jones, and Jose I. Badeness postulates that certain phrases, motifs and characters “point to Hispanic culture directly and Lorca indirectly,” who like Williams used sexuality as a subversive social act as a relentless theme in his work. Other similarities between both authors include the fact that their “regions’ deification and subjugation of women—under a strict gender code that assigns particular roles to each of the sexes and a double standard that denies women their sexuality—is deeply embedded in the respective social structures” (Badeness). Both writers were also committed to overturning these social ideas through their art. It is also possible that Williams’s speech, “In Spain there was a revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities” is a tribute to Lorca, who died in the Spanish Civil War (Badeness). Williams incorporates this paragraph first into the 1936 short story, “In Spain there was Revolution” and it later becomes part of the Tom’s opening dialogue in *The Glass Menagerie*.

It is likely that when Williams shifts his association with social freedoms from French to Latin American culture it is intended to be an extension of his critique of American ideas of freedom. Although both French and Latin American cultures have a reputation for sexual liberty in comparison with the United States, and particularly the southern United States in the early to mid-twentieth century, they both still exhibit some sexual discriminations. Even though Alma is asserting herself sexually, just like certain groups of people in these seemingly more sexually liberal places, she still does not possess total social liberty. There will be consequences for her dissension, just as it would continue to be for other marginalized groups, like African-Americans and homosexuals, who rebelled against power dynamics in the American South.

### **In her hips, there's revolutions**<sup>9</sup>

*The Glass Menagerie* has a reputation for being a staid and less passionate play perhaps undeservedly because of the sensitive, tender treatment Williams gives to it in comparison to some of his wilder and more violent works. He even admitted, "I may not have any more nice things to say. I must have known unconsciously that I would never write that kind of tender play again" (Spoto 115). However, this play exhibits as many surprising revolutionary ideas as his succeeding work. The plot involves a single mother, Amanda Wingfield, sharing expenses in a shabby St. Louis apartment with her adult children, Tom and Laura. Her husband, "a telephone man who fell in love with long

---

<sup>9</sup> This section's title comes from a line in the song "Rebel Girl" by feminist punk rock band, Bikini Kill. The following lyrics of the song connect the female body, particularly as seen through the female-to-female gaze to the idea of political or social upheaval: "When she talks, I hear the revolutions/ In her hips, there's revolutions/When she walks, the revolution's coming/ In her kiss, I taste the revolution/ ([www.musicsonglyrics.com/rebel-girl-lyrics-bikini-kill.html](http://www.musicsonglyrics.com/rebel-girl-lyrics-bikini-kill.html)).

distances,” has left her, and because she lives in a social system that values men over women, and white men above all others, she has no training and few opportunities to economically support herself (1:401). Her daughter, Laura, is rendered disabled more to a crippling shyness than her slight limp and is unable to hold a job outside the home. They depend mostly on Tom, a clerk in the shoe factory, for his ability to bring home a paycheck. The Wingfields are also social misfits, but unlike Stanley in *Streetcar*, their outsider status is not indicative of a social non-whiteness. Amanda Wingfield does, however, use racially charged language when she tells her daughter, Laura, to stay put after dinner while she clears the dishes from the table and says, “You be the lady this time and I’ll be the darky” (1:402). This comment connects the Wingfields’ social decline to racial inferiority, which was a common association in the time period when Williams was writing this play.

Amanda’s bigoted comment at dinner is the only allusion to race in the play and sexuality is not mentioned at all, therefore, gender and class boundaries may seem more germane than race or sexuality in this play. However, David Savran’s reading of *The Glass Menagerie* as a closeted play, or a play that hints at homosexuality but does not explicitly reveal it, and Williams’ use of the Spanish Civil War as “the social background of the play” suggest sexuality and social upheaval are more important than most critics have acknowledged (1: 400).<sup>10</sup> Another Williams scholar, Frederick Kugler, agrees with Savran’s interpretation, and even suggests that it is Amanda’s sexuality, or her underdeveloped sexuality, and neurosis that pushes her husband away, because she “goes

---

<sup>10</sup> For more on David Savran’s queer readings of American drama, see *Communists, Cowboys and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*.

as far as banning anything that has to do with sexuality from her house” (Kugler 26). Like Edwina, Amanda bans a D. H. Lawrence book from her home that she found her son reading, saying “I cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them --- BUT I WON’T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no!” (1: 412) Her adamant refusal to allow anything sexual into her home could metaphorically illustrate how she, like Edwina, likely treated her husband’s sexual advances, and felt the need to eliminate those from her home, too.

Savran’s reading also offers one explanation for Amanda’s demeaning outbursts toward her son. When she refuses to listen to him explain to her his desires to live a life of adventure and follow his manly instincts that he thinks are crippled by modernity, she responds that “Only animals have to satisfy instincts! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs! Than monkeys---pigs---“ (1: 421). If his unspoken desire to follow his instincts involves indulging his sexual interests, perhaps Amanda may be subconsciously associating this sexuality with what she refers to as his animal longings. It may be Amanda’s inability to face her own sexuality that prevents her from accepting her son’s sexuality which results in his abandonment of the family, much like his father.

Despite her aversion to anything sexual, or filthy as she calls it, being in her house, Amanda is ironically obsessed with remembering how she once physically appealed to her gentleman callers, and she is fanatical about finding a suitor for Laura. She even goes so far as to try to stuff Laura’s bra with powder puffs “gay deceivers” in order to appeal to a man’s physical interests (1: 433). This desire to create a deceptive attachment through eroticism is a direct contradiction to Amanda’s uneasiness about sex,

but it speaks to the pressure to submit to a heteronormative standard that dictates women must be married, especially in the 1930s when the scarcity of jobs were given to mostly men, leaving single women economically disadvantaged. Laura's sexuality is also denoted by her attachment to the glass unicorn, signifying her virginity as unicorns are the mythical protectors of virgins. When Jim breaks the unicorn's horn, it foreshadows the kiss he will give to Laura at the end that causes a rupture from her sexual innocence to a sexual awakening.

Although, Amanda is the strong-willed matriarch and works odd jobs to bring in extra money, she knows that she is also crippled by age and social limitations for women of that era. Williams uses what Yaeger describes as a common trope for southern women's writing, dirt obsession, to designate Amanda's determination for socioeconomic mobility. Amanda is consumed with cleaning the apartment before the gentleman caller arrives, a type of deception because she wants him to think the apartment is not as shabby as it really is. She is also trying to clean up her daughter, in a sense, so that the gentleman will not think Laura is peculiar.

Amanda's obsession with cleanliness does not allow the Wingfields to transgress any race or class boundaries, as dirt obsession in southern women's writing typically indicates, according to Yaeger. That does not mean that *The Glass Menagerie* is not a text that deals with race, because like sexuality, race is actually more prevalent than it seems in this play. In fact, Amanda's obsession solidifies the Wingfields' whiteness. Amanda specifies that Tom find a suitor for Laura who is "clean-living" (1:423) and while she expressing some concern that he is Irish, his whiteness is assured by the

description Williams gives of the gentleman caller as having the “scrubbed and polished look of white chinaware” (1: 432). Her anxiety about his race reflects popular sentiment that the Irish connected to black Americans. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* when Stella reveals Stanley’s ethnicity as Polish, Blanche responds with “They’re something like Irish, aren’t they?” (1:477). She later likens him to the racialized image of an ape and treats him as a racial other for the duration of the play as a way to signify that she finds him inferior to her family.

Amanda hopes if she can amplify her family’s whiteness, and she associates this with cleanliness- whether it involves redecorating the apartment or cleaning up the lives that her children have made into a mess and their peculiarities that ostracize them from society then perhaps the family can transcend into a steadier social position. Dirt obsession in *The Glass Menagerie* does not symbolize successful social transcendence because the Wingfields are considered social castaways and the clean-living gentleman caller is the paragon of social acceptability that Amanda longs for, but never obtains, for her family. The gentleman caller is Amanda’s hope that they will not only ascend the social ladder once again, but that he will become the white patriarchal figure who has been missing from their lives ever since her husband ran away.

This dirt obsession actually provides a strong link between *The Glass Menagerie* and one of Williams’s one-act plays, *Auto-De-Fe*, indicating Amanda’s dirt obsession could be a desire to remove not only any unpleasantness or what she would consider any unclean thing that threatens the social hierarchy she dreams of ascending, but also anything sexual, which she also deems unclean. In *Auto-De-Fe*, though, the focus is on



removing what the characters see as the uncleanness of homosexuality. Like Savran, Michael Paller agrees with a queer reading of *The Glass Menagerie*, connecting Tom to Eloi, the sexually distraught young man in *Auto-De-Fe*. Both characters have secrets that are “beyond the realm of [their mothers’] experience and imagination” (Paller 21). Neither can reveal their secret desires, but through agonized conversations with their respective mothers the audience can see they are desperately trying to express something. In Paller’s reading, “Everything comes back to dirt” for Eloi (22). Although, he is horrified by the gay male pornographic images that he finds, he is unable to stop looking at the pictures, which represent for him the uncleanness of New Orleans. Eloi’s obsession for dirt removal leads to him burning himself alive in his house, in hopes of purifying what he suspects as unclean about himself. Amanda’s dirt obsession results in pushing first her husband and then her son out of the house, possibly because she cannot deal with their sexual nature, whether it is a hetero- or homosexuality.

If the audience follows Savran and Paller’s queer reading of this play, Williams’s linking Tom to what Amanda refers to as a desire to “satisfy [animal] instincts” does not degrade his suspected homosexuality as critics once suspected Williams of doing. Recent scholarship on queer ecologies point to queer animal sexuality as a way of proving homosexuality is not unnatural. Chapter three expounds on how Williams argues to naturalize many forms of sexuality by repeatedly using bird imagery to denote both sexual liberty and oppression.

### **3. FREEDOM IS FOR THE BIRDS: EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM**

The idea of using birds to illustrate freedom is not foreign in the U.S., but rather than using a bald eagle, Williams's birds-peacocks, hens, nightingales and mythical birds with no feet- represent the difficulty in obtaining freedom within a broken social system. Williams's birds also demonstrate that boundaries like gender, race, and sexuality, which were considered fixed entities in the early to mid-twentieth century, are expandable and permeable. He specifically connects the boundaries of non-normative sexualities to birds as a representation of how sexuality cannot naturally be contained within a cage, or confined to a restricted boundary.

Stanley Kowalkski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is eager to conform to the cage of heteronormativity, a social entity that I will argue is a vital factor within the patriarchal system that decrees white males have the power to control the other bodies in society. Williams ties Stanley to objects like his car and his radio, items that were becoming staples in post-War American families, as "emblem[s] of the gaudy seed-bearer" indicating how his masculinity and virility are essential to achieving the American Dream (1:481). Furthermore, Stanley's service in World War II and his burgeoning career as a salesman provide him opportunities to pursue this commoditized version of the Dream as long as he stays within the heteronormative boundaries. My use of heteronormative boundaries comes from a number of queer theorists. Samuel A. Chambers "calls for an

understanding of heteronormativity as a concept that reveals expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as a norm within a society.” In the *Gender Caste System: Identity, Privacy, and Heteronormativity*, Jillian Todd Weiss compares the stigmatization of social outcasting of LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) people with racial minorities, an argument similar to Siobhan Somerville’s in *Queering the Color Line*. My interpretation of the American Dream in Williams’s texts involves looking at the Dream as an integral part of a heterosexist system, one that privileges heterosexual relationships as the norm and requires adherence to long-standing patriarchal traditions.

### ***The Owlcar Named Non-normative Desire***

Williams knows that the Dream is more widely available to white males because, at least in the U.S., it is part of the heteronormative system that is protected (usually through violence) by white males of a higher economic position. As Stanley is building toward the Dream by marrying and siring a child, he sees himself as the king of his castle and thinks he is entitled to dominate the women in it. Stanley’s sexuality is reinforced by Williams’s characterization of him as a "richly feathered male bird among hens" (1: 481). It is unclear whether this description implies that Stanley is a rooster or peacock. Both are sexually aggressive birds unable to use flight as an escape if they would even want to because, like Stanley, both birds dominate their social space. Stanley even refers to Blanche and Stella as hens, asserting his sexual authority over them. Ed Madden’s entry on Flowers and Birds in *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* cites roosters as a common seduction gift for older men to give younger boys in ancient Greece. Williams’s

knowledge about classical literature is evident from his incorporation of mythic figures such as Orpheus, Eurydice, Diana, and Adonis into his plays, making it very likely that he knew that he could subversively use birds as code for homosexuality.

Blanche is connected to several birds, though, all of which are either biologically unable to fly or restricted from flying because they are typically kept in cages. In frustration, Stanley calls her a “canary bird” because she spends a lot of time singing in the bathtub, obstructing his ability to use his own bathroom in the one-bedroom apartment (1:535). Canaries were traditionally used as a sacrificial bird sent into mines because they could detect toxins like carbon monoxide, which alerted miners to retreat. This bird choice could possibly be foreshadowing that Blanche will be the sacrificial animal in this play because she must be cast out before order can be restored. In traditional southern literature, Yaeger sees a pattern between using a person as a scapegoat and white supremacists ideas of viewing African-Americans as non-human or othered. She links this behavior to “white panic,” a crisis similar to the homosexual panic Stanley feels when he enacts violence upon Blanche (Yaeger 111). This association becomes more significant when combined with Paller’s reading that canaries in Williams’s other plays, such as *The Glass Menagerie* and *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real*, signify homosexuality.

In *Streetcar*, the canary likely refers to any non-normative sexuality, just like the partridge. Madden also reveals that ancient natural historians noticed “partridges are likely to practice male-male sex when the female is nesting,” therefore these birds became associated with male-male desire in classical art (333). When Blanche first sees

Stella, she links her sister to this bird, perhaps as Williams's way of coding the non-normative sexuality of Stella's husband because Blanche does not know that Stella is pregnant when she says, "But you, you've put on some weight. You're as plump as a little partridge" (1:475). Even if he was not aware of the classical tradition of using partridges to denote male-male desire, as mentioned before, Williams's rampant use of classical Greek imagery in his work suggests he would have been privy to classical cues of homosexuality. Nevertheless, he still uses bird imagery quite frequently to represent sexuality that does not fit into the typical heteronormative standard.

Blanche's sexual promiscuity becomes designated as a sexual otherness within a southern hegemonic system that deifies white female sexual purity. Her sexuality may also be linked to another domestic bird, a parrot. To ease the tension while Blanche waits for Mitch to show up on her birthday, Stella asks Blanche to tell some jokes. Blanche tells an inappropriate story about a parrot whom she says "knew more vulgar expressions than Mr. Kowalski!" (1:536). Cursing was considered socially unacceptable for women at that time, so what the parrot actually reveals in the joke is that its owner who likely taught it such "vulgar expressions" was likely leading a secret life that contrasts with the ladylike image she was trying to convey (1:536). The story also reveals that Blanche, the storyteller, who also postures as the prototypical belle, is using language considered unacceptable in her social class and was likely engaging in other transgressive behaviors, too.

Another bird that Blanche is linked to, even if only tangentially, is owls. When Mitch tells her that he will take an "owl-car" home after their date, she asks "Is that

street-car named Desire still grinding along the tracks at his hour?" making a sexual allusion to which Mitch is oblivious. Blanche is also referring back to when she is trying to talk Stella into leaving Stanley after he hit her, saying that all he has to offer is "brutal desire---just---Desire!---the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter" (1:509). When her sister asks "Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car?" Blanche admits that the owl-car is what brought her to this one-bedroom apartment in the French Quarter (1:509). Like Mitch, Stella seems oblivious that Blanche is actually referring to the acts of desire that led to her being run out of town and needing to seek shelter in her sister's tenement apartment in New Orleans. Blanche's final bird connection is The Flamingo, the hotel where she lived after losing her family's property, Belle Reve. In her final humiliation, Blanche was placed on the "Out-of-Bounds" list by the local military officials after it was discovered that she used the hotel as a place to pleasure the soldiers from a nearby army camp.

When Blanche loses Belle Reve, or the Beautiful Dream, she loses her tenuous grasp on a southern version of the American Dream, but most importantly to her, she loses her social freedom. She loses the family plantation, the symbol of white southern aristocracy, because she stepped out of the social boundaries of white southern women's sexuality from which this system was built. She blames the loss of their inheritance on "their improvident grandfathers and fathers and uncles and brothers [who] exchanged the land for their epic fornications" (1: 490). In reality, it is because of her sexual otherness, the very acts that put her on the "Out-of-Bounds" list, that she forfeits whatever tenuous claim she had to the Dream as a pseudo-patriarchal figure. When Blanche, as proxy

patriarch, loses the estate because of her own “epic fornications,” she is continuing the tradition of her forefathers (1: 490). She tries to exercise her sexual freedom, as they did, even after the Dream is gone, but without land, social position, or male gender, she is doomed to be trapped in a heteronormative cage that dictates she must adhere to the roles southern society created. Her role as patriarch of the family is then challenged because with the loss of money and property she is forced to live under her brother-in-law’s patriarchal rule.

Stanley’s anxiety about Blanche challenging his authority and his subsequent rape of her could be attributed to what Eve Sedgwick calls “homosexual panic” (19). Sedgwick attributes this panic and its concurrent violence and resentment to straight males who accept homosocial bonds as an ancient part of civilization, but are disturbed by modern interpretations of homosocial bonds that can be skewed as homosexual. She also theorizes that such violence is often a result of men who are so insecure about their own sexuality that they feel the need to lash out physically. Blanche thinks that Stanley might even have repressed feelings for her when she tells Mitch, “there is such a thing as the hostility of--- perhaps in some perverse kind of way he--- No! To think of it makes me (she makes a gesture of revulsion)” (1:526). In actuality, Blanche is likely the one with repressed feelings toward her sister’s husband, and Stanley’s suppressed desires are more likely homosexual in nature.

Williams understood that social freedoms were only available to white heterosexual males during the mid-century. Therefore, if Stanley’s sexuality were suspect, then he must engage in what Judith Butler calls a performative masculinity,

which requires that he demonstrate an extreme version of masculinity that extols physical strength, a close camaraderie with other men, and a denigration of woman, in order to be accepted in a white American male heterocentric society. Stanley is also at risk of being exposed because Blanche has already proven by outing her own husband that she has what Sedgwick refers to as “not only the most delicate nose for but the most potent attraction toward men who are at crises of homosexual panic” (209). It could perhaps be one of the reasons why Stanley is anxious when Blanche insults his nationality by calling him a Polack. He is bothered by the derogatory term not only because as he says, “People from Poland are Poles,” but also because he is “one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it,” not to mention the fact that if anyone questions his race or ethnicity, it infringes on his right to pursue the Dream (1: 539).

Stanley’s anxieties were not strictly about homosexual panic. According to Wanda Rushing, white southern men who felt threatened that their social dominance was being undermined exhibited similar symptoms of panic. Siobhan B. Somerville’s book, *Queering the Color Line*, illuminates why these violent behaviors toward race and sexuality are similar by showing how the nineteenth century social constructions regarding race, gender and sexuality were interconnected. One example outlines how one psychologist, Margaret Otis, uses race to mark same-sex desire as perverse. Otis demonstrates in her reports on all girl schools in the early twentieth century that with integration to all-white reform schools and “institutions for delinquent girls,” she began to see a widespread trend of “love-making between the white and colored girls”



(Somerville 34). Somerville asserts Otis would probably not even see a need to write the article if it were not for the racial distinction, because it was understood that women could “be on intimate terms” as long as it was within their own race (35). This example is one of many that Somerville uses to demonstrate how racial and sexual othering is foundational to queer studies. Her argument opens up the opportunity for me to examine why queer and raced readings of Stanley’s character are popular, but yet have never been examined together. Using Somerville’s theory, it is possible to deduce that Stanley’s anxieties at having his race in question could also indicate a discomfort and having his sexuality suspected to be non-normative. If so, his violence toward Blanche can be read as severe apprehension that she doubts his race, and if he has a secret about his sexuality, then his choice to sexually violate her could stem from his own homosexual panic.

### ***Queer as Birds***

While race and gender are now understood to be social constructs, it was certainly not a popular mindset when Williams was writing, making his representations of race, gender, and sexuality even more extraordinary. Williams was doing similarly progressive things by linking sexual otherness with animal sexuality even though some critics may read his connections as furthering the stereotype of racial and sexual others as having animalistic sexualities. However, emerging research in queer studies of ecology, asserts that human sexuality, as opposed to animal sexuality, is a culturally learned behavior. Although queer ecologies is only a recently emerging field, homosexuals have been making the argument that same-sex desire is not unnatural for years.

The study of queer animal sexualities may be a recent trend, but older scholarship on bird sexualities does exist. Havelock Ellis claims in the first English medical textbook on homosexuality, *Sexual Inversion: Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, that Belgian-carrier pigeons were “especially liable to sexual perversion” (3). We cannot know if Williams was familiar with Ellis’s work on the sexuality of pigeons, but it is possible that he was familiar with the fact that Ellis provided the seminal study on homosexuality and psychology, two topics that certainly interested Williams. It is more likely that he was aware of partridge’s homosexual associations in classical art, but it is evident that the playwright’s choice to attach his characters sexual otherness with an animal sexuality subverts the then popular notion that homosexuality was unnatural. When looking at Stanley’s brute passion through twentieth-century heteronormative standards it seems Williams is questioning whether the violent heterosexuality Stanley performs should be considered natural. Also, with his constant and purposeful rejections of societal norms, Williams could easily have been using his animal coding to subvert tenets about what sort of sexuality was natural or not.

If Stanley is more anxious about his sexuality being exposed than Blanche insulting his intelligence or lack of social grace, we can better understand why he is angry after overhearing the following tirade Blanche gives to her sister, Stella, for continuing to stay with such a man:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! 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!" ...Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella---my sister...don't have back with the brutes! (1: 510-511).

On the surface, Blanche's comments may be interpreted as disparaging to his race or social standing, but reading Williams's use of animal imagery as a signal for sexuality, Stanley's anger at her comments could also indicate a discomfort with his sexuality. Many queer studies scholars, Somerville and Weiss included, have begun connecting race and sexuality to the same rhetoric that creates social outliers. Blanche criticism of Stanley's sexuality reveals her insecurity about the social snubbing she has experienced for being a promiscuous woman, an act that has deemed her a sexual other in southern society. Stanley apprehensions about Blanche connecting his sexuality to animal habits stems from his anxiety about establishing himself as a patriarch in order to ensure his chances for obtaining the American Dream, a system that practically demands its followers adhere to a white heteronormativity. It would, therefore, stand to reason that Stanley cannot allow himself to be viewed as either a sexual or racial other for fear of losing his tenuous hold on the Dream.

Williams's animal coding denotes not only sexuality, but sexual difference, and depending on the type of bird used, it conveys what type of social and sexual freedom the characters will be permitted. Many of Williams's characters who long to be heteronormative, like Stanley, are the flightless birds because they only seek a static type of freedom that comes from staying in one place and working at one job for many years.

Meanwhile, the non-normative characters are typically associated with flying birds, like nightingales, owls, parrots, and the mythical bird of paradise.

Some of the social outliers, though, are flightless, too. Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* sneaks off to visit the penguins in the local zoo when she is supposed to be attending typing classes at a local business college so she can learn a trade and help with the family finances. Laura's connection to the penguins at the zoo also suggests her limited freedoms. She visits the penguins because she gets physically sick when she tries to go to the business classes she was enrolled in by her mother. Like the flightless birds in later plays, Laura's link to the penguins signify her inability to escape the cage her mother has built for her, and her mother's obsession with securing her daughter's economic, if not erotic, future.

Amanda also worries that Laura will become someone who has to rely on the charity of family to have room and board because her extreme shyness keeps her from being able to have a job and support herself or to secure a husband. To avoid her daughter becoming "one of those bird-like women without a nest" she begins to scheme to find her a gentleman caller. The efforts Amanda puts into the home before the caller comes to visit are referred to as necessary actions to "properly feather the nest and plume the bird" which further connects her desire to assure her daughter's economic security with sexuality. Madden also suggests that the birds nest euphemism dates back to at least Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as an allusion to female genitalia, if not earlier. Williams used the same metaphor in *Streetcar* when Blanche dresses up in her finest clothing when she mistakenly thinks a rich suitor is coming to rescue her and Stanley asks, "What've

you got on those fine feathers for?" (1:549). This reference to bird imagery in this scene indicates the same motif of using sexuality as insurance for economic security that Amanda establishes in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Despite their best efforts, most of Williams' characters end up spiraling downward rather than achieving this desired upward mobility. Therefore, Williams' s characters' dreams of freedom come to be represented by another type of movement. They adopt a subversive stance against upward mobility and instead choose the motion of flight as freedom because, for Williams's outsiders, it is crucial that they are never tied down to social norms.

Camille Gros utilizes the tropes of cowboys, pirates, and salesman to illustrate Williams's idea of mobility as freedom, but it is Williams's frequent use of bird imagery that undermines our traditional understandings of the American Dream. Williams's birds serve not only as a commentary on the fight for freedom from social strictures (whether the characters achieve it or not) but also as a representation of sexual freedom, which were synonymous ideas to him. In his private life, Williams used the nightingale as a euphemism for his own nighttime pleasures. His descriptions range in his notebooks from an incident of possible impotence he describes as: "the nightingale can't sing anymore. They just died on the branches," to this account of meeting one of his many anonymous sex partners: "A friendly stranger said "BuenaSera" and I strolled on the beach, not alone. And later to the hotel, not alone, and the nightingales sang, not at the top of their pitch but with a fair sweetness" (*Tennessee Williams Notebooks*, Margaret Bradham Thornton, 589). Gore Vidal even nicknamed Williams the Glorious Bird and recounts the time he

took him skeet-shooting with John and Jackie Kennedy before Kennedy was elected president in his 1975 review of Williams's *Memoirs*:

At one point while Jack was shooting, the Bird muttered in my ear, "Get that ass!"

I said, "Bird, you can't cruise our next president.' The bird chuckled ominously:

They'll never elect those two. They are much too attractive for the American people. Later, I told Jack that the Bird had commented favorably on his ass. He beamed. 'Now that's very exciting,' he said (Vidal).

For Williams, equating his sexuality to a bird represented his need to be able to fly away from anything that resembled a cage. This idea of confinement kept him living an itinerant existence, constantly on the move away from friends and family, so he could pursue what he wanted without disruption. Yet, ironically, he felt he was often imprisoned by his sex drive- held captive by the nightingale that wanted to sing nearly every night. Williams's bohemian philosophy rejected anything that resembled heteronormativity in the early twentieth century: marriage, land ownership, reproduction, or social and familial obligation that tether one to a particular place. Therefore, his plays serve as examples of how he subversively undermines traditional societal expectations, and while his plays were not seen as gay positive by early queer theorists they were certainly not hetero-positive, either.

His itinerant lifestyle was his method of avoiding traditional social expectations. He was very quick to pack up and flee to the other side of the country or out of the country without warning to avoid "a life of being possessed by possessions and to evade those who would possess him" (Leverich 370). He did not want to give into the

American Dream that was exemplified through consumer goods, so he lived mostly in hotels, absentmindedly discarding clothing and personal possessions along the way, but always managing to keep with him his stolen library copy of Hart Crane's poetry. People are said to have achieved the pinnacle of social success if they are able to purchase land, a home, a car, and other symbols of material wealth. The idea of social outsiders being incapable of achieving that heteronormative lifestyle, and feeling forced into a subservient position or a form of prostitution, like Blanche before she comes to New Orleans, aligns with Williams' conviction that the American capitalist-based society did not value artists, but instead forced them into becoming commodities. Williams's connection to sexuality and capitalism suggests that if the Dream is essentially a heterosexist idea based on the ability to acquire goods, then American sexuality seems to be capitalistic by nature, especially until the mid-twentieth century when women were expected to marry for financial security.

While Williams wanted to be like a bird that could escape what he saw as the trappings of American consumerism, he did, in fact, own several properties. However, his homes in New Orleans and Key West and Italy served to give him some familiarity during his flights from oppressive situations. This determined itinerant existence explains why for Williams adopting the name Tennessee became "a fitting sobriquet for an itinerant- particularly since it was common among hoboes and bums in the Depression years [the time when he first began using this pen name] to call one another by the name of the state from which they hailed" (Leverich 437). Williams believed that the artist, or the Bohemian, struggled to be free against the constraints of society, and he considered

materialism to be a trap or a cage. He said, “[T]o be free is to have achieved your life” and writing was his life (230). His outsider characters, even someone like Blanche who wants to represent the very capitalistic, heteronormative system that Williams wants to topple, is really one of Williams’s Bohemian characters. She hints at this when she is trying to seduce the paper boy and confesses that she is “not a conventional person” (1:519). Later, she indicates this attitude again when she brings Mitch back to the apartment and tells him that “[w]e’re going to be very Bohemian. We are going to pretend that we are sitting in a little artists’ café on the Left Bank in Paris!” (1:523). Williams’s bohemians are best represented by the birds, even the ones like Blanche who long to flee but are doomed to be bought and sold and kept in cages.

Williams further reveals his philosophy that motion-equals-freedom by using the phrase *en avant*, ever forward, to motivate himself to continue pursuing his Dreams. His repeated use of this phrase is so frequent in his journals that it is almost comical to read. Still, many of his entries illuminate how frenzied he felt when his blue devils, the term he used to describe his anxieties, were "massed for attack! (Thornton 245) "En Avant! En Avant! En Avant! En Avant!" he wrote, using exclamation points and underlining each phrase to emphasize his apprehensions. This was a common battle cry for Williams who continuously pushed himself forward even when he felt tired or depressed about how poorly his work was received by critics. In another entry he writes: "Too nervous for social composure. Feel little hope of production for a play. A commendable effort- no more I'm afraid. A frantic little caged beast- Me!"- further demonstrating his credence of



the artist as a caged animal and the insatiable need to be in motion, perpetually moving forward, in order to be free.

***Plumas de una mismas ala***

In Spanish and Latin American cultures, birds are prominent symbols of homosexuality. As a matter of fact, the phrase “*plumas de una misma ala*” or birds of the same wing, an equivalent to the English idiom “birds of a feather”, is often used to indicate homosexuality (Madden 333). Madden asserts that birds in Williams’s plays often represent thwarted or forbidden desires, which aligns with my reading of birds as an expression of non-normative sexuality. The same can be said for birds in Latin American novels such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera* where birds represent abnormal sexualities. Marquez refers to prostitutes in the novel as birds, and when Juvenal Urbino attempts to rescue a bird he loves, he falls from the tree and dies. His death allows the possibility for his wife to take an old suitor as a lover despite her advanced age and the social stigma for someone of her social standing to engage in pre-marital sex.

Using the definition of queer that implies a non-normative sexuality, it becomes evident that Dr. Johnny’s choice to pursue Rosa over Alma at the American Independence Day celebration marks Rosa as a sexual other, or a queer bird. When examining how Latin American allusions come to signify freedom in *Summer and Smoke*, Williams’s characterization of Rosa comments on how limited American social

freedoms were in comparison.<sup>11</sup> Rosa's appearance is also the first explicit signal to the audience that bird imagery will represent sexual freedom in this play. Williams describes her as someone who wears "lustrous feathers on her hat, greenish blue, a cascade of them" reminiscent of a peahen (1:583). Dr. Johnny absentmindedly tells Alma to wear a plumed-hat for their date when he sees Rosa, walk past them bedecked in her feathers. Alma tells him that she does not have a plumed hat. "Get one," he says as he leaves this the non-plumed woman to chase Rosa, signaling his desire for a more vibrantly dressed woman, or a more sexually liberated one, at least (1: 589).

Rosa's connection to the peahen symbolizes a type of sexual liberty, but she also tells Dr. Johnny about living with chickens in Piedras Negras and how she associates this with the dirtiness of her impoverished past. Both of these birds are unable to fly, hence, unable to obtain the ultimate freedom of a domineering American Eagle, or even a nightingale. While Williams chooses to have Alma connected to the freedom of Bastille Day, it is significant that when the audience first sees Rosa, she is enjoying a more liberated lifestyle at the American Independence Day celebration. Therefore, we can deduce that her immigrant status enables her to enjoy freedoms that a white Southern woman cannot. Alma is connected to a bird, too, though, but the sexual connotations of her bird are not as obvious. She is referred to as "The Nightingale of the Delta", presumably because she is a singer. However, when one realizes that Williams used the

---

<sup>11</sup>According to the International Commission of Jurists comparative casebook, Mexico decriminalized homosexuality in 1872, one hundred and thirty-one years before the United States. ([www.icj.org/dwn/database/Sexual%20Orientation,%20Gender%20Identity%20and%20Justice-%20A%20Comparative%20Law%20Casebook%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.icj.org/dwn/database/Sexual%20Orientation,%20Gender%20Identity%20and%20Justice-%20A%20Comparative%20Law%20Casebook%5B1%5D.pdf))

nightingale as a euphemism for his libido, it becomes apparent that Alma is going to undergo a sexual transformation.

Despite his own restless spirit, or what the French Decadents characterized as *ennui*, Dr. Johnny's depiction as the sexually suggestive rooster connects him to a flightless bird, a bird with limited freedom of mobility. He loves to chase women, gamble on illegal cockfights at Moon Lake Casino, and the stage directions state that he has a gilded weathercock on top of his house. Although, he is constantly in motion in the play or dreaming about being able to move on, or escape from whatever he thinks is trying to contain him, he is unable to fly away from his hometown. He thinks that he is sexually and socially liberated because he does not observe the local social conventions, but he eventually adheres to what the townspeople convince him is his responsibility as their doctor.

These characters' connections to revolutions and birds, or flight imagery, do not necessarily imply that Williams thought these freedoms were obtainable. Even his bird imagery contradicts his ideas of freedom. He has some characters who are sexually liberated, like Dr. Johnny and Rosa, linked to flightless birds, while Alma and her lover at the end of the play are able to take flight. The nightingale, the bird he chose to euphemize his own sexual freedom, is a flying bird, and Williams himself preferred an itinerant existence, always in flight as a result of his fear of confinement. It was essential to him that he keep constantly on the move away from friends and family, to prevent feeling trapped by their attachments. Yet, ironically, he felt he was often imprisoned by

his sex drive, always at the mercy of the nightingale who wanted to sing nearly every night.

Williams' association with nightingales helps us to understand Alma's seemingly abrupt character change that begins after she stands up to the literary group and what she now believes are their narrow-minded judgments toward Dr. Johnny. After she upbraids the townspeople in her literary group because she thinks they are the reason he left the meeting and a subsequent argument with her father, who also thinks she should not associate with a man with his reputation, Alma begins to exert her independence from the social constrictions she had always followed. She tells her father "I don't judge people by the tongue of gossips" and insists on going on a date with Dr. Johnny despite her father and the townspeople's disapproval of him (1:608). For their date, Dr. Johnny takes her to Moon Lake Casino, but she has not yet completely rejected her notions of propriety and refuses to enter. Dr. Johnny interrupts her to say, "The cock-fight has started" – and then proceeds to ask her to join him in one of the rooms for rent despite having just heard her opposing views on the subject of pre-marital sex (1:614).

Alma is devastated by his suggestion and demands to have a cab take her home where she retreats to what could be considered a cocoon, refusing to see anyone for several months. When she emerges, she has metamorphosed into a new creature that, like the nightingale, is also ready to take flight. This new Alma has no qualms about casting aside the social codes she has always followed in order to now pursue sexual liberty and goes to see Dr. Johnny to let him know about her transformation.

The immigrants in *Orpheus Descending* face a similar challenge as the Gonzales family from *Summer and Smoke*, but their loss of property is a result of more directly racist actions. Both families purchased property as a chance to move up socially and economically and both families have their property seized by the local white elite, essentially because they live outside the dominant white heteronormative social structure. In a time and place- the deep South in the mid-twentieth century- when white male authority is being threatened, it is crucial for men like Jabe Torrence and the Mystic Crew who killed Lady's Italian father to behave as if these social others are "objects of surveillance and control...[in order to help] elites secure their own status, shape their own identities, and maintain social order" (Rushing 25). Again, the Crew's racial anxiety is reminiscent of Sedgwick's idea of homosexual panic. It is possible this could be more coding because Jabe and Lady have a non-sexual marriage, and he seems to have no interest in Lady, as either a sexual or emotional companion. As a matter of fact, he sees her as a racial and social inferior, which puzzles the reader as to why he would want her as a wife unless he needed a woman to protect his sexual identity and, therefore, protect his claim to the Dream like Stella does for Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Jabe represents the type of people who can obtain the Dream. He owns the mercantile store, a place where goods, like the Dream, are bought and sold. Lady does not know her husband was the one responsible for killing her father, but she does admit years later in anger that he had "bought [her] at a fire sale"- indicating that those who live outside the dominant white heteronormative social structure are commodities to be bought and sold ( 2:39). Rather than face reality that she can never be one of those who obtain

the Dream, Lady is struggling to rebuild it in the store- a replica of the Moon Lake orchard. She wants to have it completed before Jabe dies, so that she can triumph over him-the representative of white social power. Lady's revenge against the town is to continue to pursue the Dream her father had before the white middle-class men killed him, burning him and his vineyard to the ground- a flagrant attempt to ensure the Italian outsider was not able to ascend to their social standing. While she does not seem to threaten Jabe's role as the leader of the household, she does dominate Val when he comes to work in her store, until he seduces her, and then even her economic hold over him becomes useless.

Val, an itinerant musician wearing a snakeskin jacket, is Williams's character most explicitly tied to animal sexuality. Williams's association to his character in this play with animal sexuality focuses more on racial othering than sexual othering. Despite his attempts to settle down and get a job and begin working on obtaining the American Dream, Val is too much of an outsider within this closed society to actually achieve this Dream anyway. Sheriff Talbott tries to persuade Val to leave town by telling him about a sign at a county line that reads: "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county!" and he calls Val 'boy' and tells him he better be out of town before sunrise. (2:81). This racially charged language and his eventual lynching link Val to social non-whiteness allowing Williams to address civil rights issues and race as boundaries that are as permeable as gender and sexuality.

Val claims his "temperature's always a couple degrees above normal, same as a dog's, it's normal for [him] same as it is for a dog" (2:33). He even describes himself to

Lady as a bird "that don't have legs and can't light on nothing but has to stay all his life on its wings in the sky...they just spread their wings and go to sleep on the wind" (2:38). This type of bird could represent freedom for Val or Lady because both are non-normative characters seeking a freedom of mobility. Val, who seems somewhat to enjoy being a bird in continuous flight, says that he wants to change and longs for the chance to be still, to light somewhere. The freedom to stay on the move appeals to Lady even though she is determined to carry on the Dream of her father, the dream of property ownership and potential social and financial success.

In *Orpheus Descending* and *Summer and Smoke*, Williams shows us a caste system where marginalized groups have little hope of ascending to a higher social position. Despite the odds being against him, Val makes an attempt to abandon his itinerant ways and pursue a version of the Dream that Williams characterizes as a static or even stagnant position: staying in one place, at one job, starting a family that you come home to every evening- an American Nightmare for someone who equated freedom with flight. Val, who is represented by the mythical bird that must spend its life constantly in flight because it does not have any feet to land on the ground, is fighting against his nature by trying to stay grounded. This struggle represents his inevitable battle against his sexual nature in order to try to obtain what he considers a static version of the Dream.

It is imperative that Val be seen as socially non-white because of the dual role he symbolizes at the end. In a sense Val becomes the replacement for the lost love of her youth, David, whom Lady loses when her father is killed and she simultaneously lost what little economic and social position she had at that time. Val also stands in for her

father, the Italian immigrant who is considered both racially and socially insignificant. Media scholar Allison Graham addresses this idea of the white misfit who represents the traditionally disenfranchised minority in *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle*. Graham describes Val in the film adaptation, *The Fugitive Kind*, as a "cultural mulatto...[who]...suffers the fate of those who try to "pass" (142). More importantly, because Val is regarded as a "White Negro" by the townspeople, he suffers the same fate as Lady's racially insignificant father- he is burned to death at the fake Moon Lake orchard she recreated in her store (138).

When the town folk burn Lady's lover, the socially non-white Val, at Lady's reconstructed place, it is reminiscent of when they burned Lady's first patriarchal figure, her father, at the real Moon Lake orchard. She loses her lover and her property once again to the men who first took away her father's chance at achieving the Dream. These immigrants' loss of property and pursuit of happiness demonstrates Williams' idea of who controls the Dream. Rather than fight within this system to achieve what he considers a stifling normative existence anyway, Williams favors constant motion as a symbol of freedom.

Like Val, Williams also likened himself to a footless bird that must die suspended in flight as his only defense against being trapped on the ground, or ensnared in a conventional version of the Dream. Rejecting the bald eagle, the traditional bird imagery used to represent American freedoms, Williams preferred this myth of a footless bird that will remain in motion until the day it dies. He certainly spent most of his time fleeing from one place to another, especially when he felt family or friends were demanding too



much from him socially, distracting him from his work. Leverich says that Williams' friends "viewed his birdlike migrations as more method than madness" but for Williams, it was his way of fighting against being tethered to place (370). Yet, in his work, and most particularly these four plays discussed in this thesis, he could not get away from mourning the loss of place through his characters.

The freedom Williams was most hoping to discover involved a need to completely overturn the heteronormative standards that had dictated America's social system, especially in the south. Instead what he discovered in his plays is that not even his revolutionary characters could achieve this freedom he sought to give them. Their failure was inherent because the system could not allow for outsiders to penetrate it, thereby preventing its very upheaval. Since the mid-twentieth century, though, the U.S. made progressions in social liberties. But, with racial and homosexual panic and gender restrictions still prevalent in our society, some social freedoms available now still remain insecure for some and nonexistent for many other marginalized bodies.

## **“FREEBIRD”: A CONCLUSION AND CODA**

*“And this bird you cannot change”- Lynard Skynard*

Cotton-ginning season may be the best time to drive into the Delta. The summer hayfields are no less gorgeous, with soft, swaying wheat that is such a dark green it looks perpetually soaked with rain before it turns to its signature autumnal gold. But the Delta in October is the quintessence of what most people imagine the cotton kingdom should look like: unending fields of half-dollar sized white fluffy clouds that have floated down to the earth. Some of these fluffs still float through the air from time to time or line the highway, making me mistakenly think on my first drive through this land that Delta people sure were bad to litter.

The organizers for the Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival are well aware of how magnificent the farmland looks in this season, too. They host the annual festival right at the peak of harvest time, and it never fails, at least in my memory, to be sunny, warm (but not oppressively hot) and dusty when I make my yearly pilgrimage from Oxford to Clarksdale. The golden, dusty atmosphere perfectly matches Williams’s description of the landscape as a sepia-toned memory, a technique he used in his plays long before filmmakers popularized it to denote nostalgia.

Even though I cannot hear the gins from the road, I remember the hums, thumps, and thuds the machines make when the cotton is ginned and bundled into bales. I first discovered these noises when I visited the Big Creek Gin a few years before while

shooting a documentary about the landscape Williams was imagining in his Delta plays. Passing that gin, which is located roughly five miles before entering Clarksdale from Highway 6, reminds me of the implications Williams was making with stage directions for plays like *The Battle of Angels*, which he later rewrote into *Orpheus Descending*.

In the original version, the cotton gin has great significance in a scene where Myra Torrence is visibly distraught after her clerk, Val, was nearly arrested for defending a black man. Val continues to excite her by confessing that he is afraid of his own hands and what he will do with them with perhaps her or another woman. Myra's response links the two characters' excited frenzy with noise of the gin. "My head's still whirling from all that excitement in here. I don't seem able to *think*. The cotton gin bothers me, too. It makes a sound like your heart was pounding a lot too fast," she tells him. (1: 241). Val notices her belt is untied on the back of her dress and comes over to fix it. After touching her, he says, "Let's go in the back room a minute." She tells him that the door is locked and she threw away the key because, "I know you would ask me to go in there sometime an' I was scared I might be weak enough to do it" (1: 242). He leaves the stage for a moment and the stage directions read: "The gin seems to pump even louder." Val returns and tells Myra he has broken the lock and then takes her offstage into the back room. In this scene, the gin's noises not only allude to the character's increasing heartbeats as they become sexually aroused, but it also refers to the mechanization that has changed the agricultural economy in the Delta. These changes signify for Myra Torrence's husband, Jabe, that the old ways are fleeting and new ideas, symbolized by the young man who

seduces his wife, are going to alter the society he has fought to protect, even murdering his wife's father to do so.

There is another important part to the Delta autumn landscape that reflects the social climate, especially during election years. After the cotton has been bundled into modules, it is covered with large colorful tarps and sometimes left near the highway to be collected and shipped. Some farmers spray-paint religious or political messages like one I noticed last year that read, "God Bless American," which I am not sure is a malapropism but more of a comment on importing foreign trade. This year with political issues so strongly connected to social constructs of the body like gender, race, and sexuality, it is likely these messages will reflect those sentiments.

As I think about these social issues debated on road-side cotton bales, I wonder why have powerful social figures deemed it necessary to discipline the body in Williams time and even now? Why must the body be the place where societal control is battled? It is true that bodies have long been sites for exerting power. As this study has demonstrated, the mere construction of body identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality denote a white heteronormative dominance within our society.

Bodies are also fundamental to construction of the southern mythos – with a key aspect revolving around the idea that people are inherently tied to the land. However if geographical boundaries are permeable, what does that say about boundaries of the body that are so inextricably connected to space, such as race and gender and sexuality? If space exists as a hegemonic discourse by default, then how can these spaces be utilized to complicate those boundaries of the body? This project has determined that boundaries

can expand. The American South in Williams imagination extends into Latin America, Europe, and Asia in just the few plays I used for this study, nevermind the multitude of other plays, short stories, and poems he wrote.

As Davis illustrates in *Southscapes*, bodies and geographical boundaries are inevitable spaces for social discourse. As much as Williams was concerned with these issues, it is only logical to connect his work to the current political climate that is also very much preoccupied with looking to the body and geographical boundaries as spaces of social discourse. One news story in recent months from Russia exemplifies to an extremist degree the danger of giving power to the church to keep women from expressing their disapproval of the nation's leader and his policies. But the repercussions of arresting three women for disagreeing with their opinion of the national leader and the religious institution that supports him transcends national borders and will likely affect the United States and other nations as the Church continues to grow in political power under President Vladimir Putin's leadership.

The arrest and trial for Russian female punk performance band Pussy Riot exemplifies many of the social inadequacies Williams illustrated in his work. The women are guilty of protesting against the same type of patriarchal heteronormative social system that this thesis shows Williams fought against. The band, or performance art group as they are sometimes referred to, was arrested for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" after breaking into Christ the Savior's Cathedral in Moscow and performing what they called a "punk prayer" at the altar which was filmed and then released on the internet (Rumens). The judge reading the verdict for the Pussy Riot trial even used some

of the same pathologizing rhetoric Williams utilizes in *Summer and Smoke* to reflect popular sentiment against women who deigned to express their autonomy. One account of the trial in *The New Yorker* identified that three Pussy Riot members' alleged psychological disorders were designated with phrases like: "a proactive approach to life," "a drive for self-fulfillment," "stubbornly defending their opinion," "inflated self-esteem," "inclination to opposition behavior," and "propensity for protest reactions" (Lipman). The fact that these three women have been incarcerated for having the boldness, or confidence, or what is considered an excessively high level of self-esteem, to express unpopular opinions could not be more ludicrous if it were written in a Tennessee Williams play.

Characters who refuse to adhere to the patriarchal heteronormative standard are designated as queer birds in Williams's work. What may be more astonishing than the two year prison these three members of Pussy Riot are serving is the fact that these women were also forced to sit in a glass cage like birds during the trial and hear renunciations for their actions. Leaders who have spoken out against what they consider a very harsh sentence for these women recognize that this case represents an egregious violation of human rights, and what is more frightening is that prosecutors were more focused on how these women insulted the church than supposedly disrupting the social order, another charge that was held against them. Their comments against the Orthodox Church were considered blasphemous, yet the group claims they are protesting the church's support of Putin's leadership, not the church itself.

One translation reveals that the group was imploring the Virgin Mary to become a feminist and denounce Putin's rule under which "gay pride's chained and in detention" and women are expected to "stick to making love and babies" (Rumens). There has also been a recent push from the Orthodox Church, which typically remains aloof from Western affairs, and the Russian Government for the United Nations Human Rights Council to "develop a resolution that would allow 'traditional values' to trump human rights" (Kane). These traditional values could refer to a variety of standards that are harmful to many, ranging from female circumcision to women not being allowed to work outside the home.

The lyrics to another Pussy Riot song: "the Orthodox Religion is a hardened penis/ coercing its subjects to accept conformity" illustrates the group's disgust with how the church and the current political regime are using their dominant masculine power to dictate, or discipline, social behavior ("Free Pussy Riot"). It is almost laughable that the judge said that "they crudely undermined the social order" just because the women trespassed into a church and expressed a controversial opinion (Neuman). At times Williams's treatment of unconventional characters seems unbelievably harsh, too. They are castrated, eaten alive, burned alive, or committed to asylums because something inside them will not allow them to submit to the conventions of society. As discussed in chapter two, even though Williams believed these protests were important in order to create a revolutionary new social system, he knew they were essentially doomed.

This twenty-first century trial of oppression proves Williams's work is more than relevant- even in the land of the free social liberties are still being debated. President

Obama is among many world leaders who have expressed disappointment in the Pussy Riot verdict. His opposition to this human rights violation is comparable to the fight he faces against many conservative Christians in America who fundamentally disagree with him and have used the traditional values argument to oppose Obama's health care initiative. The correlation between the United States and Russia's increasing religious influence on government matters becomes even more apparent when one considers that the Russian Orthodox Church, breaking its tradition of non-involvement in Western affairs, held a meeting last summer with conservative evangelicals for the first time. This meeting occurred while the United Nations Human Rights Council was debating Russia's proposed resolution that traditional values should usurp human rights. While the UN voted against Russia's initiative, the current political climate affirms this fight will be ongoing.

Even though some of these same issues are present that Williams was critiquing nearly seventy years ago, many of the social changes he longed to see have happened. Just as I was putting together this conclusion, the *New York Times* published an opinion editorial from a southern historian declaring "you can be openly gay and accepted in the rural South" without fearing for your life (Cox). The editorial links the perceived association of hate crimes to the idea of the south being "the most evangelical and politically conservative region" but most of the southerners who oppose gay rights and view homosexuality as a sin operate on a don't ask, don't tell policy with their gay neighbors and loved ones (Cox). This unspoken acceptance, which still denotes the strength of a heterosexist society, is surely preferable to the criminalizing of homosexuals



during World War II. In an attempt to eradicate homosexuals from society, the military began performing tests on draftees to determine if they were possible homosexuals - the most invasive one including examining men's rectum to determine if it had been enlarged from anal intercourse. <sup>12</sup>Since declaring oneself a homosexual excused a man from war, the military campaigned to dissuade men from wanting to declare themselves as gay by arresting men who frequented gay bars and by encouraging newspapers to report on these arrests and to further shame these men by relating the current ideology within psychiatry that homosexuality was a type of mental illness.

Even during the time between the setting for *Summer and Smoke* (1916) and the time it premiered as a play (1948), great social changes were occurring in the U.S. White women were allowed to vote by the mid-twentieth century and within two more decades black men and women were voting, too. Still, black men and women lived in fear that white men could abuse their bodies at any moment just to exert their social dominance. It is interesting that as the rights of blacks and women and homosexuals came into the national discussion in the 1960s, Williams moves away from heavy reliance on the American south and particularly the Delta as a setting. Some critics have said that once society caught up with Williams's personal politics in the 60s and 70s, he was not relevant anymore. While his later plays have been critiqued by some for being derivative and no longer as controversial as his earlier work, the same themes of loss, desperation, mental illness, sexuality, race, gender roles, and anxieties over social expectations

---

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the cultural context of homosexuality and how it changed during Williams career, see Michael Paller's *Gentleman Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Broadway Drama*.

abound in his later work. The fact that the Delta is not the setting for these later plays may further Williams's idea of expanding the boundaries of the south.

While there has been much progress, the social revolution Williams sought is far from being recognized in the U.S. Even in a supposedly post-racial America, disparaging opinions about President Obama are rarely expressed without racist implications as evidenced by the chair lynchings discussed in the introduction. When *Saturday Night Live* aired a skit satirizing a secret tape that was leaked of Republican candidate Mitt Romney professing unconcern for "the very poor," at a private fundraiser, he went on to say that when he was referring to the 47 percent who do not pay taxes he was not talking about senior citizens, or servicemen, or even "southern whites," a group he would most definitely not want to offend and an obvious nod to the greatest political threat for a liberal democrat, and a black man, to boot (talkingcrazytv).

There is also the recent controversy with Chick-fil-A to consider. Although many LGBT groups have advocated for boycotting Chick-fil-A for years, it was not until Dan Cathy, the food chain's president and son of its founder, Truett Cathy, admitted in an interview with the *Biblical Recorder*, a Christian news organization, that his company is "very much supportive of the family – the biblical definition of the family unit" (Blume). This statement prompted one person, Carly McGehee, to urge gays and lesbians to have a same-sex kiss-in at any of the company's 16,000 restaurants nationwide on August 3. In response, former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee made a public plea for citizens who support "a business that operates on Christian principles" to patronize the restaurant on

August 1 (Bingham). Huckabee's request resulting in what ABC News reported as over 630,000 supporters patronizing the restaurant nationwide that day.

The simple fact that there was a national same-sex kiss-in without the need for a Stonewall style riot does suggest that homosexuals have acquired a greater level of acceptance in the U.S. as Cox opines in her editorial. Another controversy about birds and homosexuality emerged this summer also indicating a progression of gay rights. England's Natural History Museum released a report that had been hidden for nearly 100 years in their museum detailing the queer sexual practices of Adelie penguins on a South Pole expedition.<sup>13</sup> The fact that a report that was once considered too indecent for publication is now being used to educate scientists on animal sexuality offers the possibility that rigid ideas, or boundaries, that control society can eventually be expanded to include new viewpoints. Of course, the museum is located in the United Kingdom, but if such a discovery were made in the U.S., it would most likely be published, too. Fifty years ago, that might not have been true.

Even more recently, Mitt Romney has unwittingly created another example in which a bird symbolizes a key issue in this election. In the first presidential debate of the 2012 electoral season, Romney repeated a promise he made this summer to cut funding for the Public Broadcasting System, saying "I like Big Bird...but I'm not going to keep spending money on things to borrow money from China to pay for it" ("Mitt Romney: I Like Big Bird But..."). Romney's desire to eliminate what some consider an important educational tool could be viewed as a way of further marginalizing groups that are

---

<sup>13</sup> For more information about George Leverick's observations of the sexual practices of the Adelie penguins, see The Natural History Museum's article, "Penguin sex habits study rediscovered at Museum."

typically at a socioeconomic disadvantage. While the producers of Sesame Street have remained neutral regarding Romney's comments, PBS CEO Paula Kerger was not willing to be conciliatory. She told CNN Newsroom that, "[w]ith the enormous problems facing our country, the fact that we are the focus is unbelievable to me, particularly given the fact that at another part of the debate, both candidates talked about the importance of education. We're America's biggest classroom" (Molloy). Researchers at the University of Texas may support Kerger's stance on using public television to educate America's youth. Their studies show that "[p]reschool children who watched a few hours a week of educational programming perform better on achievement tests over time than their peers who watch more general entertainment shows" (Center for Media Literacy). Therefore, Romney's attack on Big Bird could by default translate into an attack on lower-income households who already rank lower in education because higher-income families have access to resources other than public television and the basic curriculum in their school system to supplement their child's education.

While there are many more advances to be made for the rights of marginalized groups in this country, even some of the defeats in the past year have done much to rally public support for their rights. If nothing else, this study has shown that disciplining the body has always been paramount to societal control. By connecting Williams to political issues in the U.S and abroad, it reiterates his efforts to have his characters transcend both geographical and social borders. But ultimately for Williams, a fight for freedom was a fight against heteronormative boundaries.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Andalazua, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera*. San Francisco, California: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

“Autochthony.” Wordreference.com. Web. 20 Aug. 2012.

Badenes, Jose I. “The Dramatization of Desire: Tennessee Williams and Federico Garcia Lopez.” *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*. Ed. Robert Bray. Issue 10 (2009).  
<<http://www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/journal/work.php?ID=93>>

Bibler, Michael, *Cottons Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Bikini Kill, “Rebel Girl.” Musicsonglyrics.com. Web. 4 June 2012.

Bingham, Amy. “Chick-fil-A Supporters Line Up for Appreciation Day.” *ABCNews*. Univision. 1 Aug. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.

Blake, William, *The Complete Poetry of William Blake*. Digireads.com Publishing, 2010.

Bloom, Harold, “Introduction,” *Bloom’s BioCritiques*. Broomall, Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.

Blume, K. Allan. “‘Guilty as charged,’ Dan Cathy says of Chick-fil-A’s Stand on Faith.” *The Biblical Recorder*. 2 July 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.

Brundage, W. Fitzhugh, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Cash, W.J., *The Mind of the South*. New York: Random House, 1941.

Chambers, Samuel A., Telepistemology of the Closet; Or, the Queer Politics of *Six Feet Under*. *Journal of American Culture* 26.1: 24–41, 2003.

Cobb, James C., *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Cobb, James C., *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Cox, Karen. “We’re Here, We’re Queer, Y’all.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times. 4 Oct. 2012. Web. 4 Oct. 2012.

- Crespino, Joseph and Lassiter, Matthew, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 2010.
- Davis, Thadious. *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region and Literature*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- “Disciplining.” Dictionary.com. Web. 20 Aug. 2012.
- Donaldson, Susan and Goodwyn-Jones, Anne, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997.
- “Eagle pass.” Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.. 16 Nov. 2012. <Dictionary.com [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/eagle pass](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/eagle_pass)>.
- “Educational TV May Boost Intellectual Development.” *Center for Media Literacy*. Web. 4 Oct. 2012.
- Ellis, Havelock. *Sexual Inversion: Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. University Press of the Pacific: Honolulu, Hawaii, 1906.
- “Free Pussy Riot.” *Indymedia London*. 22 April 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- Goldfield, David, *Region, Race and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.
- Graham, Allison, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Greeson, Jennifer Rae. *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 2010.
- Gupta, Prachi. “Obama chair lynchings in Texas and Virginia,” *Salon.com*. Salon Media Group. 20 Sept. 2012. Web. 25 Sept. 2012.
- Gussow, Mel and Kenneth Holditch, eds. *Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955*. 2 Vols. The Library of America: New York, 2000.
- Handy, W.C. *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*. New York: De Capo Press. 1941.
- Holditch, Kenneth, and Leavitt, Richard, *Tennessee Williams and the South*, Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2002.

- Holditch, Kenneth, interview by Michelle Bright, videorecording, Clarksdale, Miss., 23 March 2011.
- Holditch, Kenneth, lecture, "Tennessee Williams and Mississippi," remarks delivered on the occasion of the issuance of the Tennessee Williams stamp in Clarksdale, MS on 13 October, 1995. Tennessee Williams, SMMSS (MUM00481). The Department of Archives and Special Collections, J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi.
- Hosemann, Delbert, "Initiative Measure No. 26." Mississippi Secretary of State. Web. 25 May 2012.
- [http://www.youtube.com/user/talkingcrazytv/watch?v=\\_mSellTTXJ8](http://www.youtube.com/user/talkingcrazytv/watch?v=_mSellTTXJ8). Talkingcrazytv. "SNL Mitt Romney Spoof '47 Percent' Leaked Tape." Youtube. 22 Sept. 2012. Web. 4 Oct. 2012.
- Jernow, Alison Liu, *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Justice: A Comparative Casebook*. International Commission of Jurists, 2011.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4f9eae7c2.html>. Electronic book.
- Kane, Gillian, "What Does the 'Traditional Family' Have to Do with Pussy Riot?" *Religion Dispatches*. Religion Dispatches. 20 Aug. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- Kreyling, Micheal, *Inventing Southern*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1998.
- Kugler, Frederick. *The Male and Female in Tennessee Williams Plays*. Munich: GRIN Publishing. 2006.
- Leverich, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.
- Lipman, Marsha. "The Pussy Riot Verdict." *New York Times*. New York Times, 17 Aug. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- Lutz, Norma Jean, "Biography of Tennessee Williams," *Bloom's BioCritiques*. Broomall, Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003.
- Maines, Rachel P., *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Madden, Ed, "Bird." *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*. Ed. George Haggerty, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000.



- “Mitt Romney: ‘I Like Big Bird But...’” *ABCNews*. Univision. 3 Oct. 2012. Web. 4 Oct. 2012.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona and Bruce Erikson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics and Desire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Molloy, Tim. “PBS CEO: Romney's Big Bird Moment 'Unbelievable.’” *Yahoo! TV*. Yahoo! Inc. 4 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- Nassaar, Christopher, ed. *The English Literary Decadence: An Anthology*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999.
- Neuman, Scott. “Russia's Medvedev Says Female Punk Rockers Should Go Free.” *National Public Radio News Blog*. NPR, in partnership with Public Broadcasting System. 12 Sept. 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- Paller, Michael, *Gentleman Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Broadway Drama*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- “Penguin Sex Habits Study Rediscovered at Museum.” *The Natural History Museum*. 9 June 2012. Web. 28 Sept. 2012.
- “President Woodrow Wilson Speaks in Favor of Female Suffrage.” *This Day In History*. The History Channel. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Rasky, Harry, *Tennessee Williams: A Portrait in Laughter and Lamentation*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1986).
- Roessel, David and Moschovakis, Nicholas, eds., *The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams*. New York: New Directions, 2002.
- Rumens, Carol. “Pussy Riot’s Punk Prayer is Pure Protest Poetry.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited. 20 August 2012. Web. 28 Sep. 2012.
- Rushing, Wanda, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Savran, David. *Communists, Cowboys and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

- Sedgwick, Eve, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- Seelye, Katharine, Q., "Voters Defeat Many G.O.P. – Sponsored Measures." *New York Times*. New York Times. 10 Nov. 2011. Web. 25 May 2012.
- Somerville, Siobhan B., *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Women and her Role in the Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of American History*. Vol. 60, No. 2 (Sep., 1973), pp. 332-356. Organization of American Historians. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2936779>
- Spoto, Donald, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams*, New York: De Capo Press.
- Stevens-Davidowitz, Seth, "How Racist Are We: Ask Google?," *New York Times*. New York Times, 9 June 2012. Web. 9 June 2012.
- Thornton, Margaret Bradham, *Tennessee Williams Notebooks*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson (1893). "The Significance of the Frontier In American History", in Martin Ridge, ed., *Frederick Jackson Turner: Wisconsin's Historian of the Frontier*. Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.
- Vidal, Gore. "Selected Memories of the Glorious Bird and the Golden Days." *New York Book Review*. New York Times. 5 February 1976. Web. 4 October 2012.
- Weeks, Linton, *Clarksdale and Coahoma County: A History*. Clarksdale: Carnegie Public Library. 1982.
- Weiss, Jillian Todd, *Gender Caste System: Identity, Privacy, and Heteronormativity*. Tulane Law School. 25 Feb. 2007. Web. 4 June 2012.
- Williams, Chad. "African-Americans and World War I." *African and African Diasporan Transformations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Web. 4 May 2012. [www.exhibitions.nypl.org](http://www.exhibitions.nypl.org).
- Williams, Edwina, *Remember Me to Tom*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963.
- Williams, Tennessee, *Memoirs*. New York: New Directions, 1975. .

White, Edmund, *Rimbaud: The Double Life of a Rebel*. New York: Atlas & Co. Publishers, 2008.

Yaeger, Patricia, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

## VITA

Alcorn Central High School, Class of 1999

University of Mississippi, Class of 2009

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts, English

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts, Journalism, with an emphasis  
in Magazine Journalism

Primary Research Fields:

20<sup>th</sup> Century American Literature, 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Drama, southern studies, particularly southern literature, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Eco-criticism, American Cultural Studies, documentary studies and southern journalism.