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Abstract

American society is founded on myths such as the American Dream and Manifest Destiny. Tennessee Williams, an American, wrote plays that often contained subtle hints toward the supernatural and myth, yet the time-period of his plays is often the era of post-war disillusionment. In contrast to the post-war period of WWI, in which disillusionment resulted in a rejection of democracy in favour of ideology, the post-war period of WWII was existential rather than political. The post-WWII disillusionment consisted mainly of three things: existentialism, alienation and individual hopelessness. This thesis explores how myth and gender identity portray mid-century, post-war disillusionment in Tennessee Williams´ plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Williams created a compelling and innovative portrayal of characters who struggle with identity and sexuality. Juxtaposing concepts of myth and the portrayal of gender identity reveal how Williams´ characters attempt to transcend the primal urges of the body, yet are devoured by their own human nature. As a result, the characters develop paradoxical identities which cause them to experience and represent the alienation and existentialism that permeated the American society during the mid-century era. This thesis will explore how Brick Pollitt´s inability to define his sexual identity leads to homosexual existentialism and Blanche DuBois´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to have a psychological breakdown. The similarities between these two characters is their paradoxical identities: Brick´s hetero- and homomasculine identity and Blanche´s belle/whore identity. Their paradoxical identities and their portrayal of mythical figures create new narratives, which casts Brick and Blanche as archetypal figures in their own right, and serves to make them icons for gender liberation.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Tennessee Williams employs myth and gender identity to portray Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and Brick Pollitt from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) as attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, yet ending up being devoured by their own human nature. Williams uses the myth of "the original sin" from Christianity to set up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. The societal versions of this dual human nature manifests as paradoxical identities, specifically Blanche`s belle/whore identity, and Brick hetero- and homomasculine identity. Brick´s inability to redefine his identity leads to homosexual existentialism, and causes his identity to be both hetero- and homomasculine. Blanche´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to develop a belle/whore identity. The Sothern belle and the heteromasculine identity emphasize the primacy of spiritual love over physical desire. These contradictory identities cause the characters to experience alienation and existentialism, thus portraying post-WWII disillusionment. In contrast to the post-war period of WWI, in which post-war disillusionment resulted in the rejection of democracy in favor of ideology, the post-war disillusionment after the second world war was existential rather than political.

Post-WWII disillusionment mainly consisted of existentialism, alienation and individual hopelessness. Blanche´s belle identity comes from an outdated society, and makes Blanche behave according to the rules of this society. However, these rules are obsolete, causing Blanche to become alienated from her family, as she is seen as "other" by the other characters in the play. Her belle identity makes Blanche see Stanley as not worthy of herself and her sister Stella, despite having to throw herself at their mercy. Brick, on the other hand, does not address his paradoxical identity, which causes him to experience existentialism, in addition to becoming alienated from his family. His inability to redefine his identity, makes him unable to participate in society.

In addition, Blanche and Brick are cast in the roles of Persephone and Odysseus from Greek mythology. Portraying Blanche with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying her as Persephone creates a break or deviation from the myth. Whereas Stella portrays the traditional Persephone, who falls in love with her abuser, Blanche creates a new narrative. Rather than being a subservient housewife, like Stella, who accepts abuse and misogyny from her husband, Blanche is portrayed as a woman who is struggling with her sexuality and a confining, constructed gender role. Brick´s portrayal of Odysseus while going

through a homosexual existential crisis, also creates a break from the traditional myth. Whereas Stanley is portrayed as Hades in order to demonize his hyper-masculinity, Brick is portrayed as Odysseus to illustrate how his crisis in actually a journey. Both of these deviations from the traditional myths serve to create new narratives, and casts Blanche and Brick as archetypal figures in their own right. This allows for them to emerge as icons for gender liberation.

Thomas Porter, who wrote *Myth and Modern American Drama* argues that any cultural milieu contributes attitudes and patterns to drama, making it is essential to understand how modern American drama represents its milieu in order to understand the play as a whole. The American society is founded on myths such as the American Dream and Manifest Destiny, and Williams, an American playwright, often wrote plays that contained subtle hints towards the mythical and supernatural, yet the setting of the play was often the mid-century era. To fully understand the extent of the play, it is important to examine the cultural milieu Williams was a part of at the time of production. Robert Graves wrote about the functions of myth in *The Greek Myths*. One of the functions of myth is to uphold or sustain social structures and conventional practices and beliefs. Williams employs in order to portray how a break from the myth is simultaneously a break from convention and established social structure.

This thesis will be structured in three chapters. The first chapter will examine the use of myth, and how Williams´ use of myth relates to structure, time, nature, characters and the human condition. Nancy Traubitz details how Williams employed mythical substructures to structure his plays, namely the idea that retribution follows transgression. According to Traubitz, this emphasizes how physical love will ultimately doom rather than redeem mankind. Following this, Mary Ann Corrigan argues that due to the belief that time was detrimental to the human condition, modernist authors attempted to achieve transcendence in their works. She argues that Williams´ characters fight to reconcile their dual natures of body and spirit which will allow them to transcend a temporal existence. Pau G. Barberá argues that Williams employed classical references to illustrate that man´s search for the spiritual will only result in discovering cruel nature. Athena Coronis argues that Williams creates an anti-hero, who is the victim of depraved society. Finally, Judith Thompson argues that Williams employed myth in the form of an archetypal quest to illustrate the conflict between the transcendent aspirations of the soul and the body, and that these aspirations act as an existential version of Plato´s myth of the divided self. as well as the myth of “original sin” to portray a “divided self” in his characters.

The second chapter will explore how gender identity is portrayed in selected works by Tennessee Williams. During the time his early plays were produced, hyper-homophobia permeated the American mid-century society, and homosexuality was mainly censored from the public sphere. To avoid being censored, authors and playwrights had to use the "language of remorse" which characterized homosexuals as neurotic and degenerate. According to Savran, William´s work from the 1940s and 50s challenge the homophobic discourse that permeated mid-century American society. Williams refrained from using this type of language, and found other ways to portray homosexuality. John Bak examines this, and argues that Cold War masculinity differentiated between homosexual identity and homosexual act, and Williams portrays how this ultimately resulted in homosexual existentialism. Gencheva examines female gender identity in Williams´ works, and argues that Williams portrayed the inability to develop gender consciousness as the reason for the characters being unable to separate delusion and reality. She uses the Southern belle as an example. And finally, Emmanuel Vernedakis, argues that, rather than portray the homosexual as a modern monster, Williams employed myth to portray homosexuality as a paradoxical identity.

In the third chapter I will lay out my close-reading of the plays. I will juxtapose these concepts and portrayals to reveal how the Blanche and Brick try to transcend their primal urges, but are devoured by their paradoxical identities. Specifically, how Brick Pollitt´s inability to define his sexual identity leads to homosexual existentialism and Blanche Dubois´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to have a psychological breakdown. These events lead to the development of their paradoxical identities, which act as a societal filtering of the soul/body battle. Brick´s hetero- and homomasculinity and Blanche´s belle/whore sexuality make Brick and Blanche place primacy of a spiritual relationship over physical desire. These paradoxical identities cause Brick and Blanche to become alienated or experience existentialism, thus portraying post-WWII disillusionment. Finally, I will examine how their portrayals as Persephone and Odysseus casts them as archetypal figures and icons for gender liberation.

Chapter 1. "It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends": Myth in Tennessee Williams´ oeuvre.

Williams employed myths in his works to illustrate how his characters are anti-heroes who attempt to transcend a temporal existence, but ultimately succumb to devouring nature. This inevitability is due to a mythical trope Williams often incorporated in his works, specifically, that retribution follows transgression. The effect this had on Williams´ writing was to create a sense of fatalism or determinism. In addition, Williams incorporated another modernist trope into his works, which was a dichotomous understanding of the world, for example good versus bad. A common theme in Williams´ works is the defeat of the light by darkness, or of spirit by matter. This extended to the human situation as well. For instance, the "human" would be divided into soul and body, and because these oppositions were placed in juxtaposition, this would create a tension between the two.

Williams´ fatalistic writing style is explored by Nancy Traubitz who argues in "Myth as a Basis of Dramatic Structure in *Orpheus Descending*," that Williams employed the mythical story pattern where retribution follows transgression to illustrate how physical love will ultimately doom rather than redeem mankind. Williams incorporated several myths into this play, among them the loss of Eden, Christ, and Orpheus. Traubitz argues that these myths and characters appear in a specific order in the play. The play`s characters take on roles of characters from the myths, most notably the protagonist, who jumps between the role of Christ and the role of Orpheus. The protagonist, Val, repeatedly figures as first as Christ, then as Orpheus. Traubitz argues that this emphasizes "the descent into darkness, the pull of human physical love and the primacy of the Orpheus legend over the Christ analogue" (62). In other words, by using the myths in this specific order and repeatedly using the Orpheus myth after the myth of Christ, enforces the mythical story pattern. According to Traubitz, this story pattern, where retribution follows transgression, ensures that the characters´ actions doom them, rather than redeem them. If Val only figured as Christ, who sacrificed himself to ensure that mankind could attain absolution, then the play would be one of redemption. However, by having Val take on the role of Orpheus, this becomes a story of damnation. Orpheus, who descended into Hades to reclaim his lover, but ultimately looked back when he was told not to, thus ending up losing his lover, is the epitome of retribution following transgression. Val shows promise in his role as Christ; the ability to rise above human nature, but in his role as Orpheus allows human physical love be his downfall. An example of this is how Val, the protagonist, in the role of Christ, receives a prophecy, and by ignoring the

prophecy in the role of Orpheus, ensures the loss of his lover, the same fate Orpheus experiences when he looks back.

The fatalism in Williams´ plays adds a certain element of suspense in relation to time, which makes Williams´ characters struggle to overcome the temporal even more significant. Overcoming a temporal existence is not to be understood as attempting to become immortal, but rather to live an existence which is not dictated by time. In "Memory, Dream, and Myth in the plays of Tennessee Williams," Mary Ann Corrigan argues that Williams´ characters fight to reconcile their dual natures of body and spirit which will result in transcending a temporal existence. Corrigan believes that Williams was obsessed with time and its effect on the human situation, which was common for modernist writers. The reasoning behind this is that mankind is thought to bound and degraded by time. Corrigan argues that the view of mankind as "fettered and degraded by a temporal existence" has resulted in attempts to "transcend time" (155). In other words, modernist writers attempted to overcome time because of the effects time had on mankind. "Fettered" evokes images of enslavement, so not only is mankind enslaved, but also degraded by time. Degraded can be interpreted to mean that the passing of time is detrimental to the human situation. In other words, trying to transcend time in art is due to the perceived detrimental effect of time on mankind.

"Transcend" means to rise above or go beyond, however, when Williams attempts to transcend time he is not literally trying to stop or rise above time. Rather, the attempt to transcend time comes from "the view of art as a source of stasis in a world of flux" (Corrigan, 155). This means that there are several ways to transcend time in a literary work. One way is to make the whole work a point of stasis; a world without time. For example, time has no effect in a play, the plot or characters are not bound or ruled by any sort of time restraint. According to Corrigan, this can be done through the use of myth, as authors who use myths can negate the barrier between past and present. In fact, Corrigan argues that Williams attempts to transcend time by juxtaposing past and present, thus creating a timeless perspective, or a world without time.

Another way to achieve this is to make time a sort of character in the play. Corrigan argues Williams employed this method in his plays, most commonly by using temporal terms to express conflict. What this means is that Williams made his character´s struggles related to time. Specifically, he cast time in the role of an "arch-enemy," (155). In other words, the conflict of the play would revolve around the protagonist´s fight with or against time.

Even though Williams "transcends" time in his plays, his characters are unable to do the same. Rather, the use of myth has the opposite effect on his characters. Corrigan asserts

that “Williams` mythological allusions suggest the utter incapacity for change or progress in the human situation” (158). Due to Williams´ view of time as detrimental to the human situation, he portrays characters who attempt to transcend a temporal existence. However, by referring implicitly or explicitly to myths, Williams´ emphasizes how mankind is unable to change or progress. Specifically, the attempt to transcend a temporal existence cannot be done.

The temporal, however, does not only refer to time, as Williams associated time with body and mortality. Mortality and body are both temporal terms, mortality refers to being subject to death, and the body is constantly changing, or deteriorating. Furthermore, categorizing these terms as temporal becomes more apparent when compared to their counterparts: immortality and soul, which are both synonymous with timelessness. When Williams casts time, body and mortality as the protagonist´s arch-enemies, they become “locked in combat with freedom, soul, [and] immortality” (155). Time becomes the counterpart to freedom and thus becomes synonymous with captivity. This means that not only is mankind enslaved and degraded by time, but also by body and mortality as well. As a result, the characters in Williams´ work are in conflict with time, body and mortality, and must overcome these in order to transcend or become free from time. Not only is the character trying to overcome a temporal, but also a physical existence. This is not meant to be taken literally; the characters are not trying to become immortal. Rather, his characters are trying to become free from an existence ruled by time, to escape an existence which is dictated by the temporal.

Transcending a temporal existence as well as the body is impossible. Body and soul can never be reconciled because body will always defeat soul. Corrigan explains that this is because “no compromise between pure spirit and base matter is possible in a world in which the realities of time-bound existence place limitations on the spirit´s capacity to be free,” (159). In other words, the limits a time-bound existence places on the soul ensure that the body will win all conflicts. Even though the characters in Williams´ plays are fighting to transcend time, this will ultimately fail due to the detrimental effect of a temporal existence on the human situation. This becomes a vicious cycle; time places limitations on the character, and by extension the soul, which warrants the attempt to overcome time, which again fails due to the limitations placed by time on the soul.

Even though the attempt to transcend the temporal is futile, the pursuit is still worthwhile. Corrigan argues this by describing the “attempt to flee the present as a noble failure” (158). In other words, despite the futility of attempting to transcend a temporal

existence, the act of not trying to is essentially shameful. Passivity is viewed negatively, and simply endeavouring to transcend is transcending in a way. The “noble failure” implies that the person pursing this endeavour is by extension noble or honourable. However, not only are the people who do not try to transcend implied to be ignoble, they are also deemed corrupt.

Corrigan divides the characters in Williams´ work into two categories: those who do and those who do not attempt to transcend a temporal existence, and the latter group is labelled as corrupt. Corrigan states that “those who submit to the conditions of mortal existence are viewed as corrupt; those who defy them in pursuit of a timeless ideal are eventually destroyed by the corrupt anyway” (159). Even though the endeavour to reach the timeless is doomed, the attempt to try is noble. The people who do not even attempt this are thus ignoble or corrupt. They are corrupt because they accept the confines a mortal existence places on them. And they will eventually corrupt those who aspire to transcend the temporal, forcing them to also submit to a mortal existence.

The difference in outcome for those who never become corrupt, and those who do is exemplified in two characters: Val and Chase. Because time is cast as an arch-enemy, both Val and Chase are trying to overcome the detrimental effect of time. Even though they have both committed transgressions which lead to their detriment, they are both victims of a temporal existence. Corrigan argues that “however pure one´s motives, the sins of the past take their toll” (162). In other words, even if a character gains redemption or otherwise achieves something good, time is an enemy that cannot be defeated. Time is detrimental in the sense that the future is something to be dreaded. In Chase´s and Val´s case, their past actions will destroy their future.

However, there is a difference between these two characters in how they accept the detrimental effect of time. Chase does not run from the fallout of his transgressions, which results in him being castrated. Yet, Corrigan argues that “by facing the enemy squarely, Chase achieves a spiritual victory” (162). In other words, all characters are doomed to lose in the fight against time; they will never be able to reach an existence which is not ruled by time. But by acknowledging this, and “facing the enemy,” they may find some sort of inner peace, which is the case with Chase. By acknowledging his defeat, he lessens the severity of the outcome. Contrastingly, Val does try to run from the fallout of his transgressions and is eventually caught by a mob, lynched and torn apart by dogs. Val ceases his attempt to transcend the temporal by running away, thus becoming “corrupt”, which results in his death.

Williams´ mythical allusions ensures that transcending a temporal existence, or existing without time is impossible. Time as arch-enemy cannot be defeated, as body and soul

cannot be reconciled, and Pau G. Barberá argues that this endeavour will only result in finding devouring nature. Corrigan argues that the temporal also refers to the spiritual, and Barberá specifies this to mean God. In "Literature and Mythology in Tennessee William`s *Suddenly Last Summer*: Fighting against Venus and Oedipus" Barberá argues that Williams uses classical references to illustrate that man´s search for the spiritual will only result in discovering the cruelness of Nature, which acts as a devouring Venus. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, one of the main characters, Sebastian, is on a quest to find God and "his true face" (2). He is not literally trying to find God, but rather to find the face of God in uncivilized nature. Much like the traveller Robert Walton in Mary Shelley´s *Frankenstein*, Sebastian is attempting to discover a divine presence. He, like Robert Walton, believes that this can be found in untouched or uncivilized nature. He travels to the Galapagos Islands, where he observes baby sea-turtles being born. However, flesh-eating birds are circling above, waiting for the sea-turtles to hatch. This means that the baby sea-turtles need to race to the sea right after they are born so they aren´t devoured by the birds. Barberá cites Violet Venerable from the play who says: "my son was looking for God, I mean for a clear image of Him…when he came down the rigging he said `Well, now I´ve seen Him!´" (2). In other words, Sebastian is looking for God in nature, and rather than an idyllic scene, he finds babies being hunted and devoured by larger predators. Yet, Sebastian claims he has found the true face of God or, something akin to God.

This true face of God or the spiritual then is cruel, and the notion of uncivilized Nature untouched as "edenic" is false. In fact, creating civilized Nature, gardens for example, is to create edenic nature. However, this civilized Nature is a denial of natural or real Nature. Yet, Sebastian manages to create a garden which is both civilized and uncivilized. Instead of a traditional garden, Sebastian cultivates a garden where he grows the Venus fly-trap, among other things. With this, Barberá argues that Williams "wants to confront the myth of Eden…with the real Nature, which is not *edenic* but cruel" (3). What this means is that Sebastian´s search for God in Nature, or edenic Nature, will only end in discovering cruel Nature. And if uncivilized Nature is a reflection of the deity or presence that created it, then this Nature-God must be a cruel one. Thus, Sebastian´s garden, the Venus fly-trap, mirrors true and cruel Nature.

The extent of this cruel Nature is illustrated in stages throughout the play with several implicit references to Nature as devouring. First, the Venus flytrap is mentioned. This plant is insectivorous, and Violet actually explains that Sebastian had to order insects so the plant could be sustained. Secondly, the "flesh-eating" birds that prey upon the baby sea-turtles, the

event that made Sebastian "find" God. And lastly, Sebastian´s death; he was killed and devoured by young boys which he had taken advantage of. Barberá argues that "Nature´s cruelty is overwhelming in Suddenly Last Summer…thanks to the cannibalism always *in crescendo*". Crescendo is an apt description as the "level" of cannibalism gradually increases. The first stage is plants and insects. Though it may be a stretch to define it as cannibalism, this type of reversal of the traditional food chain enforces the notion of unnatural devouring, which cannibalism is. Secondly, animals are devoured by other animals before lastly, humans are the ones who act as cannibals. This progressive increase of unnatural devouring or, cannibalism, expresses how nature is immensely cruel, to the point that cannibalism becomes normalized and is a representation of God or the spiritual.

Not only is Nature devouring, it also acts as a devouring Venus. This is due to the allusions to mythical characters, namely Venus and Oedipus. Sebastian is cast in the role of Oedipus, partly due his creation of a poem every year when he is on vacation with his mother. His mother, Violet, explains that he would write the poem during summer, and that the other nine months, the length of a pregnancy, were only preparation. Barberà argues that "A poet creates or gives birth like a woman" (5). With this, Barberá is claiming that Sebastian gives birth to a poem once a year, and it is his mother who inspires or, in other words, inseminates him. This becomes evident when Sebastian does not produce or "birth" a poem the summer he did not travel with his mother. Barberá argues that this is due to "the lack of motherly insemination" (5). So, the poems Sebastian birthed: his children, are also the children of his mother. This makes Sebastian both father and brother to his poems, just as Oedipus was father and brother to his children. Oedipus unknowingly married and procreated with his mother, Iocaste, however, despite Sebastian being fully aware of whom his mother is, he is still cast in the role of Oedipus.

Even though Sebastian is portrayed as Oedipus, Violet is not Oedipus´ mother. Rather, she is cast in a perverted version of the role of Venus. Even though there is an explicit reference to Venus in the play, casting Violet as Venus is a little more convoluted. First off, Barberà argues that the reference to the Venus fly-trap will surely evoke the myth of Venus. However, this myth becomes a perverted version of the original, as Barberá claims that Williams was convinced people would "associate that insectivorous plant with the image of a possessive mother" (7). In other words, the reference to the Venus fly-trap both evokes the myth of Venus and a possessive mother. In addition, the reference to this devouring plant takes the notion of possessiveness to an extreme level: specifically, to the point of devouring. Thus, Violet is not only a possessive Venus, she is a devouring Venus.

This image of Nature as a devouring Venus becomes more apparent when taking the Freudian interpretation of the myth into consideration. Freud`s "Oedipus complex" states that children will want to possess the parent of the opposite sex, and is a stage of psychosexual development. However, in the play these roles are reversed, and Violet completely possesses Sebastian. This disruption in Sebastian´s psychosexual development may allude to why he is drawn to young boys. Barberá argues that Williams took advantage of the belief that mothers want to possess their sons totally, to the point that "the love that their sons feel for other women is in fact a betrayal, so that they must love other men in order not to awake their mother´s jealousy" (6). In other words, Sebastian is not able to develop fully because of his mother´s possessiveness, and is drawn to young boys to appease her in the sense that he will not make her jealous. However, his obsession with young boys will not be his salvation. Rather, his desire to appease his mother´s jealousy and possessiveness leads him to the very boys that cannibalize him. The devouring of Sebastian is directly committed by the abused young boys, but also in extent, by his mother. In other words, he is literally devoured by the boys, and the possessiveness that causes his death a form of devouring. Again this notion of the devouring Venus in enforced; Violet is not the mythological Venus, rather she is a perverted version: a devouring Venus.

Though Sebastian is devoured by the young boys he abused, this is actually an act of self-sacrifice. Sebastian is on a quest to find God in uncivilized Nature, and the boys he encounters on vacation are a part of uncivilized nature. Sebastian has already discovered that the true face of God in uncivilized nature is devouring, and this "Nature-God" demands self-sacrifice. Barberá argues that this divine entity "makes them live, and, at the same time, He devours them, thus demanding the most civilised of human acts, self-sacrifice" (2). In other words, nature and life is a constant process of creation and destruction. This is discovered by Sebastian when he witnesses the cruel devouring the sea-turtles are subject to right after birth. According to Barberá, when Sebastian is confronted with this truth: his anagnorisis, he embraces it, and the only sensible thing to do is to "pay homage to the evidence" (7). Sebastian´s way of paying homage is through self-sacrifice: letting uncivilized nature devour him.

The constant process of creation, and the birth of the sea-turtles establishes devouring nature as a mother: Mother Nature. However, this is not the traditional Mother Nature which is often described as benevolent and nurturing. This Nature-God in the form of Mother Nature is cruel and devouring. Barberá argues that in contrast to Oedipus who blinds himself, when Sebastian discovers the truth, he "accepts being the victim of a sacrifice which is inherent to

the human condition…in order to feel in his own flesh the cruelty of this Mother, Nature or God who both gives life to us and kills us" (7). This inherent sacrifice is to be destroyed or devoured by Mother Nature. Yet, as Sebastian acknowledges this and accepts it, his sacrifice is self-sacrifice in order to physically feel cruel Nature in the form of a Mother. Whereas he merely observed this devouring nature in the Galapagos Islands, now he wants to experience it for himself "in his own flesh".

This inherent sacrifice casts not only Sebastian, but all humans in the role of Oedipus. The roles of Oedipus and Venus, portrayed by Sebastian and Violet respectively, illustrate how nature acts as a devouring Venus. Barberá concludes that "all human beings are Oedipuses who are doomed to return to the bosom of the original Mother," (7) and that "Nature is certainly a true Venus devouring a son" (3). In the myth, Oedipus tries to escape the fate that he will marry his mother, yet he is not successful, and ends up marrying and procreating with his mother. Just like Oedipus, humans are fated to return to their Mother. And thus, instead of finding an edenic paradise: the true face of God, Sebastian discovers the original Mother: cruel and devouring Nature. This devouring Nature is what gives life, and eventually takes it again, and when Sebastian return to the Original Mother, it is an act of filicide. Furthermore, Violet´s possessiveness or devouring which led to Sebastian´s death illustrates that Nature is a Venus devouring a son.

Attempting to transcend the temporal, but ultimately succumbing to devouring nature casts Williams´ characters in the role of Athena Coronis´ "anti-hero". Devouring Nature sees human existence as circular rather than linear, as humans are endlessly born and devoured by Nature. This allows devouring nature to be interpreted as depraved society. In *Tennessee Williams and Greek Culture: with special emphasis on Euripedes*, Coronis argues that Williams employs myths to create an anti-hero, who as opposed to the Aristotelian "tragic hero", is a victim of a depraved society. According to Coronis, Aristotle argued that one of the most important aspects of tragedy is the tragic hero. Aristotle developed rules for achieving this; for example, that the hero be noble, prosperous and morally good. Williams´ characters are not Aristotelian tragic heroes; they are not noble, prosperous or highly renowned. His range from working class to aristocracy, and are often portrayed with a bad reputation. Coronis uses a quote from Esther M. Jackson to argue this point: "Williams appears to reject the Aristotelian concept of the protagonist and the substitute for it is an anti-hero, the personification of a humanity neither good, knowledgeable, nor courageous," (51). In other words, the personification of humanity or the representation of mankind, according to Williams, is not high status, morally good nor prosperous. This rejection of the ideal hero

results in Williams´ anti-hero, which should not be mistaken for a villain, or someone evil. Rather, Williams´ anti-hero is the image of man; neither only good, knowledgeable, nor courageous, but also not only evil, ignorant, nor cowardly.

Unlike the Aristotelian hero who falls from an elevated status due to a character flaw or lapse in judgement, the anti-hero is a victim of devouring Nature which takes the form of society. According to Coronis, Williams portrays a depraved society which causes psychological problems, like homosexuality. Coronis argues that these "psychological problems combined with socio-economic deprivation cause man to become the victim of his social milieu…Williams´ society is divided into mutilators and mutilated" (49). The characters in William`s works are either powerful victimizers who mutilate, or powerless victims who are mutilated. An example of this is the dichotomy between Stanley and Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche is continually brutalized by her social milieu, a victim, and when Stanley rapes Blanche, a form of mutilation, she has a psychological breakdown. This form of mutilation, rape, is also a form of devouring. Thus, the depraved society which victimizes the characters into the role of anti-heroes is also devouring nature. According to Coronis, while the Aristotelian hero tries to find redemption after his fall, the anti-hero never does.

Coronis argues that devouring Nature takes the form of depraved society, which casts William´s protagonists as "anti-heroes". According to Corrigan, the anti-hero attempts to transcend a temporal existence, which involves overcoming body. Judith Thompson expounds on this and argues this conflict is actually an illustration of the myth "the original sin", or the body´s betrayal of the soul. Furthermore, rather than the anti-hero being a victim of devouring Nature in the form of depraved society, Thompson argues that devouring Nature actually becomes human nature when the attempt to transcend the temporal fails. More specifically, devouring Nature manifests as an existential version of Plato`s divided self, where human nature devours the concept of the whole, and results in a divided self.

In *Tennessee Williams´ Plays: Memory, Myth and Symbol,* Thompson argues that in *A Streetcar Named Desire,* Williams´ employed myth in the form of an archetypal quest to illustrate the conflict between the transcendent aspirations of the soul and the body, and that these aspirations act as an existential version of Plato`s myth of the divided self. To start, Thompson explains that *Streetcar* functions as an ironic archetype, specifically, as an ironic quest myth. A quest is a long and trying search for something, and this archetypal quest myth is based on the "myth of paradise lost…the original sin" of the body`s betrayal of the innocent soul" (Thompson, 28). When the first humans lived in Eden, their bodies and souls were

united. But by eating the apple: the original sin, they were evicted from Eden, which resulted in a divide between not only God and man, but also soul and body.

Like the attempt to transcend the temporal, Thompson proposes that the characters´ endeavour is doomed to fail, which in this case is the archetypal quest. According to Thompson, the archetypal quest myth functions "as a parable of the soul´s heroic but futile quest to transcend the inescapable demands, desires and inevitable degeneration of its physical incarnation" (25). In other words, the archetypal quest in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is to have the soul transcend its physical incarnation. However, the play functions as a lesson in how this is a futile endeavour. This means that the character is forced to experience the original sin, or the body´s betrayal of the soul indefinitely. Furthermore, even though the attempt is futile, it is also heroic.

The archetypal quest is based on archetypal sequences, specifically sequences of romantic descent. Thompson quotes Northrop Frye who refers to this as "descent theme of romance" (25). This differs from traditional romance, which is characterized by a cyclical movement of descent and subsequent return to an idyllic world. According to Thompson, a play which is focused on the descent theme of romance, or demonic romance, involves the heroine descending into a nightmarish reality and never returning to the idyllic. Thompson argues that this descent happens in stages of archetypal sequences, namely "mythically elevated expectations, followed by inevitable disillusionment, and the physical corruption of the soul´s transcendent dreams" (26). When the romance begins with mythically elevated expectations, chances are that they will not be met, especially considering the play is not based on traditional romance. This means that the romance is usually imagined, whereas the descent actually happens. The next stage is disillusionment, when the character realises that the romance is not as expected, with the final stage being the re-enactment of the betrayal of the soul by the body.

The character who is on this archetypal quest, is Blanche DuBois. In the play, she travels to stay with her sister Stella and Stella´s husband Stanley. Stella tells Stanley that Blanche is fragile, because she married someone when she was a lot younger, but he committed suicide. So, the first sequence of romantic descent begins in Blanche`s past as a romantic myth. Thompson argues that Blanche describes her meeting with her husband Allan "in the mythic terms of the illumination of Eros by Psyche" (28). Specifically, she describes how she discovered love as suddenly shining on a light on something that had always been half in shadow. In the myth, Psyche was not allowed to see Eros´ true face, but after he went to sleep, she shone a light on him, and instantly fell in love. Eros, who is also referred to as

Cupid, was the god of intense love. Although Blanche does not explicitly refer to Eros and Psyche, the allusion to the myth implies that Blanche not only fell instantly in love, but also that the depth of her love for Allan was intense right from the start. In addition, when Blanche alludes to the myth, she elevates their love and relationship to a mythical or spiritual level.

The next sequence, however, is disillusionment; which is Allan`s betrayal of Blanche. Thompson argues that this betrayal is re-enacted by Blanche as self-betrayal, or "psychomania of the eternally unresolved conflict between the transcend aspirations of the soul and the brutal desire of the body, played out within her own divided self" (30). What this means is that Allan sexual relations with another man and subsequent betrayal of their relationship manifests in Blanche as her own conflict between soul and body, the eternal re-enactment of the "original sin". Blanche continuously re-enacts the body´s betrayal of the soul, which means she continuously attempts to recreate the spiritual union she had with Allan. She has had numerous relations with unnamed men in the past, but there are several attempts by Blanche to achieve this portrayed in the play. Firstly, with Mitch, then Shep Huntleigh, and finally the doctor who leads Blanche away in the end of the play. To some extent, also with Stanley. However, as with Allan, her romantic dreams are deflated, and Blanche´s continuous re-enactment of the body`s betrayal of the soul results in a divided self.

This body/soul division mirrors Plato´s myth of the divided self. Thompson argues that Blanche´s "transcendent aspirations evoke Plato´s myth of the division of humankind´s original wholeness into a divided self, each half of which spends its entire life searching for its soulmate" (30). Blanche´s original wholeness was her relationship with Allan. So when she loses this, she is destined to spend the rest of her life searching for a replacement: her soulmate. This is not to be understood as the term from popular culture, which implies the only true love a person can find. Rather, soulmate here refers to a partner which will allow Blanche to achieve transcendence over the soul´s physical incarnation. Allan was only one such partner. However, Blanche´s dream of romantic spiritual love is destroyed by sexual desire in the form of promiscuous relations, and in her fall from young girl to promiscuous woman, Blanche "re-enacts the entire biblical epic of human degeneration, from Eve-like innocence to the whore of Babylon," (31).

The final stage then, is the physical corruption of the soul´s transcendent dreams. Thompson argues that Blanche´s rejection of Allen "is re-enacted in a retributive version, not once, but twice in the course of the play" (32). In other words, Blanche´s transgression is followed by retribution. This retribution takes the form of exposure, humiliation and rejection by Mitch and Stanley. However, Stanley´s "retribution" is more extreme than Mitch´s, as

Stanley also rapes Blanche. According to Thompson, this act drives Blanche to "psychic suicide, the emotional equivalent of Allan´s literal fate" (34). What this means is that Blanche becomes delusional after the play, she cannot handle reality, so she retreats into her own imagination. She commits psychic suicide, which means that she is alive, but not really living.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has reviewed how Williams employed myths in his works to illustrate how his characters are anti-heroes who attempt to transcend a temporal existence, but ultimately succumb to devouring Nature. Mary Ann Corrigan argues that Williams´ characters fight to reconcile their dual natures of body and spirit which will result in transcending a temporal existence. The reasoning for this is that mankind is thought to be bound and degraded by time. However, transcending time is not to be taken in a literal sense, rather, his characters are trying to escape the constraints of time, or in other words, to exist without being ruled by time. According to Corrigan, Williams manages to transcend time by fusing past and present, through the use of myth. However, mythical references and allusions ensures that his characters never achieve transcendence over the temporal, as myth implies the inability to progress or change. Thus, mankind can never triumph over the temporal.

The constant struggle against the temporal, which is doomed to fail, casts time as an arch-enemy. In other words, Corrigan argues that Williams used temporal terms to express conflict, and much of the character´s struggles are related to time. However, the temporal does not only refer to time, but it also associated with body and mortality. As a result, these temporal terms are in combat not only with the protagonist, but also with freedom, immortality, and spirit. A conflict between soul and body creates a duality within the character. What this means is that, to transcend a temporal existence, the character must also overcome body and mortality. However, Williams´ deterministic style, as well as the use of myth ensure that the character can never overcome body. Corrigan argues that a time-bound existence places limitations on the soul, consequently ensuring that there will never be a compromise or union between body and soul.

Even though the attempt to transcend the temporal is futile, the pursuit is still worthwhile. According to Corrigan, attempting to flee the present is a "noble failure". This implies that the people who attempt this are by extension noble and honourable. Contrastingly, the people who accept a mortal existence are labelled as corrupt. Yet, those

who attempt to transcend the temporal are eventually destroyed by the corrupt anyway. This is exemplified in two characters; Val Xavier from *Orpheus Descending* and Chance Wayne from *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Both Val and Chance are trying to transcend the temporal, yet become victims of time. They have both committed transgressions which ultimately lead to their detriment, as Corrigan argues that the "sins of the past take their toll". However, there is one interesting difference between Val and Chance. Chance does not run from the later fallout of his past transgressions, which result in him being castrated. Corrigan argues that he achieves a spiritual victory because he faces his enemy: his past. Val, as opposed to Chance, does try to run from his past mistakes and when he is eventually caught by a mob, he is lynched and torn apart by dogs.

Williams´ mythical allusions ensures that transcending a temporal existence, or existing without time, is impossible. Time as arch-enemy cannot be defeated, and Pau Barberá argues that the failure of his endeavour will result in discovering devouring Nature. Corrigan argues that the temporal refers to the spiritual, and Barberá specifies this to mean God. Barberá argues that Williams used classical references to illustrate that man´s search for God will only result in discovering the cruelness of Nature, which acts as a devouring Venus. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, one of the main characters, Sebastian, is on a quest to find the true face of God in uncivilized nature. However, rather than find an idyllic scene, touched by the divine, he sees baby animals eaten by predators. Yet, Sebastian claims he has seen God, implying that the true nature of God is cruel.

Barberá argues that portraying God in Nature as cruel is due to Williams´ wanting to confront the myth of Eden. Real Nature is not edenic, but cruel. This cruelty becomes overwhelming as the play portrays cannibalism in crescendo. In other words, the play has increasing levels of cannibalism. Firstly, the reference to an insectivorous plant, then the animals eating other animals, before finally, the gang of young children who cannibalize Sebastian. All of these stages serve to portray Nature as overwhelmingly cruel, but the reference to the insectivorous plant, or the Venus-fly trap, also portrays the nature in the play as devouring Nature. Specifically, the connection between the Venus fly-trap and Sebastian´s mother Violet who is cast in the role of the mythical Venus.

Even though Sebastian´s birth of poems by way of his mother´s insemination is what casts him in the role of Oedipus, Violet is not cast as Oedipus´ wife/mother. Rather, she is portrayed as a perverted version of Venus due to her possessiveness of Sebastian. This extreme possessiveness becomes devouring, and thus Violet becomes a devouring Venus. Applying the Oedipus complex to the play illustrates how Violet´s extreme possessiveness

may have led to Sebastian´s stunted psychosexual development. His preference for young boys could thus be a result of this stunted development. Sebastian´s love of young boys will eventually lead to him being killed and devoured by the same boys he took advantage of, yet this devouring is Sebastian´s self-sacrifice. He believes he has found God in cruel and uncivilized Nature, who simultaneously gives life and devours. The only sensible thing to do is to pay homage, which for Sebastian takes the form of letting uncivilized Nature devour him. Barberá argues that this sacrifice is inherent to the human condition, and thus casting all of mankind in the role of Oedipus. All humans are Oedipuses who are doomed to the return to the original Mother. This mother is devouring Nature.

Attempting to transcend the temporal, but ultimately succumbing to devouring Nature casts Williams´ characters in the role of Athena Coronis´ "anti-hero". Devouring Nature treats human existence as circular rather than linear, as humans are endlessly born and devoured by Nature. This allows devouring Nature to be interpreted as depraved society. Coronis argues that Williams employed myths to create an anti-hero, who as opposed to the Aristotelian tragic hero, is a victim of a depraved society. While the Aristotelian hero tries to find redemption after his fall, the anti-hero never does. Coronis argues that man becomes the victim of his society, which is divided into mutilators and mutilated. An example of this is the dichotomy between Stanley and Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche is continually brutalized by her social milieu, and when Stanley rapes her, which can be seen as a form of mutilation, she has a psychological breakdown. This form of mutilation, rape, is also a form of devouring. Thus, the depraved society which victimizes the characters into the role of anti-heroes is also devouring nature.

According to Corrigan, time is cast as an arch-enemy, and is ranged with body. As a result, body and soul are in conflict, and transcending the temporal involves overcoming body. Judith Thompson expounds on this and argues that this conflict is actually a portrayal of the myth "the original sin", or the body´s betrayal of the soul. Rather than the anti-hero being a victim devouring Nature in the form of depraved society, Thompson argues that devouring Nature actually becomes human nature when the attempt to transcend the temporal fails. More specifically, devouring Nature manifests as an existential version of Plato`s divided self, where human nature devours the concept of the whole, and results in a divided self. Thompson argues that Williams´ employs myth to illustrate the conflict between the transcend aspirations of the soul and the body, and that these transcendent aspirations are an existential version of Plato`s myth of the divided self.

According to Thompson, *Streetcar* functions as an ironic quest myth. This archetypal quest myth is based on the myth of a paradise lost: the "original sin" of the body`s betrayal against the soul, the consequent exile of humankind from the Edenic paradise where body and spirit were united, and the soul`s attempt to transcend its physical incarnation. This transcendence is impossible, so the play`s protagonist, Blanche, is destined to continually re-enact the "original sin" of the body`s betrayal of the soul. It starts when Blanche elevates herself and her husband Allen to edenic innocence, but when Allen betrays her with another man, this betrayal is re-enacted by Blanche as self-betrayal. According to Thompson, this self-betrayal is actually the eternally unresolved conflict between the transcend aspirations of the soul and the brutal desire of the body, played out within her own divided self. What this means is that Allan´s betrayal manifests in Blanche as her own conflict between soul and body, the eternal re-enactment of the "original sin". In other words, she continually re-enacts the body`s betrayal of the soul, resulting in a divided self. Blanche`s transcendent aspirations functions as an existential version of Plato`s myth of the division of humanity`s original wholeness into a divided self.

Chapter 2. “One is not born, but rather becomes”: Gender and identity in Tennessee Williams´ oeuvre.

Williams portrayed his characters´ struggle with gender and identity in order to challenge post-war, mid-century American society, in which homophobic discourse and constructed gender led to issues such as sexual existentialism, the inability to develop gender consciousness and paradoxical identities. The latter however, is not necessarily negative, as it allowed Williams to reject a binary division of gender, and rather portray gender as a spectrum or a range. In this chapter I will examine David Savran´s argument that post-war, mid-century American society saw escalated homophobic tensions, which resulted in a censoring of homosexuality in theatre, film and newspapers. This meant that a discursive counterpart was in many ways inconceivable, and any works treating the topic of homosexuality had to be blatantly homophobic, or use “the language of remorse”. Savran contends that Tennessee Williams did either of these things, rather, Williams challenged the homophobic discourse and constructed gender roles his milieu had developed by portraying transgressive relationships which broke social norms, and undermined the notion of traditional and constructed gender. Following this, I will explore John Bak´s argument that during the cold-war era, American politicians developed and perpetuated “hyper-masculinity” as a tactic to combat communism and homosexuality. According to Bak, Williams portrayed how this type of constructed gender, hyper-masculinity, led to sexual existentialism. Next I will look at Andrea Gencheva´s argument which is similar to Bak´s, but rather than hyper-masculinity leading to existential sexuality, Gencheva argues that the Southern “belle” resulted in the inability to develop gender consciousness. Combined with a continuously developing society, this inability will lead to paradoxical identities. Finally, I will look at Emmanuel Vernedakis´s essay, in which he argues that a paradoxical identity is not necessarily negative, rather, it can contend a binary division of gender, and illustrate how gender should be viewed as a spectrum, or range.

In “By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty´: Mapping the closet with Tennessee Williams,” David Savran contends that Williams´ work is homophobic by arguing that his works from the 1940s and 50s challenged the homophobic discourse that permeated mid-century American society and thus resisted the post-war homophobic hegemony. The 1950s was a very turbulent time for homosexuals. Subjects treating homosexuality in positive, or even neutral terms, were kept out of print and off the screen, and Savran argues that: “an anti-homophobic discursive counterpart was virtually inconceivable”

(48). In other words, homophobia had become so integrated into American society during the 1940s and 1950s that it was essentially impossible to discuss homosexuality in the public sphere. According to Savran, Williams, a "closeted" homosexual himself, would in theory not be able to write plays about homosexuality and have them produced during this time. Yet, these years were arguably the most productive of Williams´ career, and some of his plays from this era treat homosexuality. Some scholars use this to interpret Williams´s work as homophobic. However, Savran argues even though several of Williams´ plays were produced during this time, Williams was not homophobic, but rather a part of a "silent" opposition against the homophobic discourse of the time.

The campaign against homosexuals was not unopposed, as the modern gay liberation movement began during this time as well. According to Savran, the magazine *ONE* was created in 1953 with the intention of examining homosexuality from scientific, historical, and critical points of view. The content consisted of current news, essays, and fiction, as well as reviews of allegedly gay fiction. However, rather than represent homosexuality in a positive light, the magazine pursued integration for homosexuals, which was essentially an appeal for tolerance from the heterosexual majority. Savran argues that due to this appeal, most of the writers for the magazine spoke "the language of remorse" (50). The "language of remorse" refers to the discourse of homophobia from the nineteenth century. According to Savran, using the language of remorse meant appropriating the vocabulary which defined homosexual behaviour in negative characteristics, such as deviant, neurotic, and guilty. A new rhetoric which redefined the homosexual would not begin to emerge and thrive until the mid 1960s. This meant that American plays from the 1940s and 50s, even the plays that were sympathetic to "the gay problem," were written in the language of remorse.

The language of remorse resulted in the plays that were sympathetic towards homosexuality ended up recycling homophobic conventions, and meant that homosexuality was still "the crime that dares not speak its name" (Savran, 53). These plays never used the word homosexual, they characterized homosexuality as a vile condition, and usually ended with the protagonist denying or rejecting his homosexuality. In opposition to this mode of treating the homosexual was Williams´s way of writing, and Savran argues that "Williams´s homosexuality is endlessly refracted in his works: translated, reflected and transposed" (47). In other words, the homophobic hegemony in the US during the 1940s and 50s, as well as the censorship of American theatre meant that Williams had to reframe homosexuality. Savran explains that Williams disguised homosexuality as other transgressive relations, which were still taboo, but would not be censored. An example of this kind of transgressive relation which

was commonly used by Williams is adultery. Adultery, especially committed by the wife, was a clear violation mid-century social norms. Portraying adultery would necessitate a portrayal of sexuality, and allowed Williams to raise questions and explore this topic, while avoiding using the language of remorse.

The transgressive relationships Williams portrayed in his works resulted in him undercutting the social conventions of the time. Savran emphasizes that by "undermining conventionalized presentations of sexuality and gender… [Williams challenged] the homophobic fury of the post-war hegemony" (53). In other words, the post-war homophobic hegemony perpetuated a binary division of gender and sexuality. This division equated gender with sex, as well as gender/sex with sexuality. What this means is that gender was seen as male/female, and there was not distinction between which gender someone was born as (sex), and which gender someone identified with (gender). The binary division extended to sexuality, meaning that men could only be attracted to women, and vice versa, with the result that anything deviating from the norm was seen as wrong. However, portraying characters with relationships that violated social norms meant Williams could illustrate the uncertainty individuals experienced with sexuality and gender, thus undermining the conventional presentations of these. Although Williams was not able to write openly about homosexuality, transgressive relationships which explored questions of sexuality and gender could be applied to homosexuality. Undermining conventional notions of gender and sexuality allowed him to silently oppose the post-war homophobic discourse that permeated mid-century American society.

Another way for Williams to avoid using the language of remorse, according to Savran, was to displace his openly homosexual characters. In *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof*, no less than three characters are said to be as gay. However, these characters are not directly part of the play as they are only mentioned by other characters. Savran argues that "Williams was able to protect his homosexual subject from `the torrent of lies and distortions´ that overwhelms him on the commercial stage only by displacing him, or by not allowing him to speak, since the only language he was permitted to speak was the very one that ensured his abjection and marginalization" (62). In other words, to avoid using the language of remorse, which would only reinforce abjection and marginalization for homosexuals, Williams silenced his homosexual characters. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the three homosexual characters are all deceased. One of the main character´s best friend: Skipper, and two former owners of the plantation where the play is set. By creating characters who are gay and making them absent

from the play, allowed Williams to protect his characters from the hegemonic homophobic discourse.

Even though the characters who are openly gay are absent and silenced from the play, two other characters have implied or ambiguous ties to homosexuality. One of them is Big Daddy, is the current owner of a large estate, and unknowingly dying of bowel cancer. He had been ill, and suspected he might be dying, but his doctor told him otherwise. Meanwhile, his two sons and their wives are aware of his terminal condition, so much of the play is focused on who will inherit the estate. Big Daddy inherited the estate from two bachelors who are implied homosexuals. Furthermore, Big Daddy himself implies that he has explored homosexuality in his younger days. Savran argues that "what is most striking about this pattern of estate ownership is less its conspicuously patrilineal nature, than the homosexuality that stands at its imputed origin and so determinedly "haunts" its development" (54). In other words, the ownership of the estate is passed down the patriarchal line, or, from man to man, yet this patrilineal inheritance is not restricted to property, but also sexuality. As all of the plantations owners have had at least some experience with homosexuality, the correlation between estate ownership and homosexuality implies that the next owner will also be somehow involved with homosexuality. Big Daddy confesses to one of his sons, Brick, that he wanted to leave the estate to Brick when he thought he was dying. Brick is the other character with ambiguous ties to homosexuality. Brick is suspected to be a closeted homosexual, and is struggling with this perception of himself, and questions whether it might be true. Thus, according to Savran, homosexuality haunts the estate in the sense that if Brick inherits the plantation, he is "doomed" to become homosexual. Homosexuality, in turn, also haunts Brick, and the question of whether or not he is gay leads him to become an alcoholic.

According to Savran, Big Daddy´s cancer and Brick´s alcoholism can be interpreted as a mirroring of the extent of their interaction with homosexuality. A lot of William´s work is structured on retribution following transgression. This means that actions in the past will come back to haunt the characters, and Savran argues that Big Daddy´s bowel cancer "becomes the currency of mortal debt in Williams´s homosexual economy…bowel cancer seems to be the wages of sodomy" (55). In other words, homosexuality is treated as a transgression, and the retribution manifests as cancer and alcoholism. The severity of the retribution matches the severity of the transgression. According to Savran, this means that Big Daddy who has seemingly only participated physically in homosexual acts, he has not had an emotional connection with other men, is punished with a physical illness and is consequently dying of bowel cancer. Contrastingly, Brick has never engaged in homosexual acts, and thus

pays a “lesser” price, as alcoholism is not as fatal or irreversible as cancer. Brick maintains that he has never touched a man in a sexual way, the only contact between Brick and his best friend Skipper was holding hands, and only as an expression of their profound friendship. Yet, in the play, Brick is questioning everything about his relationship with Skipper, and whether he has had feelings for Skipper which were homosexual in nature. This means that because Brick never physically engaged in homosexuality, he may have experienced homosexual feelings, which makes his ailment existential in nature. In other words, Brick´s alcoholism is a result of his conflicted feelings, rather than a physical ailment.

Big Daddy´s implied experience with homosexuality is surprising when taking his characterization into account. According to Savran, Big Daddy embodies power, authority, promiscuity, and heterosexual misogyny. Even his name exudes masculine authority. Savran argues that this makes him “the play´s exemplum of normative masculinity” (55). Normative masculinity refers to the conventional behaviour of mid-century American men, who simultaneously desired and degraded women, and Big Daddy acts as the prime example of this. In addition, he does not struggle with questions of sexuality, despite his alleged exploration of homosexuality in his youth. Thus, having him imply that he has engaged in homosexual activity, yet feels neither remorse nor disgust, makes him a powerful image. Rather, he is confident in his masculinity and sexuality, implying that homosexuality might be unrelated to masculinity.

Big Daddy´s characterization is at odds with the clear distinction between masculinity and homosexuality which was perpetuated during the 1940s and 50s. However, his interpretation of homosexuality is similar to what many came to define homosexuality as during the mid-century period. In “`Sneakin´ and Spyin´´ from Broadway to the Beltway: Cold War Masculinity, Brick, and Homosexual Existentialism,” John Bak argues that Cold War masculinity differentiated between homosexual identity and homosexual act, and the confusion this distinction created made it difficult for some to define their identity, which resulted in homosexual existentialism. Bak examines Brick from “*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*”, who he argues is having a homosexual existential crisis. This crisis began when Brick starts to question his relationship with his best friend, Skipper. Specifically, when Skipper tells Brick he is gay, as this clashes with Brick´s understanding of what homosexuality is. Bak argues that “his inability to understand what homosexuality is or how it is precisely defined or even vaguely knowable – [is] an epistemological mire for which Williams holds his Cold War society ultimately responsible” (227). In other words, Brick knows of homosexuality, but he has a stereotypical understanding of it. An example of this is when he speaks about the former

owners of the plantation, and refers to them as sisters, sissies" and queers. As a result, Skipper´s confession of homosexuality does not fit with Brick´s understanding of what it means to be gay. He has to accept Skipper´s claim, but this leads him to re-evaluate his friendship with Skipper. However, he cannot clearly define the difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality which makes this extremely complicated.

To understand Brick´s stereotypical understanding of homosexuality, and why, according to Bak, Williams blames Cold War society for this, it is necessary to take a look at Cold War masculinity. Bak quotes Robert Corber and Suzanne Clark, who both explored Cold-War gender politics and sexual identity. After World War II, politicians employed "heterosexist language" (232) to project a strong American image internationally. According to Bak, heterosexist language consisted of an inflated male swagger, contempt for femininity, and a way of speaking which evoked notions of perversion and penetration. Politicians like Hoover, Nixon and McCarthy assigned communists effeminate characteristics, which resulted in un-masculine equating un-American. Due to the link between communism and homosexuality, homosexuals were afforded the same characteristics. Bak argues that "Washington´s hard line gender propaganda… meant American men had to perform their masculinity or effectuate it by ridiculing the effeminacy in others" (233). In other words, mid-century gender propaganda enforced the view that American, heterosexual men were masculine, and communists and homosexuals were effeminate. This is the basis for Brick´s understanding of homosexuality; the effeminate man becomes a stereotype for homosexuals. When Brick is confronted by his father about his feelings for Skipper, he becomes agitated, and that is when he refers to the former owners as "sisters" and "sissies". When he feels he is being accused of being homosexual, his masculinity is threatened, and he reinforces it by ridiculing the effeminacy in someone he knows is homosexual. This in turn reinforces his masculinity and heterosexuality.

Brick´s understanding of homosexuality is not restricted to the effeminate stereotype, he also understands homosexuality in terms of "gay acts". Bak argues that "in Brick´s eyes, one was homosexual simply by what one did, not by who one was" (241). What this means is that Brick saw gay sex as synonymous with homosexuality. This is evidenced when Big Daddy tries to suggest that Brick´s feelings for Skipper might have been more than friendship, and thus implying that Brick might be homosexual. Brick becomes agitated and accuses Big Daddy of saying that Brick and Skipper performed sodomy. Equating homosexuality with gay acts also meant that, before Skipper´s confession of homosexuality, Brick could be assured

that the relationship between Skipper and him was only profound friendship. They had not done anything sexual together, so they could not possibly be gay.

However, even though Brick sees his and Skipper´s relationship as nothing more than a profound friendship, others around them had doubts about the nature of their friendship. This is due to the expiration date placed on socio-sexual relationships. When Brick and Skipper were younger, they were extremely close as they attended the same college, belonged to the same fraternity and played football together. Their closeness was socially acceptable, because it was seen as male-bonding. However, acceptable socio-sexual behaviour varies in relation to age, and as Brick and Skipper grew older, their closeness became less acceptable. Bak argues that "though he is no longer of an age of sexual awakening, Brick is certainly of an age of social definitioning based on sexual conditioning" (240). In other words, Brick starts to become aware of the social implications of the closeness he shares with Skipper, especially since Brick is also married. He acknowledges that they share an unconventional friendship as he tells his father that their relationship was too special to be normal. Despite this, he refuses to accept that it is anything other than deep friendship. Due to Brick´s understanding of homosexuality, he could reject society´s suspicion of their friendship because they had not engaged in any gay acts together.

After Skipper´s confession, Brick knows that homosexuality is not restricted to effeminate personality or gay acts. Bak examines a study by Alfred Kinsey to illustrate how Brick´s confusion about homosexuality mirrored what several men in the US experienced at the time. Kinsey´s study explored male sexuality, and disputed Simone de Beauvoir´s binary division of men. Kinsey found that the principle de Beauvoir applied to women, could also be applied to men, specifically "man-as-Other" (238). Bak argues that the sexual habits Kinsey documented which "effectively reaffirmed the hegemonic control heteromasculinity had in America was one that equally served to deconstruct it: the homosexual outlet" (238). In other words, Kinsey found that a portion of the male population had homosexual experience without identifying as homosexuals. This was not necessarily because they were afraid or ashamed of admitting they were homosexuals, but rather that they separated a homosexual act from a homosexual identity. This reaffirmed the hegemonic heteromasculinity in the sense that people who didn´t identify as homosexuals, would not display homosexual characteristics, such as effeminate traits. Yet, simultaneously it goes against mid-century gender propaganda which perpetuated the belief that homosexuals were effeminate, and that gay acts determined homosexuality. As a result, rather than question who was homosexual, the study questioned what hetero- and homosexuality was. According to Bak, by arguing

against binary sexual identities, Kinsey blurred the lines between socio-sexual relations, and generated mass confusion about how to define sexual identity.

Not only did Kinsey´s study question the division between hetero- and homosexuality, another scholar, Eve Sedgewick, wrote about changes in socio-sexual conventions, and explored the division of homosexuality. The hyper-masculinity being propagated from Washington constructed a Cold War heteromasculinity, which extracted homosexuality from sexual activity and relocated it an effeminate identity. Bak quotes Sedgewick who argues that "constructed homosexual identity based uniquely on gender and sexual inversion allowed for masculinist male-male desire, whether homosocial or not, to persist free from suspicion" (242). Sexual inversion is a term that was used by sexologists in the late 19th and early 20th century to refer to homosexuality, and meant taking on the gender role of the opposite sex. What Sedgewick is arguing is that defining homosexuality only on the basis of an effeminate identity meant that anyone who portrayed a masculine identity could avoid being suspected of homosexuality. This notion extended to the gay community, and created a new form of masculinity; cold war homomasculinity.

Like heteromasculinity, Cold War homomasculinity also relocated homosexuality in an effeminate identity. In other words, the gay community began to distinguish between "fairies": men who identified as gay, and "queers": men who only participated in gay acts. According to Sedgwick, the difference between these two, is that a "queer" man still maintains a heteromasculine gender construct, while "fairies" are usually effeminate homosexuals. Sedgewick argues that as a result of this division, "fairies" became the "homosexual Other" (242). What this means is that "fairies" became outcasts in both heterosexual and homosexual communities, due to being openly gay in a hyper-homophobic era. Queers could be men who did not see themselves as homosexuals, regardless of sexual activity, or "closeted" homosexuals, who secretly identified as homosexual, but presented themselves as heterosexual. In any case, queers were masculine as were not seen as homosexuals by society, regardless of how they themselves identified.

Kinsey´s study questioned what constituted homosexuality, and Sedgwick explored the division of homosexuality, with the result that an effeminate identity was still the defining factor in homosexuality. However, Cold War homomasculinity, especially the "queer" identity, blurred the lines between hetero- and homosexuality. Men could be hyper-masculine and still be homosexual, as was the case with many closeted homosexuals. Brick learns this when Skipper admits he is homosexual. Furthermore, men could participate in sexual activity with other men, and still not identify as gay. As far as Brick knows, Skipper has not done

anything sexual with another man, which means that someone can identify as homosexual despite not being effeminate nor doing "gay acts". Bak argues that Brick is stuck in a "no man´s land between hetero- and homosexuality" (233). This uncertainty of what it means to be homosexual is the root of Brick´s homosexual existential crisis. He does not understand the difference between heterosexual and homosexual desire.

Because Brick struggles with the hetero- and homomasculinity in his relationship with Skipper, he resorts to homophobia to protect his sexual identity. Bak argues that homophobia was employed by heteromasculine and queer men to "justify homosocial bonds and marginalize homosexual ones" (243). Brick enacts homophobia as proof of his heterosexuality, and insists on the defining homosexuality in terms of homosexual acts, rather than a homosexual identity. This means he can hide behind the fact that he and Skipper never participated in sexual acts, and thus could not be homosexuals. So, when Big Daddy attempts to suggest that Brick and Skipper might have been in love, Brick becomes angry and accuses his father of believing that he had performed sodomy. If Brick were to accept Big Daddy´s suggestion, which would integrate a heteromasculine identity with a homosexual act, he would have to admit that he was homosexual in identity. Yet, when he doesn´t accept this suggestion, he is able to secure his heteromasculine identity. Because, if Skipper and Brick were cut from the same cloth, and Skipper turned out to be homosexual, this would implicate Brick being homosexual as well.

This means that Brick´s homophobia says nothing about Brick´s views on homosexuality, as it could be a performative tool to display heterosexuality. Homophobia as a performative tool was used by both hetero- and homosexuals for this purpose. According to Bak, rather than Williams´ work being homophobic, his characters are only portraying the conventional hyper-masculinity of the time, and Brick´s homophobia can be interpreted as an act or disguise of his homosexuality. This is a result of Cold War masculinity associating homosexuality with an effeminate identity, and creating the notion that heterosexuality needed to be performed through hyper-masculinity. This eventually resulted in a distinction between homosexual act and homosexual identity, which created constructed sexual identities and which led to mass confusion in regards to identifying sexuality.

Both Savran and Bak have explored homosexuality in Williams´ work. Bak examined how the constructed versions of masculinity and sexuality during the cold war era was portrayed in Brick from *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof*. However, socially constructed gender and sexuality was not limited to men, women as well were subjected to constructed gender roles and controlled sexuality. This is often seen in William´s plays, perhaps most noticeably in *A*

Streetcar Named Desire, where Blanche acts as the epitome of a Southern belle. The belle was a constructed gender role which not only defined how white, young, aristocratic women portrayed their gender, but also placed limits on their sexuality. Andrea Gencheva explores how constructed gender roles, specifically the belle, can stagnate the development of gender consciousness, as portrayed by Blanche.

In "Truth and Illusion in Tennessee Williams´ A Streetcar Named Desire," Andrea Gencheva argues that Williams´ portrayed the inability to develop gender consciousness as the cause of developing delusions, and subsequently being unable to separate delusions and reality. Gencheva points to Blanche DuBois, one of the main characters in Williams´ play *A Streetcar Named Desire,* as a prime example of this. Blanche was raised in the old South: a society made up of restrictive societal expectations, which included rigid and strict "interpretations of masculinity and femininity, superiority and inferiority, supremacy and subordination" (32). In other words, Blanche has been brought up to view the world a specific way, with fixed positions of gender, and where white, aristocratic men were at the top of the hierarchy. Her understanding of society, class and gender were confined to what the Southern elite considered to be right, which also extended to Blanche´s view of herself. This resulted in a well-defined identity and gender consciousness, as well as a very specific code of conduct within a male-dominated culture.

This code of conduct that young women from the South´s upper class followed cast them in the role of the Southern "belle", and Blanche acts as a personification of the belle. Gencheva argues that the belle is "a social phenomenon rooted in the idea that women might escape the rule of the patriarchy" (32). What this means is that the belle was a way to ensure that women could not escape the rule of the patriarchy. The South was built on a patriarchal system, with women being subordinate to men. The idea that women could be liberated in the sense that they could be autonomous and self-sufficient was heavily protested by both Southern men and women. Belles were aristocratic, or wealthy, women, and were in a better position that many others to become self-sufficient, for example, if they inherited a large estate. The belle then, a term for a proper, young, white woman who was expected to marry a proper, white, and wealthy man, was a way to ensure the continuation of the patriarchal system. The belle´s entire goal, everything she did, was to get a husband. According to Gencheva, perpetuating the idea of the belle meant that women were raised to believe they had one purpose in life: to find a husband, and thus unconsciously or not continue the patriarchal rule.

Yet, to be classified as a belle, young women had to meet certain criteria, with the most important being that they were “proper”. Proper, in this case, is an umbrella term encompassing everything regarding a young woman´s behaviour and appearance. As a belle, Blanche had been raised to conform to this code of conduct. According to Gencheva, the role of belle is so ingrained into Blanche´s psyche that her upbringing can be classified as conditioning. Gencheva argues that Blanche was “conditioned by Southern Puritanism to control and subdue, preferably eradicate, her libidinal desires” (32). In other words, Blanche has been taught never to express any kind of sexual desire, to the point that she must become asexual. This does not mean that she is to become a living statue, as belles were also expected to be able to “catch” a husband. Thus, Blanche must walk a precarious line between the oppositions of chaste and desiring, lady and whore in order to fulfil her duty and find a husband.

These oppositions that belles must intermediate become limits in Blanche´s case, serving to confine her gender consciousness. In the play we learn that Blanche has successfully straddled the line and married a young man, Allan. However, Blanche experiences a traumatic event when Allan kills himself after she sees him with another man and accuses him of being gay. She becomes a widow, and with the rest of her family either dead, dying or far away, Blanche finds herself alone. As a means to combat the loneliness, trauma and guilt, she allows herself to indulge in physical desire. Yet, rather than letting her gender consciousness evolve to encompass libidinal desire, she stubbornly attempts to cling to her beliefs and role as a belle. For Blanche, feeling and acting on her desire equates to her being a whore, and Gencheva argues that “the very beginning of the play mars Blanche as a scarlet letter woman” (32). Similar to the main character in *The Scarlet Letter*, Blanche´s sexual relations are judged by others. But unlike Hester, Blanche has sex with numerous men. And when she becomes involved with her seventeen-year old pupil, she is run out of her hometown. She travels to her sister, Stella, and tries to begin anew, but when these unmoral relations are brought to the attention of her newest love interest, Mitch, he dumps her. Instead of conducting herself like Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*, who wears the red A with silent pride, Blanche tries to revert to her role as belle and hide her sexual relations behind an illusion of youth and innocence.

Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulge in it. Yet, Gencheva argues that Blanche is unable to sustain these two competing aspects of her gender consciousness, which will eventually lead to a “utilization of sex to obliterate her conscience”

(34). In other words, when the guilt of indirectly causing her husband´s death becomes too much for Blanche, she uses sex as a respite. Yet, as Blanche believes indulging in sex makes her a whore, this behaviour also serves as punishment. Thus, sex for Blanche is form of self-flagellation, as it will eventually lead to harm her.

Using sex as punishment is also a form of penance for Blanche. Gencheva argues that "as if wearing the mark of Cain for [her involvement in her husband´s death]… Blanche lives her life as penance for this sin" (35). In other words, the mark of Cain can be seen as a mark of penance, and Cain himself was forced to become a wanderer. According to Gencheva, this is similar to Blanche´s situation, as she is also a wanderer in the play. She is forced out of her hometown, and eventually forced out of Stella and Stanley´s home. So, like Cain, she is somehow marked and forced to repent for her sins. Blanche is forced to jump between the roles of belle and whore according to the confines of her gender consciousness. Because she is not able to let go of her role as belle, she can only ever inhabit these roles, meaning that she can never develop her gender consciousness to be a version of a belle that also has and enjoys sex. And because she is unable to let go of her desire, not only because this is a natural human reaction, but because sex has become a tool to deal with her guilt, she can never be a true belle either.

The result of jumping between these two roles, specifically continuing to return to the role of belle leads to her developing delusions; mainly the knight in shining armor must save her. As a belle, Blanche cannot save herself because "she has been taught that male companionship is a woman´s means of survival" (Gencheva, 37). To clarify, women were not literally dependent on men to survive. There were unmarried women who managed to make a life for themselves without being married. But as Blanche comes from an aristocratic family, she is expected to marry. So, aristocratic women were dependent on men and marriage for social acceptance. This means that until she is married, Blanche is in need of "saving". However, Blanche is no longer young or a virgin, so she is not as attractive as she used to be, and catching a husband is going to be much harder for her. This makes her desperate to find someone, and eventually every suitable man she meets becomes her "knight". Not only does Blanche believe that she cannot save herself, she is not even willing to try. She is adamant that she needs to find someone who will marry her in order to be saved. According to Gencheva, because Blanche sees herself as a belle, she must present herself as an attractive option for her knight, and she does this by deceiving Mitch into thinking that she is a young, chaste woman. If she were honest with Mitch from the start, he might have married her anyway. But she believes she must create an illusion of herself in order to find her knight, and

thus be saved. This belief that life and love is a fairy tale, where she is the damsel in the distress and the first man who wants her is the knight in shining armor, is going to be detrimental to Blanche.

This contrasts to her sister, Stella, who is married, but has very much saved herself. Gencheva argues that "while Stella´s marriage unshackles and simultaneously redeems her, Blanche´s first and only marital affair does the opposite" (34). Blanche´s marriage and her role in her husband´s suicide has shackled her to the role of a "scarlet-letter woman". She uses sex as means to punish herself, while also inhabiting the role of belle, which demands her to become asexual. Stella, on the other hand, is married but is also more free than she used to be. Furthermore, she is "redeemed" in terms of sexuality. She has been raised in the same manner as Blanche, but as she is married, she no longer has to adhere to the complete suppression of desire that being a belle demands. This is evident in hers and Blanche´s conversation about desire. While Stella explains that things happen between men and women in the dark that makes everything else seem unimportant, Blanche has to act as if she appalled at her blatant acknowledgement of feeling desire, as well as placing it in such high regard.

Stella´s acknowledgement of desire and the importance of it shows that her gender consciousness has evolved. This is due to her marriage. Yet, Gencheva states that Stella "allows herself to be brought down to earth by Stanley, accepting her raw sexuality and exploring it with him" (34). Not only does Stella accept her sexuality, a break from what she and Blanche have been taught, but her acceptance also means that her gender consciousness has evolved. Furthermore, she also explores her sexuality, meaning that her gender consciousness is also developing. This contrasts to Blanche who has a very fixed and rigid gender consciousness; she is either belle or whore, she is not able to gain the middle ground that Stella has seemingly found.

Blanche might be able to find this middle-ground and develop her gender consciousness if she is ever able to get married. The desperate hunt for a husband and her role as a belle make her develop illusions, which eventually transform into delusions. To aid her in the bid to deceive Mitch, she has used the darkness as a cover. So, when Mitch learns the truth about her, and is heart-broken, he is also fed up with her refusal to turn on the light. Gencheva argues that "Mitch turning on the light symbolizes his exposure of her…while destroying the image she created of herself" (38). This destruction of the image she has created results in her knight refusing to save her. Mitch was Blanche´s last hope to be saved, and now she is doomed. However, Blanche refuses this, and rather than accept the circumstances, she clings to her delusion of "knight in shining armor". Her real prospect, Mitch, is replaced by a new

knight: Shep Huntley. However, her relationship with Shep is completely fictional, a delusion Blanche deceives herself with.

This delusion will eventually become the basis of the fantasy world Blanche shuts herself in when she can no longer face reality. When Blanche is raped, she experiences yet another trauma which affects her psyche. Her role as belle and the world view this includes, clashes with the harsh reality she is currently living in. She in unable to develop her gender consciousness, which means that she is unable to put down the mantle that is her role as belle. So the rape signifies a violent clash with harsh reality, it is not only Stanley that abuses Blanche, but also society. This makes Blanche escape into a fantasy which consists of "forever waiting for the perfect husband – Shep Huntley. He represents the last shred of an already dead code of conduct, the chivalric gentleman" (Gencheva, 39). Not only is Blanche clinging to her delusion of knight in shining armor, but also her role as belle and the defunct social milieu she grew up in and has known her entire life. Her inability to develop her gender consciousness, and embrace her dependence on intimacy and desire leads to her creating delusions to function. These delusions eventually take over her psyche, resulting in her inability to separate her delusions from reality.

Blanche´s gender consciousness which takes the role of belle, is what makes Blanche believe that she is completely dependent on other people, especially men. And it is this dependence on others rather than on herself which is the reason she has faced so much hardship in her life. Her fantasies and delusions have set her up for failure in life. Gencheva argues that "there are no chivalric knight and gentlemen who will come to rescue her from the mud she was pushed in, by her own promiscuous behaviour" (40). As the beliefs she has grown up with are no longer valid, she has to save herself. But Blanche is unwilling to let go of her beliefs and continues to believe that she must be saved by a knight, a gentleman. However, the gentlemen she has been conditioned to attract will not be interested in Blanche, and she is unwilling to settle for less. In her desperate attempt to continue to belong to the Southern way of life, and to keep her role as belle, she elevates Mitch to this mythical gentleman, who will only want her if she is young and chaste. Rather than face reality and treat Mitch as he is: a blue-collar working man, who has also experienced "real" life, and not the sheltered life that the nobility lives, she does the opposite. She deceives everyone, herself included, and when it blows up in her face, she retreats further into her delusions. This leads to her inability to develop her gender consciousness resulting in her inability to differ between delusions and reality.

Savran and Bak explored homosexuality in Williams´ work, specifically how hyper-homophobia in the 1950s was portrayed and employed in Williams´ plays. Rather than simply being homophobic, Williams´ work illustrated how constructed gender roles such as Cold War masculinity, or hyper-masculinity, led to a distinction between hetero- and homomasculinity, which created confusion and difficulty in defining sexuality. This confusion resulted in sexual existentialism, and manifested in Brick from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as homosexual existentialism. However, constructed gender roles and controlled sexuality were not limited to men, as women also, and perhaps especially, were subjected to this. Specifically, Gencheva explores how the "Southern belle", a social construct for white unmarried women, hindered the development of gender consciousness. She explores how Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire* is torn between her role as belle, which dictates that she suppresses or eradicates sexual desire, and her need for physical intimacy, which ultimately casts her in the role of whore. Socially constructed gender roles, which people like Brick and Blanche try to follow but ultimately fail to do, results in psychological issues like sexual existentialism and the inability to develop gender consciousness. What both Brick and Blanche have in common, is that they experience paradoxical identities. Brick is both heteromasculine, but Bak argues he is having a homosexual existential crisis, which means that, like Schrodinger´s cat, he is both hetero- and homomasculine. Blanche continuously jumps between her roles as belle and whore, and is never able to fully embrace one or the other.

However, despite Brick and Blanche developing paradoxical identities, socially constructed gender roles and controlled sexuality are not inherently negative. Both Brick and Blanche portray how gender and sexuality are not binary identities. Rather, gender and sexuality are fluid concepts. This is explored by Vernedakis, who looks at Oliver from the short story "One Arm". In "Violent Fragility: The Mythical, the Iconic and Tennessee Williams´ Politics of Gender in `One Arm´," Emmanuel Vernedakis argues that, rather than portray the homosexual as a modern monster, Williams employed Nietzsche´s Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms of behaviour to portray homosexuality as a paradoxical identity, and make the main character of "One Arm" an icon for homosexuality. "One Arm" is a short story about a young man, Oliver Winemiller, who loses an arm in an accident, kills someone and is sentenced to death. Oliver is homosexual, and according to Vernedakis, Williams attempts to turn Oliver into an icon for gender oriented politics. Due to the censoring of American theatre during this time, plays that treated homosexuality in positive, or even neutral terms, were most likely to not be produced. However, according to Vernedakis, other narratives, like short

stories, had a higher chance of being circulated in the public, and could therefore treat a broader range of subjects. Vernedakis argues that in his short story, Williams portrays society as having "socially constructed structure of gender" (2). This refers to a binary view of gender, in which there is no distinction between sex and gender. A binary perception of gender may extend to a binary view of sexuality, and anyone who go against this is rejected. Contrastingly, another way to view gender is to distinguish it from sex. In other words, sex is what you are born as, male or female, and gender is what you identify as, which does not necessarily correlate to sex. Thus, changing perceptions of what gender is: a spectrum rather than binary division, may result in changed perceptions of sexuality.

The characterization of Oliver wavers between dichotomous identity principles. Vernedakis argues that this echoes Friedrich Nietzsche´s *Birth of Tragedy,* in which he describes "a tension between the Apollonian stress on order and individuality and the Dionysian rapture [and] violence" (2). The terms "apollonian" and "dionysian" derive from the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus respectively. Apollo is known as the God of light and art, and is associated with youth, beauty and morality. Dionysus, on the other hand, is the god of wine, and is associated with revelry and violence. According to Vernedakis, Nietzsche used these two contrasting characters to categorize types of human nature into opposing paradigms of behaviour: mainly Apollonian or rational behaviour, and Dionysian or irrational behaviour.

The paradoxical identity is implied in the title of the story: "One Arm". Vernedakis refers to a quote by Plutarch who calls Apollo "the One" (3), and the ripping apart of the god Dionysus by Titans, explicating that Oliver´s missing arm mirrors the rending of Dionysus. Vernedakis thus proposes that "if the term `one´ in `One arm´ sides with the apollonian paradigm, the torn apart body part is Dionysian" (4). So, by applying the apollonian "one" and comparison of Oliver´s missing arm to Dionysus´ rending to the short story´s title, it becomes clear that "One Arm" refers to both the Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms of behaviour. According to Vernedakis, the title of the short story sums up main character in two words. In other words, not only is the title referring to Oliver´s most defining feature or identity: one arm, but it also refers to both the apollonian and dionysian paradigms as equal parts of his identity.

The title then, foreshadows the events of the play, as Oliver´s identity is both apollonian and dionysian. Vernedakis argues that Oliver "displays and apollonian concern for moral integrity" (2), and that his "most notable apollonian feature is his concern with the self" (3). This is in line with referring to Apollo as "the One", as the term apollonian encompasses individuality. However, the dionysian paradigm is the counterpart to this, and is thus naturally

associated with “the many”. Even though Oliver is only concerned with himself, he writes back to people who send him letters when he is awaiting execution. Furthermore, he tries to help a young priest, who he believes is repressing his homosexuality, showing concern for someone other than himself. He also kills someone, as well as participates in a pornographic movie while drunk, which places his behaviour in the dionysian paradigm. Vernedakis applies these terms to Williams´ play to categorize Oliver´s personality, and illustrate how Williams´ portrayed Oliver, a homosexual, as having a paradoxical identity.

As one half of Oliver´s identity can be characterized as apollonian, it endows him with an arrogance that is reminiscent of a Southern gentleman. According to Vernedakis, this allows for Williams to incorporate “the old South” into Oliver´s identity. Vernedakis argues that Williams employed “the syncretic intertwining of Apollonian and Dionysian in connection with Southern historical and cultural features” (4-5). In other words, Oliver´s personality creates associations to Southern features, which Williams takes advantage of. The Southern historical and cultural features refer to how the South romanticized the defeat they suffered in the Civil War, which led to the notion that the tragedy of losing their society elevated them above the victors. It is this romanticized loss which Williams incorporates into Oliver´s identity. Vernedakis argues that “the parallel between Oliver´s lost arm and the South´s lost cause promotes a politics of fragility and loss” (6). As the antebellum South romanticized their loss and make it a point of pride rather than shame, this romanticized loss endows the expected fragility with power. So when Williams recycles this romanticized loss in Oliver, his missing arm makes him fragile and precious, yet also endows these qualities of his personality with power.

Oliver´s missing arm makes him an epitome of the South, and also turns him into an icon. Oliver is compared to art several times throughout the play, with a statue, a sculpture, and a painting among the comparisons. Vernedakis argues that Oliver´s fragility, when imbued with power, not only makes him both broken and beautiful, but makes the comparisons to art turn him into an icon. In other words, losing his arm creates a powerful fragility in him, which is actually “charm”. Vernedakis explains that “`charm´ is the secularized reading of `divine grace´, a characteristic assigned to Christian icons” (6). In this case, “icons” refers to paintings of holy figures used in Byzantine and Eastern churches for worship. What this means is that, not only is Oliver “a work of art,” but because of his charm he is elevated into an icon. In addition, Oliver´s picture gets printed in several newspapers when he is arrested, making people view him as an image instead of as a person. Vernedakis argues that “Oliver´s picture in the newspapers has a tremendous iconic effect on the men

who recognize him" (8). So, not only does Oliver become an image, he also becomes a subject of worship.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored how Williams portrayed his character´s struggle with gender and identity in order to challenge post-war, mid-century American society, in which homophobic discourse and constructed gender led to issues such as existential sexuality, the inability to develop gender consciousness and paradoxical identities. The latter however, is not inherently negative, as it allowed Williams to contend a binary division of gender, and rather illustrate how gender should be viewed in a spectrum or a range.

Savran argues that Williams challenged the homophobic discourse by translating and reflecting homosexuality into other transgressive relationships, which were still taboo, but would not be censored. Adultery was a common trope he employed as portraying adultery would necessitate a portrayal of sexuality, and allowed Williams to raise questions about and explore this topic. According to Savran, these transgressive relations served to undercut the social conventions of the time. In other words, by showing characters with relationships that violated social norms meant Williams could illustrate the uncertainty individuals experienced with a binary division of sexuality and gender, thus undermining the conventional presentations of these.

According to Savran, Williams also displaced his homosexual characters in order to avoid using the "language of remorse". *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof* features three characters who are portrayed as gay, however, they are not directly part of the play. Savran argues that Williams was able to protect his homosexual subjects by not allowing them to speak, since the only language available to them ensured their abjection and marginalization. By creating characters who are gay and making them absent from the play, allowed Williams to protect his characters from the homophobic discourse. Even though the characters who are openly gay are absent and silenced from the play, two other characters have implied or ambiguous ties to homosexuality: Brick and Big Daddy. Big Daddy implies that he has some experience with homosexuality, and Brick is suspected to be a closeted homosexual.

To protect Brick and Big Daddy for their ambiguous experience with homosexuality, Williams "punished" them. According to Savran, this punishment comes in the form of Big Daddy´s cancer and Brick´s alcoholism, which mirrors the extent of their interaction with

homosexuality. Society cannot allow homosexuality, a perceived sin, to be unopposed, so Big Daddy´s bowel cancer becomes the currency of mortal debt in Williams´s homosexual economy. Brick has never engaged in homosexual acts, and thus pays a "lesser" price, as alcoholism is not as fatal or irreversible as cancer. This makes his ailment existential in nature; Brick´s alcoholism is a result of his conflicted feelings, rather than a physical ailment.

Despite his punishment, implying that Big Daddy has participated in homosexual acts is surprising due to his characterization. Savran argues that Big Daddy embodies power, authority, promiscuity, and heterosexual misogyny, which makes him an exemplum of normative masculinity. In addition, he does not struggle with questions of sexuality, despite his alleged exploration of homosexuality in his youth. This makes him a powerful image, while simultaneously portraying how many men viewed homosexuality during the mid-century, post-war period.

This view of homosexuality is explored by John Bak, who defines it as "Cold War masculinity". Cold War masculinity differentiated between homosexual act and homosexual identity. Bak argues that Brick is experiencing a homosexual existential crisis. To understand what lies behind Brick´s identity crisis, Bak explains the developing view of homosexuality during this time. Prominent politicians from Washington compared homosexuals and communists, and assigned them an effeminate identity. This is the basis for Brick´s understanding of homosexuality; the effeminate man becomes a stereotype for homosexuals. Brick also understands homosexuality in terms of "gay acts". Bak argues that Brick saw homosexuality as by what one did, not by who one was.

Yet, after Skipper confesses to being gay, Brick knows that homosexuality is not restricted to effeminate personality or gay acts. Bak examines a study by Alfred Kinsey to illustrate how Brick´s confusion about homosexuality mirrored what several men in the US experienced at the time. Kinsey´s study explored male sexuality found that a portion of the male population had homosexual experience without identifying as homosexuals. This was not necessarily because they were afraid or ashamed of admitting they were homosexuals, rather that they separated a homosexual act from a homosexual identity. As a result, rather than question who was homosexual, the study problematized what constituted hetero- and homosexuality. Bak also quotes Eve Sedgewick, wrote about changes in socio-sexual conventions, and explored the division of homosexuality. Sedgewick argued that defining homosexuality only on the basis of an effeminate identity meant that anyone who portrayed a masculine identity could avoid being suspected of homosexuality. This notion extended to the gay community, and created a new form of masculinity; cold war homomasculinity. Like

heteromasculinity, Cold War homomasculinity also relocated homosexuality to an effeminate identity. According to Sedgewick, the gay community began to distinguish between fairies: men who identified as gay, and queers: men who only participated in gay acts. The difference between these two, is that a "queer" man still maintains a heteromasculine gender construct, while "fairies" are usually effeminate homosexuals. As a result of this division, "fairies" became the "homosexual Other", and queers were not seen as homosexual by society due to their masculinity, and regardless of how they themselves identified.

Cold War homomasculinity, especially the "queer" identity, blurred the lines between hetero- and homosexuality. Men could be hyper-masculine and still be homosexual, as was the case with many closeted homosexuals. Brick learns this when Skipper admits he is homosexual. Furthermore, men could participate in sexual activity with other men, and still not identify as gay. As far as Brick knows, Skipper has not done anything sexual with another man, which means that someone can identify as homosexual despite not being effeminate nor doing gay acts. Bak argues that Brick is stuck in a no man´s land between hetero- and homosexuality. This uncertainty of what it means to be homosexual is the root of Brick´s homosexual existential crisis. He does not understand the difference between heterosexual and homosexual desire.

Because of this, Brick resorts to homophobia to protect his sexual identity. Bak argues that homophobia was employed by heteromasculine and queer men to justify homosocial bonds and marginalize homosexual ones. Brick enacts homophobia as proof of his heterosexuality, and insists on the primacy of a homosexual act over a homosexual identity. This means he can hide behind the fact that he and Skipper never participated in sexual acts, and thus could not be homosexuals. So, when Big Daddy attempts to suggest that Brick and Skipper might have been in love, Brick becomes angry and accuses his father of believing that he had performed sodomy. This means that Brick´s homophobia says nothing about Brick´s views on homosexuality, as it could be a performative tool to display heterosexuality. Homophobia as a performative tool was used by both hetero- and homosexuals for this purpose. What this means is that, rather than Williams´ work being homophobic, his characters are only portraying the conventional hyper-masculinity of the time, and Brick´s homophobia can be interpreted as an act or disguise of his homosexuality. This is a result of Cold War masculinity associating homosexuality with an effeminate identity, and creating the notion that heterosexuality needed to be performed through hyper-masculinity. This eventually resulted in a distinction between homosexual act and homosexual identity, which

created constructed sexual identities and which led to mass confusion in regards to identifying sexuality.

Socially constructed gender and sexuality was not limited to men, women as well were subjected to constructed gender roles and controlled sexuality. Andrea Gencheva explores this in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which she argues that Blanche acts as the epitome of a Southern belle. The belle was a constructed gender role which not only defined how white, young, aristocratic women portrayed their gender, but also placed limits on their sexuality. Gencheva argues that constructed gender roles, specifically the belle, can stagnate the development of gender consciousness, as portrayed by Blanche. Blanche was raised in the old South, a society made up of restrictive societal expectations, which included rigid and strict interpretations of masculinity and femininity. Blanche has developed a well-defined identity and gender consciousness, as well as a very specific code of conduct within the male-dominated culture.

This code of conduct that young women from the South´s upper class followed cast them in the role of the Southern "belle", and Blanche acts as a personification of the belle. The belle was a way to ensure the continuation of the patriarchal system. The belle´s entire goal, everything she did, was to get a husband. Perpetuating the idea of the belle meant that women were raised to believe they had one purpose in life: to find a husband, and thus unconsciously or not continuing the patriarchal rule. In order to find a husband, Gencheva argues that Blanche was conditioned by Southern Puritanism preferably eradicate her sexual desire. This means Blanche must walk a precarious line between the oppositions of chaste and desiring, lady and whore in order to fulfil her duty and find a husband.

These oppositions serve to confine Blanche´s gender consciousness. After Blanche´s husband kills himself, Blanche uses physical intimacy and desire as a means to combat the loneliness, trauma and guilt. Yet, rather than letting her gender consciousness evolve to encompass libidinal desire, she stubbornly attempts to cling to her beliefs and role as a belle. For Blanche, feeling and acting on her desire equates to her being a whore, which marks her as a scarlet letter woman. Similar to the main character in *The Scarlet Letter*, Blanche´s sexual relations are judged by others, and when she becomes involved with her seventeen-year old pupil, she is run out of her hometown. Rather than own up to her mistakes, and embrace her sexuality, she tries to revert to her role as belle and hide her sexual relations behind an illusion of youth and innocence.

Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulge in it. Gencheva argues

that Blanche is unable to sustain these two competing aspects of her gender consciousness, and when the guilt of indirectly causing her husband´s death becomes too much for Blanche, she uses sex as a respite. As Blanche believes indulging in sex makes her a whore, this behaviour also serves as punishment. So using sex as punishment is also a form of penance for Blanche. Gencheva argues that it is as if she is wearing the mark of Cain. Like Cain, Blanche is forced to be a wanderer. Blanche is forced to jump between the roles of belle and whore according to the confines of her gender consciousness. Because she is not able to let go of her role as belle, she can only ever inhabit these roles, meaning that she can never develop her gender consciousness to be a version of a belle that also has and enjoys sex. And because she is unable to let go of her desire, she can never be a true belle either.

The result of jumping between these two roles, specifically continuing to return to the role of belle leads to her developing delusions; mainly the knight in shining armor must save her. As a belle, Blanche cannot save herself, and she is not even willing to try. She is adamant that she needs to find someone who will marry her in order to be saved. Because Blanche sees herself as a belle, she must present herself as an attractive option for her knight, and she does this by deceiving Mitch into thinking that she is a young, chaste woman. She believes she must create an illusion of herself in order to find her knight, and thus be saved. This belief that life and love is a fairy tale, where she is the damsel in the distress and the first man who wants her is the knight in shining armor, is going to be detrimental to Blanche.

This contrasts to her sister, Stella, who is married, but has very much saved herself. Gencheva argues that Stella´s marriage unshackles and simultaneously redeems her. Stella is married but is also more free than she used to be. Furthermore, she is “redeemed” in terms of sexuality. She has been raised in the same manner as Blanche, but as she is married, she no longer has to adhere to the complete suppression of desire that being a belle demands. Stella´s acknowledgement of desire and the importance of it shows that her gender consciousness has evolved. Not only does Stella accept her sexuality, a break from what she and Blanche have been taught, but she also explores it, meaning that her gender consciousness has evolved and is developing. This contrasts to Blanche who has a very fixed and rigid gender consciousness; she is either belle or whore, she is not able to gain the middle ground that Stella has seemingly found.

Blanche´s belle identity is what makes Blanche believe that she is completely dependent on other people, especially men. And it is this dependence on others rather than on herself which is the reason she has faced so much hardship in her life. Her fantasies and delusions have set her up for failure in life. Gencheva argues that there are no chivalric

knights and gentlemen who will come to rescue her. As the beliefs she has grown up with are no longer valid, she has to save herself. But Blanche is unwilling to let go of her beliefs and continues to believe that she must be saved by a knight. However, the gentlemen she has been conditioned to attract will not be interested in Blanche, and she is unwilling to settle for less. In her desperate attempt to continue to belong to the Southern way of life, and to keep her role as belle, she elevates Mitch to this mythical gentleman, who will only want her if she is young and chaste. She deceives everyone, herself included, and when it blows up in her face, she retreats further into her delusions. This leads to her inability to develop her gender consciousness resulting in her inability to differ between delusions and reality.

What Brick and Blanche have in common, is that they both experience paradoxical identities. Brick is heteromasculine, however, Bak argues that due to Brick´s homosexual existential crisis, he becomes both hetero- and homomasculine. He is both in the sense that he is incapable or unwilling to identify as either one, and cannot reject them both. He is, like Blanche, in a state of limbo. Blanche continuously jumps between her roles as belle and whore, and is never able to fully embrace one or the other. However, despite Brick and Blanche developing paradoxical identities which are the focal point of their identity struggles, a paradoxical identity is not inherently negative. This is because both Brick and Blanche portray how gender and sexuality are not binary identities, but rather fluid concepts. This is explored by Emmanuel Vernedakis, who looks at Oliver from the short story “One Arm”, and argues that, rather than portray the homosexual as a modern monster, Williams employed Nietzsche´s Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms of behaviour to portray homosexuality as a paradoxical identity, and make the main character of “One Arm” an icon for homosexuality.

The characterization of Oliver wavers between dichotomous identity principles which echo Nietzsche´s *Birth of Tragedy*, in which he describes a tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Nietzsche used these two contrasting characters to categorize types of human nature into opposing paradigms of behaviour: mainly Apollonian or rational behaviour, and Dionysian or irrational behaviour. Oliver´s paradoxical identity is implied in the title of the story: “One Arm”. The title refers to both the Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms of behaviour, and sums up main character in two words. In other words, not only is the title referring to Oliver´s most defining feature or identity: one arm, but it also refers to both the apollonian and dionysian paradigms as equal parts of his identity.

Oliver´s apollonian behaviour allows Williams to incorporate “the old South” into Oliver´s identity, specifically romanticized loss. Vernedakis argues that the parallel between Oliver´s lost arm and the South´s lost cause promotes a politics of fragility. As the antebellum

South romanticized their loss and make it a point of pride rather than shame, this romanticized loss endows the expected fragility with power. So when Williams recycles this romanticized loss in Oliver, his missing arm makes him fragile and precious, yet also endows these qualities of his personality with power. Furthermore, Vernedakis argues that Oliver´s fragility, when imbued with power, not only makes him both broken and beautiful, but makes the comparisons to art turn him into an icon. In other words, losing his arm creates a powerful fragility in him, which is actually "charm". Vernedakis explains that charm is the secularized reading of divine grace, a characteristic assigned to Christian icons. In other words, not only is Oliver "a work of art," but because of his charm he is elevated into an icon. So, not only does Oliver become an image, he also becomes a subject of worship. His homosexuality and paradoxical identity turn him into an icon which makes him a subject of worship.

Chapter 3. Close reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

In this chapter I will do a close-reading of Williams´ plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Tennessee Williams employs myths and gender identity to portray Blanche and Brick as attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, yet ending up being devoured by their own human nature. Williams uses the myth of "the original sin" from Christianity to set up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. The societal versions of this dual human nature manifests as paradoxical identities. Brick´s inability to redefine his identity leads to homosexual existentialism, and causes his identity to be both hetero- and homomasculine. Blanche´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to develop a belle/whore identity. The Sothern belle and the heteromasculine identity emphasize the primacy of spiritual love over physical These contradictory identities cause the characters to experience alienation and existentialism, thus portraying post-WWII disillusionment.

Post-WWII disillusionment mainly consisted of three things: existentialism, alienation and individual hopelessness. Blanche´s belle identity comes from an outdated society, and makes Blanche behave according to the rules of this society. However, these rules are obsolete, causing Blanche to become alienated from her family, as she is seen as "other" by the other characters in the play. Her belle identity makes Blanche see Stanley as not worthy of herself and her sister Stella, despite having to throw herself at their mercy. Brick, on the other hand, does not address his paradoxical identity, which causes him to experience existentialism, in addition to becoming alienated from his family. His inability to redefine his identity, makes him unable to participate in society.

In addition, Blanche and Brick are cast in the roles of Persephone and Odysseus from Greek mythology. Portraying Blanche with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying her as Persephone creates a break or deviation from the myth. Whereas Stella portrays the traditional Persephone, who falls in love with her abuser, Blanche creates a new narrative. Rather than being a subservient housewife, like Stella, who accepts abuse and misogyny from her husband, Blanche is portrayed as a woman who is struggling with her sexuality and a confining, constructed gender role. Brick´s portrayal of Odysseus while going through a homosexual existential crisis, also creates a break from the traditional myth. Whereas Stanley is portrayed as Hades in order to demonize his hyper-masculinity, Brick is

portrayed as Odysseus to illustrate how his crisis in actually a journey. Both of these deviations from the traditional myths serve to create new narratives, and casts Blanche and Brick as archetypal figures in their own right. This allows for them to emerge as icons for gender liberation.

3.1 Myth and Gender Identity in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Williams employed the myth of Hades and Persephone in *A Streetcar Named Desire* to portray Stanley as Hades and both Stella and Blanche as Persephone. Whereas Blanche tries to overcome the primal urges of her body, Stanley and Stella embrace their dual nature. As a result, Blanche ends up being devoured by her own human nature, specifically her paradoxical identity. Blanche´s belle/whore identity causes her to become alienated from society, which mirrors the post-war disillusionment many experienced after WWII. In addition, by portraying Blanche as Persephone in combination with her belle/whore identity, causes Blanche to break from the myth and become an archetypal figure in her own right, as well as an icon for gender liberation.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois comes to visit her pregnant sister Stella, and Stella´s husband Stanley. Both Blanche and Stella grew up on a plantation, and used to be rich. Stanley, on the other hand, is Polish and working class, which Blanche disapproves of. As a result, Blanche and Stanley do not get on well together. Blanche starts to see one of Stanley´s friends, Mitch, and both Stella and Blanche believe Mitch is going to marry her. However, during the course of the play it becomes apparent that Blanche is close to becoming, is she is not already, an alcoholic. Stanley also manages to discover that she has a sordid reputation: not only has she slept with a number of men, she also fooled around with her seventeen-year old pupil, causing her to be run out of town. Stanley tells Mitch, and he does not want anything more to do with her. Shortly after, Stella goes into labour, and is taken to hospital. Stanley comes back home to a distraught Blanche, who has lost her final chance at marriage. He rapes her, which causes Blanche to have a psychological breakdown. The play ends with Stella refusing to believe Blanche about the rape, and a doctor escorting Blanche to an asylum. Stella calls out to Blanche as they walk away, but Blanche does not turn back.

The first myth I will explore in *Streetcar* the myth of Hades and Persephone. According to the myth; Persephone was the goddess of spring, and one day Hades, king of the underworld, fell in love with her. He kidnapped her and she eventually fell in love with him as

well and became queen of the Underworld. There is an explicit reference to this myth in the opening of scene one, as the setting of the play takes place on a street named “Elysian Fields” (Williams, 47: 1116). Elysian Fields, or Elysium, is a place in the Greek mythological Underworld. The Greek Underworld was the place where Grecians believed humans arrived after death. The Greek did not believe in the sort of heaven that is depicted in, for example, Christianity. They believed that all the souls of the people who died travelled to the Underworld, which was divided into three places, similar to Dante´s seven circles of hell. Elysian Fields was where warriors and heroes ended up, and was thought to be one of the most peaceful places in the Greek Underworld. The setting of the play is described as having an “atmosphere of decay” (Williams, 47: 1116), and as one connotation of decay is death, this implies that the place has an atmosphere of death. This further emphasizes how the setting of the play mirrors the Underworld, where the dead reside. And finally, the play refers to a river, which could be any of the five rivers running through the underworld of Greek mythology.

Even though the Greeks did not believe in a “heaven”, at least not in the same way Christians believe in heaven, Elysian Fields can be seen as the Greek equivalent to heaven. Elysian Fields was considered to be a paradise. The two remaining places in the Greek Underworld was Tartarus and The Asphodel Meadows. Tartarus was the deepest region of the Underworld, and if Elysian Fields is heaven, then Tartarus is hell, as this was the place where souls were judged and punished. The Asphodel Meadows was where most mortals ended up, and was thought to be the place of indifference. Here, the river Lethe, or river of forgetfulness, is located, and anyone who would drink from this river would forget their previous lives. The beginning of *Streetcar*, with the explicit reference to Elysian Fields, gives an implication of heaven in the play. However, as the play goes on, this becomes more ambiguous. Even though the play is set in Elysian Fields, the characters seem to inhabit separate regions, at least psychologically. For example, as the play goes on, Blanche´s drinking problem becomes more apparent. Blanche uses sex as a way to punish herself, but alcohol as a means of forgetting her guilt and her past. Thus, it can be argued that, while Blanche is living in the apartment, she psychologically inhabits Asphodel Meadows. Blanche is drinking to forget, which may suggest she is drinking from the Lethe.

Not only is Blanche in Asphodel Meadows, so is Stella. Yet, as opposed to Blanche who is unable to forget, Stella accomplishes this in a sense. In the play, she seems to be indifferent to most things. Even Blanche comments on this, saying to Stella: “I don´t understand your indifference” (Williams, 47: 1140). Stella seemingly wants to pretend that everything is fine, and not acknowledge any potential problems. Even after Stanley hits Stella,

she forgives him shortly after. When Blanche is appalled, Stella tells her that: “I know how it must have seemed to you and I´m awful sorry it had to happen, but it wasn´t anything as serious as you seem to take it” (Williams, 47: 1140). And after Blanche tells Stella about the rape, Stella doesn´t want to believe her. She admits to her friend that she couldn´t believe Blanche and go on living with Stanley. This implies that she might believe Blanche, but she chooses to believe Stanley, and agrees to send Blanche away. However, when the doctors leave with Blanche, Stella tries to call out for her sister, but Stanley comes out and embraces her, which stops her calling for Blanche. Both of these cases seem to suggest that Stanley has the power to make Stella forget or become indifferent.

Even though Blanche might seemingly be drinking from the Lethe in order to forget her past, it soon becomes apparent that for her, the apartment is actually Tartarus, the place where souls are judged and punished. Stanley makes his distrust and dislike for Blanche known, and purposefully intimidates her. When Stanley finds out about her sordid past, he is in positon to be merciful or vengeful. Stella tries to plead Blanche´s case, but Stanley has already made up his mind about Blanche. In other words, he has judged her, and will end up punishing her as well. Stanley decides to tell Mitch about her affairs, which results in Mitch refusing to marry her. This is not enough “punishment” or torture, as Stanley also decides to rape her. Blanche was perhaps already mentally unstable, but the rape ensures that she becomes locked in her own delusions. In other words, Stanley has trapped her in Tartarus. Stanley, on the other hand, continues to inhabit an Elysian Fields state of mind throughout the play. He is violent, and can be seen as a warrior of sorts, and yet he is peaceful in the sense that he is confident in his identity and sexuality. Yet, he seemingly has the power to control which region the other characters inhabit psychologically. He can make Stella forget, and he can torture and administer punishment on Blanche. This suggests that Stanley is not only an inhabitant of the Underworld, he is its ruler: Hades.

Stanley´s control of other characters´ psychological states which can move them to different regions of the Underworld makes him a representation of Hades, king of the Underworld. The clearest case of Stanley portraying Hades is when Stanley exclaims: “I am the king around here…!” (Williams, 47: 1160). This exclamation serves several purposes. Firstly, as Hades is the king of the Underworld, having Stanley exclaim that he is a king cements his role as Hades. This is furthermore seen in the specification of “around here”, which defines *where* he is king: their apartment. This is like Hades, who is only the king of his realm, the Underworld, whereas Zeus and Poseidon rule the earth and the sea respectively. Secondly, this statement emphasizes his gender: king, which is the male equivalent of royalty.

By using “king” as opposed to boss, leader or authority, which are essentially gender neutral terms, he is also claiming to be of higher rank than Stella and Blanche, who are women. Here, Stanley is asserting his authority through his gender.

Portraying Stanley as Hades is also alluded to through the use of a reference to Christianity. When Blanche and Stella are speaking about astrological signs, and Stella tells Blanche the date of Stanley´s birth, Blanche exclaims: “Capricorn – the Goat!” (Williams, 47: 1145). In Christianity, the devil is often depicted as a goat, or goat-like figure, and the goat is closely associated with the devil. This can be interpreted to mean that Stanley´s astrological sign, the goat, implies that he is the devil, or Hades, the Greek mythological version of the devil.

Stanley portrays Hades, and both Stella and Blanche can be cast in the role of Persephone. Perhaps the most obvious choice for the portrayal of Persephone is Stella, as she is married to Stanley, and Persephone is married to Hades. Furthermore, Stanley speaks about when he and Stella first met and says: “I pulled you down off them columns,” (Williams, 47: 1162), which refers to the columns of the plantation where she and Blanche grew up. He says he pulled her down, invoking the part of the myth when Hades pulls Persephone down into the Underworld. Yet, when Blanche explains to Mitch that her name, Blanche DuBois, means white woods, she also says: “like an orchard in spring” (Williams, 47: 1136), which implies that she is Persephone, the Goddess of Spring. Furthermore, a well-known motif in Western art is “The rape of Proserpina” (Persephone), yet, Blanche is the one who is raped in the play. For the purpose of comparison, they will both be seen as portraying Persephone.

In addition to applying the myth of Hades and Persephone to the play, I will explore how this combines with the myth of the “original sin”. According to Thompson, the original sin refers to the body´s betrayal of the soul, the consequent exile of humankind from the Edenic paradise where body and spirit were unified, and the soul´s attempt to transcend its physical incarnation. The original sin includes the idea that humans are born guilty, or that humans have a tendency to sin that they must resist. Williams incorporates the original sin into the play by portraying his characters, especially Blanche, with a dual nature. In other words, Williams sets up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. Although all the characters have dual natures, only Blanche is attempting to overcome the soul´s physical incarnation, or the primal urges of her body. This could be interpreted to mean that she views acting on her bodily urges as a sin, and by overcoming this, she might transcend to a spiritual level, or a return of sorts, to the garden of Eden. However, Barberá argues that Williams wants to confront the myth of Eden, by

showing that the only nature that exists is cruel and devouring. Furthermore, that real nature consists of predators and prey.

The attempt to transcend the body´s urges is portrayed in Blanche´s pursuit of a spiritual relationship, like the one she had with Allan. Recreating such a relationship would allow her to achieve her soul´s spiritual inclinations, or return to the garden. Allan was Blanche´s first love and Stella describes the depth of Blanche´s feelings: "I think Blanche didn´t just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human" (Williams, 47: 1158). Blanche not only loved Allan, but worshipped him. She had found a "god" whom she could worship, thus elevating Allan to a status higher than a mere human. This is further evident when Stella says Blanche thought him "too fine to be human". Blanche loved Allan in a pure state, thus Allan is elevated to a spiritual level, which means he ceases to be only human, and becomes is something more. As a result, their relationship is simultaneously elevated to a spiritual level.

In addition to portraying the characters with dual natures, Williams also incorporates the original sin into the play by having Allan betray Blanche. Allan has a sexual liaison with another man, which betrays Blanche on two levels. He not only betrays her by cheating on her, he also betrays their spiritual relationship by being physically intimate with another man. He gives his body´s urges, his sexual desire, primacy over the spiritual relationship he shares with Blanche, enacting the original sin of the body´s betrayal of the soul. Blanche discovers them, and her disgust leads him to commit suicide. Allan´s betrayal can thus be seen as the original sin of the play, which transfers to Blanche, and manifests as her need to recreate their spiritual relationship, but ultimately succumbing to her physical desire. Barberá argues that self-sacrifice is inherent to the human situation, but according to Thompson, in relation to the original sin, this is enacted as self-betrayal. Blanche´s guilt over Allan´s suicide leads her to betray her soul by giving in to her sexual desire.

Blanche attempts to recreate a spiritual relationship with other men, most notably with Mitch. An example of this is when Mitch comforts Blanche after she has told him about Allen, and she exclaims: "Sometimes – there´s God – so quickly!" (Williams, 47: 1155). In Mitch´s embrace, she can almost glimpse God, or the spiritual, implying that she can return to the garden of Eden through pure or spiritual love. Her self-betrayal and re-enactment of the body´s betrayal of the soul is exemplified in the interaction between her and the young man who comes to their apartment to collect money for the newspaper. The man is eager to leave when Blanche does not have money to pay him, he is even described as looking "yearningly at the door" (Williams, 47: 1149). But Blanche stops him several times in order to make him

stay longer. She tells him "You make my mouth water" (Williams, 47: 1148). She asks if she can kiss him, but before he can respond, she presses her mouth to his. She tells him to run along, as she has "got to be good" (Williams, 47: 1149). In other words, acting on her desire is bad, or even a sin. In addition, she is already seeing Mitch at this point. So not only is she betraying herself, she is also re-enacting Allan´s betrayal of her by cheating.

The spiritual connection Blanche is looking for, is exemplified in her imagined relationship with Shep Huntleigh. Blanche tells Stanley that she is going to move out of the apartment, as she is going to be joining her friend, Shep, on a cruise. She complains about the lack of privacy when she and Stanley are alone in the apartment, and Stanley asks if living with Shep would not also interfere with her privacy. Blanche says no, and explains that: "What he wants is my companionship…. Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart- and I have all those things- aren´t taken away, but grow!" (Williams, 47: 1169). The nature of her imagines relationship with Shep would not be of a physical sort, but rather spiritual; enriched by mind, spirit and heart. However, this is only a fantasy. She has not been in contact with Shep, and her attempt to achieve a spiritual relationship with him is pure imagination.

Blanche´s refusal to accept her dual nature means she attempts to overcome her body by repressing her sexual urges. This connects to her paradoxical identity, as the tension between her body and her spirit is mirrored in the tension between being considered a belle and a whore by society. In other words, the belle/whore paradoxical identity is the societal version of the body/spirit battle. The belle can in a way be seen as a representation of the spiritual part of her dual nature and paradoxical identity, however, the belle is also very tied to society. The belle is an asexual, constructed gender role, a position in and defined by society, as opposed to the spiritual, which is defined by religion. Yet, the belle perpetuates a repression, or eradication of sexual desire, thus emphasizing the primacy of spiritual love over physical love. The whore on the other hand represents the physical part of dual nature/paradoxical identity. The whore is a sexually active, constructed gender role, which focuses on physical desire.

Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle, means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulging in it. According to Gencheva, constructed gender roles, specifically the belle, can stagnate the development of gender consciousness. Unlike Stella, who has developed her gender consciousness, and can accept sexual desire as part of her identity, Blanche´s belle identity does not allow her to achieve the same development. Her relentless pursuit of the spiritual, and her endeavour to be

only the belle, are the reasons for Blanche´s alcoholism and delusions, and is the reason why Mitch´s dumps her. Had she been able to develop her gender consciousness to the point that she was able to accept her sexual desire, things might have turned out differently for Blanche. Her belle identity demands that she hides behind a veneer of youth and innocence. Had she been upfront about her past from the beginning, both Mitch and Stanley might have accepted her. Her belle identity keeps Blanche trapped in an obsolete past, alienating her to the point that she is unable to function in society.

All the characters face a tension between bodily urges and the spiritual, but Stanley and Stella embrace their violence and sexual desire. By accepting the duality of their human nature, they create a kind of unity in their identities. Stella´s acceptance of and love for Stanley leads her to also embrace the primal urges of the body. Stella tells Blanche that on their wedding night, Stanley took her slipper and smashed all the lightbulbs in the apartment with it. Blanche is shocked, but Stella admits that she was "sort of – thrilled by it" (Williams, 47: 1140). Stella does not only accept primal urges, they excite her. And even though Stanley is violent towards her, she forgives him. She explains to Blanche that their relationship is of a volatile and primal nature. Their relationship is physical in the sense that they embrace their primal urges and make no excuses for them, which results in Stanley not only abusing Stella when he gets upset, but also using physical love or sex, as a means to ask for and express forgiveness.

This kind of physical love, consisting of primal urges like violence and desire, is at odds with Blanche´s quest for spiritual love. She tells Mitch she is terrified of Stanley and is not used to such violence. Blanche is trying to supress her sexual desire, and thus cannot understand why her sister would lower herself to this level. The morning after Stanley hit Stella, and she forgave him, Blanche asks Stella how she could "come back in this place last night? Why, you must have slept with him!" (Williams, 47: 1139). Blanche is appalled at the thought of Stella sleeping with Stanley after his treatment of her the night before, as she fails to comprehend the nature of this kind of physical love. Yet, she starts to understand this when she tells Stella that she "can´t live with him! ...What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to- go to bed with him! And that´s your job- not mine!" (Williams, 47: 1142). The only way to live with such a man as Stanley is embrace the primal urges of the body. Stella can live with Stanley because she accepts the duality of her human nature, and is free to value sexual desire over spiritual love, as the only love he is capable of expressing is physical.

Stanley does not fight to supress his body´s urges, in fact, he embraces them to the point that he becomes a representation of the primal. This is illustrated by Blanche, who describes Stanley as "bestial", "even…sub-human" (Williams, 47: 1143). Whereas Allen is elevated to a spiritual level, Stanley is lowered to a "sub-human" level by Blanche. Nature, or even animals, can be interpreted to be a level below human in terms of evolution. Blanche expands on this idea by describing Stanley as a cave man: "Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is- Stanley Kowalski- survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle! And you- you here- waiting for him! Maybe he´ll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you!" (Williams, 47: 1143). Williams parallels the urges of the body with the wildness of nature. Blanche´s suggestion that he may "strike" or "grunt and kiss" refer to the primal urges associated with the body; violence and sex. The reference to Stanley as a cave-man alludes to no development in his gender consciousness, but whereas this is disastrous for Blanche, Stanley does not have an issue with it because he embraces all of his human nature.

Stanley personifies the primal urges of the body, which causes Blanche to be terrified of him. This is emphasized in the scene directions: "as Stanley crosses past her, a frightened look appears on her face, almost a look of panic" (Williams, 47: 1159). Furthermore, the stage directions create a sense of foreboding when setting the scene before the rape: "The night is filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle" (Williams, 47: 1170). These noises of the jungle are heard as Stanley stalks Blanche through the apartment. Stanley is a representation of the primal urges of the body, and the reference to jungle is made right before he rapes Blanche, a sort of devouring of itself. The parallel between the urges of the body and the wildness of nature makes Stanley a representation devouring nature as well. According to Barberá, Williams wants to confront the myth of Eden, with the cruelness of nature. There can never be a return to the garden, only the discovery of devouring nature. Stanley´s rape of Blanche emphasizes this.

Furthermore, Corrigan argues that those who submit to a mortal existence are corrupt, but those who pursue a timeless ideal are eventually destroyed by the corrupt anyway. Even though Blanche´s dual human nature ends up devouring her, resulting in her alienation from society, the rape also constitutes a devouring. Blanche pursues a timeless ideal: a spiritual relationship, but this was doomed from the start. She was always going to be destroyed by someone who submitted to a mortal existence. This is seen in Stanley´s comment to Blanche right before he rapes her: "we´ve had this date with each other from the beginning" (Williams, 47: 1171). Williams sets up Stanley and Stella as being at peace with themselves and their

identities by existing in a purely physical or bodily state. Stanley´s rape of Blanche emphasizes how everyone eventually become corrupted.

Portraying Stanley as Hades serves to demonize him. By portraying Stanley as an archetypal figure emphasizes his conventionalized hyper-masculinity. Yet, Hades, the devil of Greek mythology, paints Stanley as a villain. An example of how Stanley was viewed when the play first premiered is described by Seokhun Choi in "Desire, Affect, and Becoming: A Deleuzian Reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire*". Choi argues that the audience, particularly men, "sympathized with Stanley" (114). Furthermore, according to Elia Karzan, the director of the original production on Broadway, in his autobiography "*Elia Karzan: A Life*", audience members even laughing during the rape scene. Something so heinous as rape was met with laughter, because Blanche was seen as deserving of it. So, by portraying Stanley as Hades, rather than Odysseus, Achilles or Heracles, emphasizes that he is not a hero. He is a villain, and whereas in the myth, Hades only kidnaps Persephone, Stanley enacts the popular western motif which depicts the rape of Persephone.

Portraying Blanche with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying her as Persephone creates a break or deviation from the myth. Whereas Stella portrays the traditional Persephone, who falls in love with her abuser, Blanche creates a new narrative. Rather than being a subservient housewife, like Stella, who accepts abuse and misogyny from her husband, Blanche is portrayed as a woman who is struggling with her sexuality and a confining, constructed gender role. Yet, her portrayal as Persephone allows her to emerge as an archetypal figure, and consequently as an icon for gender liberation. According to Graves, a function of myth is to uphold and sustain conventional social structures and practices Blanche as Persephone, then, creates a new conventional structure and practice.

3.2 Myth and Gender Identity in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Williams employed the myth of Odysseus and Circe in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to portray Brick as Odysseus and Maggie as Circe. Brick attempts to overcome the primal urges of his body, yet ends up being devoured by his human nature, specifically his paradoxical identity which is divided into hetero- and homomasculinity. This paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from society, to the point that he can no longer function in society. This reflects the post-WWII disillusionment many experienced during the mid-century era. In addition, by portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his existential crisis is a journey to

redefine his identity. His portrayal as a mythical figure in combination with his paradoxical identity creates a new narrative, and serves to reframe him as a new archetype, and thus an icon for gender liberation.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is set on a plantation, and the owner of the plantation, Big Daddy, is dying of bowel cancer, although he does not know this to begin with. He and his wife, Big Mama, are led to believe that the only thing wrong with him is a spastic colon. However, the couple´s two sons: Brick and Gooper, and their two wives: Maggie and Mae, are aware of Big Daddy´s condition. The play focuses mostly on the relationship between Brick and Maggie, the death of their friend Skipper, and Big Daddy´s diagnosis, which he eventually made aware of. Before the events in the play take place, Brick was a football player, but became injured. He had to stay home while Skipper played an away game, yet Maggie, Brick´s wife accompanied Skipper. Maggie suspected Skipper of being gay and harbouring feelings for Brick. He tries to prove that this is not true by sleeping with her. When he is unable to perform the act, he convinces himself that he must be gay. He calls Brick to tell him about this, but Brick hangs up on him. Skipper later commits suicide. After his friend Skipper dies, Brick becomes an alcoholic. Skipper is already dead when the events in the play unfold. In the play, Maggie is desperate for affection from Brick, but after his friend´s death, he cannot stand her, although he doesn´t want to divorce her. Because Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie, opting instead to sleep on the sofa in their room, they have no children. This becomes a point of contention, as Big Daddy´s favourite son is clearly Brick. Big Daddy tells Brick that he is wary of leaving the plantation to Brick, as he has no children. Maggie used to be poor, and she is deathly afraid of becoming poor again. Towards the end of the play, Brick lets it slip that Big Daddy´s does have cancer, and Maggie tries to cheer everyone up by lying and saying she is pregnant. The play ends with her pleading with Brick to come to bed with her to make the lie true.

The myth I will explore in *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof* is the myth about Odysseus and Circe. Circe was an enchantress, who could transform men into animals. In the most well-known myth about Circe, Odysseus and his crew go to shore on her island. She turns his men into swine, yet Odysseus manages to convince her to turn them back into their human forms. He stays with her for a year, and they have two sons. However, sexual politics has reinterpreted the character Circe a number of times, as well as the method for how she changes men into animals. She has usually been portrayed as the archetype of predatory females, and in *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922*, James Milner argues that the poem *Circe´s Palace* by T. S. Eliot depicts her, and in extension all women, as

an emasculatory threat. The poem is written from the point of view of one of Odysseus´s crewmates. He sees Circe luring her victims in, before transforming them into beasts. Milner argues that the poem portrays "Eliot´s Circe as his archetypal representation of Woman, with her sexually centred control of men enabling her to reduce them to their animal natures" (71). In other words, Eliot uses Circe, the predatory female, to portray how women control men through and with sex. This control becomes emasculatory, then, both physically and figuratively. Circe can literally transform men into beasts, which would also control their reproductive organs, and can as such be seen as emasculating. But the archetypal Woman controls men through sex, meaning that she controls their reproductive organs, which is a form of figurative castration.

Applying the myth of Circe and Eliot´s interpretation of Circe as an emasculating woman to the play, allows Maggie to emerge as Circe, an enchantress and predatory female, who has the power to emasculate men. The incident with Skipper is the clearest example of this. In the play, she has already confessed to Brick about this incident, but she relays the events again, saying: "when I came to his room that night…he made that pitiful, ineffectual little attempt to prove what I had said wasn´t true" (Williams, 55: 28). Maggie had told Skipper to either stop loving Brick, or tell Brick to let Skipper admit his feelings for him. At first, Skipper tries to deny this allegation by having sex with Maggie. However, the "pitiful, ineffectual little attempt" implies that it was Skipper who was unwilling or unable to go through with it, while Maggie had no such qualms. Her wording also implies that he was physically unable to have sex with her, which suggests that Maggie has emasculatory power over Skipper. This is because, not only is he unable to have sex with her, her accusation that Skipper loved Brick might also be the cause of Skipper inability to perform sexually.

Like Circe, Maggie also has the power to transform men into animals. Maggie tells Brick she thinks Big Daddy has a "lech" for her because he "drops his eyes to my boobs an´ licks his old chops!" (Williams, 55: 5). And in an attempt to make Brick jealous she tells him that other "men´s eyes burned holes in my clothes, there wasn´t a man I met or walked by that didn´t just eat me up with his eyes" (Williams, 55: 21). One man in particular, "the best lookin´ man in the crowd – followed me upstairs and tried to force his way in the powder room with me, followed me to the door and tried to force his way in!" (Williams, 55: 21). All of these men seem to lose all composure when they see Maggie, they cannot contain themselves, licking their lips, "eating" her up with their eyes, and tries to force themselves into her presence. In other words, when men act like this they are often described as animals, which means that simply the sight of Maggie, arguably turns these men into animals.

The only male in the play who is not affected by Maggie, is Brick, which portrays him as Odysseus. Odysseus is the only man who is not transformed into an animal. In the play, Maggie preys on Brick, as she tries to get him to have sex with her, thus portraying the archetypal version of Circe as a predatory female. She even goes as far as pleading, but he refuses. Brick is not aroused by Maggie, which mirrors Circe´s inability to transform Odysseus into an animal. But the play breaks with the myth, as Odysseus does have sex with Circe, but Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. Maggie tells Brick "you know, our sex life didn´t just peter out in the usual way, it was cut off short, long before the natural time for it to, and it´s going to revive again… That´s what I´m keeping myself attractive for. For the time when you´ll see me again like other men see me" (Williams, 55: 21). Maggie is unable to get Brick to have sex with her, but her statement implies that when whatever is bothering Brick blows over, her power over him will be restored.

In addition to reducing men to their animal natures, Maggie transforms her nieces and nephews into animals. Specifically, by constantly referring to them in various animal terms. She calls them "no-neck monsters" (Williams, 55: 2), and says even Big Daddy called them "pigs at a trough" (Williams, 55: 2). She lists their names and says: "Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, Polly! – Sounds like four dogs and a parrot – an animal act in a circus!" (Williams, 55: 14). In other words, by constantly referring to them as animals, she is essentially turning them into animals, at least in her own mind. She mirrors Circe´s powers of transformation which turns humans into animals.

Circe and Odysseus have two children together, and a point of contention in the play is in regards to Brick and Maggie not conceiving any children together. A child could help Brick maintain or portray his heterosexuality, and make sure Maggie is taken care of financially. Furthermore, in the myth, Circe transforms Odysseus´ crew into swine, but Odysseus manages to persuade her to turn them back. However, in the play, no such persuasion or transformation happens. What this means is that Maggie repeatedly refers to the children as animals, transforming them, in a sense, into animals. In the play, a possible solution to this is presented in the dialogue between Maggie and Big Mama. When Maggie complains about the children, Big Mama tells her: "shoot, Maggie, you just don´t like children," whereas Maggie replies "I do SO like children! Adore them! – well brought up!" (Williams, 55: 17). Big Mama replies "Well, why don´t you just have some and bring them up well, then, instead of all the time pickin´ on Gooper an´ Mae´s?" (Williams, 55: 17). This interaction suggests that Maggie might see the children in the play differently if she were to have children herself. Yet, unlike Odysseus who persuades Circe to transform animals back into humans and fathers two

of her children, Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. This results in her being unable to have a child of her own, and in extension, unable to figuratively transform her nieces and nephews from animals into children.

Brick is portrayed as Odysseus, a mythological figure who journeyed for several years before he was able to return home. Brick´s homosexual existential crisis mirrors this journey. Brick is trying to find his way "home", in other words, he is trying to define his identity. In the myths, Odysseus is already married when he meets Circe. Brick was not married before he met Maggie, he is married to Maggie. Rather, Odysseus´ marriage, which he is fighting to return to, mirrors Brick´s identity. Before Brick married Maggie, he was confident in his and Skipper´s relationship and in his own sexual identity. However, after he married Maggie, she transforms Skipper´s and Brick´s feelings for each other by casting doubt and suspicion on their previously pure friendship. Like Odysseus then, Brick is on a journey to redefine his identity, and Maggie is a hinder in this journey.

Applying the myth of the original sin to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, shows how Brick´s relationship with Skipper may also have been of a spiritual nature. Brick tells Maggie that: "One man has one great good true thing in his life. One great good thing which is true! – I had friendship with Skipper. – You are naming it dirty!" (Williams, 55: 27). So, like Blanche, Brick also places primacy of a spiritual relationship over a physical one. Brick´s relationship with Skipper was not based on physical love, which is similar to the love Blanche and Allan shared. According to Brick, their love for each other was platonic, and any suggestion that it was not, is equal to "naming it dirty". Even though the one great thing Brick had in life, was his relationship with Skipper, he cannot admit that their love for one another was anything other than heterosexual. Despite admitting that their relationship was too rare to be considered normal and wanting to be around each other all the time, Brick cannot acknowledge whether or not he is homosexual, even whether or not he is heterosexual. The play was written during a time of hyper-homophobia, and homosexuality was considered a sin. So, Brick´s reluctance to admit to anything regarding his feelings for Skipper is understandable. Unlike Blanche, who tries to recreate a spiritual relationship with other men, Brick attempts to forget about Skipper.

The original sin refers to the body´s betrayal of the soul, thus implying a duality to human nature. In *Cat*, the original betrayal of the soul by the body may refer the incident with Maggie and Skipper. However, Maggie and Skipper did not actually have sex, despite Skipper being willing, but unable, to go through with it. This may have implications for how it affects Brick. Brick does not try to recreate the spiritual relationship he had with Skipper. This may

be because he was not actually betrayed by (Skipper´s) body. Skipper was willing to betray their friendship, yet, his body could not go through with it. After this incident, Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. This could perhaps be seen as a betrayal of their friendship, as after Skipper is unable to have sex with Maggie, he interprets this as being homosexual, and subsequently confesses to Brick that he loves him. Brick does not know whether or not he is homosexual himself, and he does not want to find out. Yet, he still refuses to sleep with Maggie, possibly because he is attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, and because this would be seen as a betrayal of Skipper.

Brick´s attempt to forget Skipper, is akin to attempting to suppress or overcome his bodily urges. There is some ambiguity in the play in regards to Brick´s homosexuality, which makes it difficult to suggest that he felt sexual desire for Skipper. Yet, like Blanche, Brick has been brought up in a society with strict gender roles, and he might have been subconsciously or not repressing any sexual desire he felt for Skipper. Constructed gender roles may stagnate the development of gender consciousness, and Brick´s hyper masculinity does not allow him to develop his understanding of homosexuality. Brick´s paradoxical identity mirrors the soul/body battle. For him, homosexuality, or homomasculinity is equal to physical and sexual desire. Heteromasculinity encompasses a love that is spiritual and pure, which justifies homosocial bonds. Brick can justify his relationship with Skipper, because their love for each other is spiritual, and therefore heterosexual, which makes Brick by extension, heteromasculine. Because the primal urges of his body are tied to homomasculinity, Brick suppresses these urges in order to avoid defining his identity.

Yet, these primal urges emerge when Maggie and Big Daddy try to bring up Skipper. For the most part, Brick is calm, yet silent. And, like Blanche, Brick uses alcohol as a means of forgetting. He uses alcohol to suppress his body and his guilt regarding Skipper´s death. So, when Maggie starts talking about Skipper, Brick becomes violent, and threatens her unless: “Maggie, you want me to hit you with this crutch? Don´t you know I could kill you with this crutch?” (Williams, 55: 27). When Maggie refuses to stop talking about Skipper, Brick “hurls the crutch at her” (Williams, 55: 28). And when Big Daddy tries to get Brick to talk about Skipper, Brick becomes furious.

Brick´s inability to redefine his identity, thus forcing him to have a paradoxical identity is devouring him. Brick´s alcoholism and his paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from his family, and also from society. He cannot bear to speak to anyone unless he has a drink in his hand. His refusal to make a decision regarding his sexuality, despite being asked repeatedly to do so by his family members, results in him barely speaking

to anyone. He has withdrawn into his own world, so despite being present at gatherings, he is not really there.

Brick´s constructed gender role does not allow him to develop his gender consciousness. When his understanding of his gender role, hetero- and hyper-masculinity, as well as homosexuality, instead of exploring what this could mean for himself, Brick has an existential homosexual crisis. He is stuck between hetero- and homomasculinity, and can be seen as being both. Although Brick is similar to Blanche, in that he has a spiritual connection with someone, they differ in their responses to the primal urges of the body. Brick´s issue is that he does not know what his sexuality is, and therefore cannot accept or embrace it. He is unable to have sex with Maggie, because doing so would imply or suggest what his sexual identity is. Blanche cannot accept her sexuality, which means she cannot let go of her paradoxical identity. But whereas Blanche is actively trying to find a new spiritual connection, which might make her accept the duality of her human nature like Stella, Brick does not. Not only does he not try to recreate his relationship with Skipper, albeit with someone else, he does not even try to redefine his sexuality. Whereas Blanche is aware of her dichotomous identity, yet cannot seem to be either one or the other, Brick does not even raise the question. This is what leads to his existential crisis.

Portraying Brick with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying him as Odysseus illustrates a deviation from the traditional myth. Whereas Stanley is portrayed as Hades to demonize his hyper-masculinity, Brick is portrayed as Odysseus to imply a certain perseverance. Even though Brick does little to address his paradoxical identity, the play ends unresolved, which can suggest several outcomes to Brick´s situation. Portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his homosexual existential crisis is actually a journey, and emphasizes how struggles with gender identity can be arduous, yet are not in vain. Odysseus travelled for more than a decade to come home to his family. Therefore, Brick as Odysseus creates a new narrative, which casts Brick as an archetypal figure in his own right. This makes him an icon for gender liberation. Furthermore, by alluding to struggles with gender identity as a journey creates a more positive outlook on this struggle than Streetcar does.

Chapter conclusion

This chapter has reviewed my close reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof,* which shows how Tennessee Williams employs myths and gender identity to

portray Blanche and Brick as attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, yet ending up being devoured by their own human nature. The myth of "the original sin" sets up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. The societal versions of this dual human nature manifests as paradoxical identities. Brick´s inability to redefine his identity leads to homosexual existentialism, and causes his identity to be both hetero- and homomasculine. Blanche´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to develop a belle/whore identity. The Sothern belle and the heteromasculine identity emphasize the primacy of spiritual love over physical desire. These contradictory identities cause the characters to experience alienation and existentialism, thus portraying post-WWII disillusionment. Blanche´s belle identity comes from an outdated society, and makes Blanche behave according to the rules of this society. However, these rules are obsolete, causing Blanche to become "other" from the other characters in the play. It makes Blanche see Stanley as not worthy of herself and her sister Stella, despite having to throw herself at their mercy. Brick, on the other hand, does not address his paradoxical identities, which also causes him to experience existentialism, in addition to becoming alienated from his family. His inability to redefine his identity, makes him unable to participate in society. In addition, Blanche and Brick are cast in the roles of Persephone and Odysseus from Greek mythology. Both Brick´s and Blanche´s paradoxical identities break with the myths they are portraying, thus creating a new narrative, which makes them archetypal figures in their own right. This serves to cast them as icons for gender liberation.

In the close reading of Streetcar, I applied the myth of Hades and Persephone to the play. The play is set on a street called Elysian Fields, yet it soon becomes apparent that both Blanche and Stella inhabit other places in the Greek mythological Underworld, at least psychologically. Stella is in The Asphodel Meadows, because of her indifference, and the way Stanley is able to make her "forget". Even though Blanche briefly inhabits Asphodel Meadows because of her drinking, it becomes clear that she is actually in Tartarus. This is due to Stanley´s treatment of her. In both of these cases, Stanley controls Stella´s and Blanche´s states of mind, thus influencing which region of the Underworld the women stay in. This suggests that Stanley is not only an inhabitant of the Underworld, he is its ruler: Hades. The clearest case of Stanley portraying Hades is when Stanley exclaims that he is the king around here. Stanley draws a parallel to Hades being king, and ruling only over his own realm. As Hades is the king of the Underworld, having Stanley exclaim that he is a king cements his role as Hades. Furthermore, the reference to Stanley´s astrological sign, the goat, implies that he is the devil, or Hades, the Greek mythological version of the devil.

Both Stella and Blanche can be cast in the role of Persephone. Stella, because she is married to Stanley, which mirrors how Persephone is the wife of Hades. And Stanley alludes to Hades´ kidnapping of Persephone, when Stanley tells Stella that he pulled her down from the columns of her plantation home. Yet, Blanche also implies that she is Persephone, the Goddess of Spring, when she compares her name, Blanche DuBois, to an orchard in spring. Furthermore, as Blanche is the one who is raped in the play, this brings to mind the well-known motif in Western art: "The rape of Proserpina" (Persephone). As such, both Stella and Blanche could both be seen as portraying Persephone.

In addition to the myth of Hades and Persephone, the myth of the "original sin" is also applied to the play. The original sin portrays the characters, especially Blanche, with a dual nature. Williams sets up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. Despite all the characters having a dual nature, Blanche is the only one who is attempting to overcome the primal urges of her body. This could be interpreted to mean that she views acting on her bodily urges as a sin, and by overcoming this, she might transcend to a spiritual level, or a return of sorts, to the garden of Eden. However, Barberá argues that Williams wants to confront the myth of Eden, by showing that the only nature that exists is cruel and devouring. Furthermore, that real nature consists of predators and prey.

The attempt to transcend the body´s urges is portrayed in Blanche´s pursuit of a spiritual relationship, like the one she had with Allan. Recreating such a relationship would allow her to achieve her soul´s spiritual inclinations, or return to the garden. According to Stella, Blanche not only loved Allan, but worshipped him. Thus, Allan is elevated to a spiritual level, and as a result, their relationship also is elevated to a spiritual level. However, Allan betrays Blanche, which can be seen as the original sin of the play. He gives his body´s urges, his sexual desire, primacy over the spiritual relationship he shares with Blanche, enacting the original sin of the body´s betrayal of the soul. This transfers to Blanche, and manifests as her need to recreate their spiritual relationship, but ultimately succumbing to her physical desire. Blanche attempts to recreate a spiritual relationship with other men, most notably with Mitch. In Mitch´s embrace, she can almost glimpse God, or the spiritual, implying that she can return to the garden of Eden through pure or spiritual love. Her self-betrayal and re-enactment of the body´s betrayal of the soul is exemplified in the interaction between her and the young man who comes to their apartment to collect money for the newspaper. After she gives in to her desire and kisses him, she tells him to run along, as she

has to be good. This implies that acting on her desire is bad, or even a sin. She not only betrays her spiritual aspirations, but also re-enacts Allan´s betrayal by cheating on Mitch.

Blanche´s refusal to accept her dual nature means she attempts to overcome her body by repressing her sexual urges. This connects to her paradoxical identity, as the tension between her body and her spirit is mirrored in the tension between being considered a belle and a whore by society. The belle/whore paradoxical identity can be interpreted as the societal version of the body/spirit battle. The belle can in a way be seen as a representation of the spiritual part of her dual nature and paradoxical identity, however, the belle is also very tied to society. The belle is an asexual, constructed gender role, a position in and defined by society, as opposed to the spiritual, which is defined by religion. Yet, the belle perpetuates a repression, or eradication of sexual desire, thus emphasizing the primacy of spiritual love over physical love. The whore on the other hand represents the physical part of dual nature/paradoxical identity. The whore is a sexually active, constructed gender role, which focuses on physical desire. Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle, means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulging in it. Unlike Stella, who accepts sexual desire as part of her identity, Blanche´s belle identity does not allow her to assimilate desire into her identity. The belle stagnates Blanche´s development of gender consciousness, and demands that she hides behind a veneer of youth and innocence. Her belle identity keeps Blanche trapped in an obsolete past, alienating her to the point that she is unable to function in society.

All the characters face a tension between bodily urges and the spiritual, but Stanley and Stella embrace their violence and sexual desire. By accepting the duality of their human nature, they create a kind of unity in their identities. Stella´s acceptance of and love for Stanley leads her to also embrace the primal urges of the body. She explains to Blanche that their relationship is of a volatile and primal nature. Their relationship is physical in the sense that they embrace their primal urges and make no excuses for them, which results in Stanley not only abusing Stella when he gets upset, but also using physical love or sex, as a means to ask for and express forgiveness. This kind of physical love, consisting of primal urges like violence and desire, is at odds with Blanche´s quest for spiritual love. Blanche is trying to supress her sexual desire, and thus cannot understand why her sister would lower herself to this level. Blanche is appalled at the thought of Stella sleeping with Stanley after his treatment of her the night before, as she fails to comprehend the nature of this kind of physical love. Yet, she starts to understand this when she tells Stella that the only way to live with such a man is to go to bed with him. Stella can live with Stanley because she accepts the duality of

her human nature, and is free to value sexual desire over spiritual love, as the only love he is capable of expressing is physical.

Stanley does not fight to supress his body´s urges, in fact, he embraces them to the point that he becomes a representation of the primal. This is illustrated by Blanche, who describes Stanley as bestial, sub-human and a cave-man. Williams parallels the urges of the body with the wildness of nature. Blanche´s suggestion that he may strike or grunt and kiss Stella refers to the primal urges associated with the body; violence and sex. The reference to Stanley as a cave-man alludes to no development in his gender consciousness, but whereas this is disastrous for Blanche, Stanley does not have an issue with it because he embraces all of his human nature. Stanley personifies the primal urges of the body, which is emphasized in the scene directions before the rape, as the noises of the jungle which are heard as Stanley stalks Blanche through the apartment. Stanley is a representation of the primal urges of the body, and the reference to jungle is made right before he rapes Blanche, a sort of devouring of itself. The parallel between the urges of the body and the wildness of nature makes Stanley a representation devouring nature as well. According to Barberá, Williams wants to confront the myth of Eden, with the cruelness of nature. There can never be a return to the garden, only the discovery of devouring nature. Stanley´s rape of Blanche emphasizes this.

Furthermore, Corrigan argues that those who submit to a mortal existence are corrupt, but those who pursue a timeless ideal are eventually destroyed by the corrupt anyway. Even though Blanche´s dual human nature ends up devouring her, resulting in her alienation from society, the rape also constitutes a devouring. Blanche was always going to be destroyed by someone who submitted to a mortal existence. This is seen when Stanley says to Blanche before the rapes her, that they had had a date with each other from the beginning. Williams sets up Stanley and Stella as being at peace with themselves and their identities by existing in a purely physical or bodily state. Stanley´s rape of Blanche emphasizes how everyone eventually become corrupted.

Portraying Stanley as Hades serves to demonize him. By portraying Stanley as an archetypal figure emphasizes his conventionalized hyper-masculinity. Yet, Hades, the devil of Greek mythology, paints Stanley as a villain. According to Karzan, audience members laughed when Stanley raped Blanche. Something so heinous as rape was met with laughter, because Blanche was seen as deserving of it. So, by portraying Stanley as Hades, rather than Odysseus, Achilles or Heracles, emphasizes that he is not a hero. He is a villain, and whereas in the myth, Hades only kidnaps Persephone, Stanley enacts the popular western motif which depicts the rape of Persephone. Portraying Blanche with a paradoxical identity, while

simultaneously portraying her as Persephone creates a break or deviation from the myth. Whereas Stella portrays the traditional Persephone, who falls in love with her abuser, Blanche creates a new narrative. Rather than being a subservient housewife, like Stella, who accepts abuse and misogyny from her husband, Blanche is portrayed as a woman who is struggling with her sexuality and a confining, constructed gender role. Yet, her portrayal as Persephone allows her to emerge as an archetypal figure, and consequently as an icon for gender liberation.

In the close reading of *Cat*, I applied the myth of Odysseus and Circe to the play to portray Brick as Odysseus and Maggie as Circe. Brick attempts to overcome the primal urges of his body, yet ends up being devoured by his human nature, specifically his paradoxical identity which is divided into hetero- and homomasculinity. This paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from society, to the point that he can no longer function in society. This reflects the post-WWII disillusionment many experienced during the mid-century era. In addition, by portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his existential crisis is a journey to redefine his identity. His portrayal as a mythical figure in combination with his paradoxical identity creates a new narrative, and serves to reframe him as a new archetype, and thus an icon for gender liberation.

Applying T.S. Eliot´s interpretation of Circe as an emasculating woman to the play, allows Maggie to emerge as Circe, an enchantress and predatory female, who has the power to emasculate men. The incident with Skipper is the clearest example of this. Maggie had told Skipper to either stop loving Brick, or tell Brick to let Skipper admit his feelings for him. At first, Skipper tries to deny this allegation by having sex with Maggie. Her wording also implies that he was physically unable to have sex with her, which suggests that Maggie has emasculatory power over Skipper. This is because, not only is he unable to have sex with her, her accusation that Skipper loved Brick might also be the cause of Skipper inability to perform sexually. Like Circe, Maggie also has the power to transform men into animals. According to Maggie, the men who meet her seem to lose all composure when they see her. And when men act like this they are often described as animals, which means that simply the sight of Maggie, arguably turns these men into animals.

The only male in the play who is not affected by Maggie, is Brick, which portrays him as Odysseus. Odysseus is the only man who is not transformed into an animal. In the play, Maggie preys on Brick, as she tries to get him to have sex with her, thus portraying the archetypal version of Circe as a predatory female. She even goes as far as pleading, but he refuses. Brick is not aroused by Maggie, which mirrors Circe´s inability to transform

Odysseus into an animal. But the play breaks with the myth, as Odysseus does have sex with Circe, but Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. Maggie tells Brick "you know, our sex life didn´t just peter out in the usual way, it was cut off short, long before the natural time for it to, and it´s going to revive again… That´s what I´m keeping myself attractive for. For the time when you´ll see me again like other men see me" (Williams, 55: 21). Maggie is unable to get Brick to have sex with her, but her statement implies that when whatever is bothering Brick blows over, her power over him will be restored.

In addition to reducing men to their animal natures, Maggie transforms her nieces and nephews into animals. Specifically, by constantly referring to them in various animal terms. Circe and Odysseus have two children together, and a point of contention in the play is in regards to Brick and Maggie not conceiving any children together. In the myth, Circe transforms Odysseus´ crew into swine, but Odysseus manages to persuade her to turn them back. However, in the play, no such persuasion or transformation happens. What this means is that Maggie repeatedly refers to the children as animals, transforming them, in a sense, into animals in her own mind. However, the interaction suggests that Maggie might view the children differently if she were to have children herself. Yet, unlike Odysseus who persuades Circe to transform animals back into humans and fathers two of her children, Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. This results in her being unable to have a child of her own, and in extension, unable to figuratively retransform her nieces and nephews from animals into children.

Brick is portrayed as Odysseus, a mythological figure who journeyed for several years before he was able to return home. Brick´s homosexual existential crisis mirrors this journey. Brick is trying to find his way "home", in other words, he is trying to define his identity. In the myths, Odysseus is already married when he meets Circe. Thus, Odysseus´ marriage which he is fighting to return to, mirrors Brick´s identity. Before Brick married Maggie, he was confident in his and Skipper´s relationship and in his own sexual identity. However, after he married Maggie, she transforms Skipper´s and Brick´s feelings for each other by casting doubt and suspicion on their previously pure friendship. Like Odysseus then, Brick is on a journey to redefine his identity, and Maggie is a hinder in this journey.

Applying the myth of the original sin to the play, shows how Brick´s relationship with Skipper may also have been of a spiritual nature. Brick tells Maggie that he has one true and pure thing in life, which was his friendship with Skipper. So, like Blanche, Brick also places primacy of a spiritual relationship over a physical one. Brick´s relationship with Skipper was not based on physical love, which is similar to the love Blanche and Allan shared. Even

though the one great thing Brick had in life, was his relationship with Skipper, he cannot admit that their love for one another was anything other than heterosexual. Despite admitting that their relationship was too rare to be considered normal and wanting to be around each other all the time, Brick cannot acknowledge whether or not he is homosexual, even whether or not he is heterosexual. Unlike Blanche, who tries to recreate a spiritual relationship with other men, Brick attempts to forget about Skipper.

In *Cat*, the original betrayal of the soul by the body may refer the incident with Maggie and Skipper. However, Maggie and Skipper did not actually have sex, despite Skipper being willing, but unable, to go through with it. This may have implications for how it affects Brick, as he does not try to recreate the spiritual relationship he had with Skipper. This may be because he was not actually betrayed by (Skipper´s) body. Skipper was willing to betray their friendship, yet, his body could not go through with it. After this incident, Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. This could perhaps be seen as a betrayal of their friendship, as after Skipper is unable to have sex with Maggie, he interprets this as being homosexual, and subsequently confesses to Brick that he loves him. Brick does not know whether or not he is homosexual himself, and he does not want to find out. Yet, he still refuses to sleep with Maggie, possibly because he is attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, and because this would be seen as a betrayal of Skipper.

Brick´s attempt to forget Skipper, is akin to attempting to suppress or overcome his bodily urges. There is some ambiguity in the play in regards to Brick´s homosexuality, which makes it difficult to suggest that he felt sexual desire for Skipper. Yet, like Blanche, Brick has been brought up in a society with strict gender roles, and he might have been subconsciously or not repressing any sexual desire he felt for Skipper. Constructed gender roles may stagnate the development of gender consciousness, and Brick´s hyper masculinity does not allow him to develop his understanding of homosexuality. Brick´s paradoxical identity mirrors the soul/body battle. For him, homosexuality, or homomasculinity is equal to physical and sexual desire. Heteromasculinity encompasses a love that is spiritual and pure, which justifies homosocial bonds. Brick can justify his relationship with Skipper, because their love for each other is spiritual, and therefore heterosexual, which makes Brick by extension, heteromasculine. Because the primal urges of his body are tied to homomasculinity, Brick suppresses these urges in order to avoid defining his identity.

Brick´s inability to redefine his identity, thus forcing him to have a paradoxical identity is devouring him. Brick´s alcoholism and his paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from his family, and also from society. He cannot bear to speak to anyone

unless he has a drink in his hand. His refusal to make a decision regarding his sexuality, despite being asked repeatedly to do so by his family members, results in him barely speaking to anyone. He has withdrawn into his own world, so despite being present at gatherings, he is not really there.

Brick´s constructed gender role does not allow him to develop his gender consciousness. He is stuck between hetero- and homomasculinity, and can be seen as being both. Although Brick is similar to Blanche, in that he has a spiritual connection with someone, they differ in their responses to the primal urges of the body. Brick´s issue is that he does not know what his sexuality is, and therefore cannot accept or embrace it. He is unable to have sex with Maggie, because doing so would imply or suggest what his sexual identity is. Blanche cannot accept her sexuality, which means she cannot let go of her paradoxical identity. But whereas Blanche is actively trying to find a new spiritual connection, which might make her accept the duality of her human nature like Stella, Brick does not. Not only does he not try to recreate his relationship with Skipper, albeit with someone else, he does not even try to redefine his sexuality. Whereas Blanche is aware of her dichotomous identity, yet cannot seem to be either one or the other, Brick does not even raise the question. This is what leads to his existential crisis.

Portraying Brick with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying him as Odysseus illustrates a deviation from the traditional myth. Whereas Stanley is portrayed as Hades to demonize his hyper-masculinity, Brick is portrayed as Odysseus to imply a certain perseverance. Even though Brick does little to address his paradoxical identity, the play ends unresolved, which can suggest several outcomes to Brick´s situation. Portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his homosexual existential crisis is actually a journey, and emphasizes how struggles with gender identity can be arduous, yet are not in vain. Odysseus travelled for more than a decade to come home to his family. Therefore, Brick as Odysseus creates a new narrative, which casts Brick as an archetypal figure in his own right. This makes him an icon for gender liberation. Furthermore, by portraying struggles with gender identity as a journey creates a more positive outlook on this issue than Streetcar does.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how myth and the portrayal of gender identity represent post-WWII disillusionment. In the first chapter of this thesis is the first part of the literary review: the use of myth in Williams´ works. The chapter reviewed how Williams employed myths in his works to illustrate how his characters are anti-heroes who attempt to transcend a temporal existence, but ultimately succumb to devouring Nature. Mary Ann Corrigan argues that Williams´ characters fight to reconcile their dual natures of body and spirit which will result in transcending a temporal existence. The reasoning for this is that mankind is thought to be bound and degraded by time. According to Corrigan, mythical references and allusions ensure that the characters never achieve transcendence over the temporal, as myth implies the inability to progress or change. Thus, mankind can never triumph over the temporal.

Corrigan argues that Williams used temporal terms to express conflict, and much of the character´s struggles are related to time, and that to transcend a temporal existence, the character must also overcome body and mortality. Even though the attempt to transcend the temporal is futile, the pursuit is still worthwhile as attempting to flee the present is a "noble failure". The people who accept a mortal existence are labelled as corrupt, yet, those who attempt to transcend the temporal are eventually destroyed by the corrupt anyway.

Williams´ mythical allusions ensures that transcending a temporal existence is impossible, and Pau Barberá argues that the failure of his endeavour will result in discovering devouring Nature. Corrigan argues that the temporal also refers to the spiritual, and Barberá specifies this to mean God. Barberá argues that Williams used classical references to illustrate that man´s search for God will only result in discovering the cruelness of Nature, which acts as a devouring Venus. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, one of the main characters, Sebastian, is on a quest to find the true face of God in uncivilized nature. Barberá argues that portraying God in nature as cruel is due to Williams´ wanting to confront the myth of Eden. Real nature is not edenic, but cruel. Sebastian´s love of young boys will eventually lead to him being killed and devoured by the same boys he took advantage of, yet this devouring is Sebastian´s self-sacrifice. He believes he has found God in cruel and uncivilized Nature, who simultaneously gives life and devours. The only sensible thing to do is to pay homage, which for Sebastian takes the form of letting uncivilized Nature devour him. Barberá argues that this sacrifice is inherent to the human condition, and thus casting all of mankind in the role of Oedipus.

Attempting to transcend the temporal, but ultimately succumbing to devouring Nature casts Williams´ characters in the role of Athena Coronis´ "anti-hero". However, in this case,

devouring Nature takes the form of depraved society. Coronis argues that Williams employed myths to create an anti-hero, who as opposed to the Aristotelian "tragic hero", is a victim of a depraved society. Unlike the Aristotelian hero who falls from an elevated status due to a character flaw or lapse in judgement, the anti-hero is a victim of devouring nature which takes the form of society. While the Aristotelian hero tries to find redemption after his fall, the anti-hero never does. Coronis argues that man becomes the victim of his society, which is divided into mutilators and mutilated.

According to Corrigan, time is cast as an arch-enemy, and is ranged with body. As a result, body and soul are in conflict, and transcending the temporal involves overcoming body. Judith Thompson expounds on this and argues that this conflict is actually a portrayal of the myth "the original sin", or the body´s betrayal of the soul. Furthermore, rather than the anti-hero being a victim devouring Nature in the form of depraved society, Thompson argues that devouring Nature actually becomes human nature when the attempt to transcend the temporal fails. More specifically, devouring Nature manifests as an existential version of Plato`s divided self, where human nature devours the concept of the whole, and results in a divided self. Thompson argues that Williams´ employs myth in the form of "demonic romance" to illustrate the conflict between the transcend aspirations of the soul and the body, and that these transcendent aspirations are an existential version of Plato`s myth of the divided self.

Thompson argues that *Streetcar* functions as an ironic archetype, specifically, as an ironic quest myth. This archetypal quest myth is based on the myth of a paradise lost: the "original sin" of the body`s betrayal against the soul, the consequent exile of humankind from the Edenic paradise where body and spirit were united, and the soul`s attempt to transcend its physical incarnation. This transcendence is impossible, so the play`s protagonist, Blanche, is destined to continually re-enact the "original sin" of the body`s betrayal of the soul. It starts when Blanche elevates herself and her husband Allen to edenic innocence, but when Allen betrays her with another man, this betrayal is re-enacted by Blanche as self-betrayal. According to Thompson, this self-betrayal is actually the eternally unresolved conflict between the transcend aspirations of the soul and the brutal desire of the body, played out within her own divided self. What this means is that Allan´s betrayal manifests in Blanche as her own conflict between soul and body, the eternal re-enactment of the "original sin". In other words, she continually re-enacts the body`s betrayal of the soul, resulting in a divided self. Blanche`s transcendent aspirations functions as an existential version of Plato`s myth of the division of humanity`s original wholeness into a divided self.

The second chapter is the second part of the literary review: how gender identity is portrayed in Williams´ works. This chapter explored how Williams portrayed his character´s struggle with gender and identity in order to challenge post-war, mid-century American society, in which homophobic discourse and constructed gender led to issues such as existential sexuality, the inability to develop gender consciousness and paradoxical identities. The latter however, is not inherently negative, as it allowed Williams to contend a binary division of gender, and rather illustrate how gender should be viewed in a spectrum or a range.

David Savran argues that the post-war, mid-century American society saw escalated homophobic tensions and a general censoring of homosexuality which meant that a discursive counterpart was inconceivable. As a result, any works treating the topic of homosexuality had to be blatantly homophobic or use what Savran refers to as "the language of remorse". Savran argues that Williams challenged the homophobic discourse and constructed gender roles his milieu had developed by portraying transgressive relationships which broke social norms, and undermined the notion of traditional and constructed gender. In other words, Williams challenged the homophobic discourse by translating and reflecting homosexuality into other transgressive relationships, which were still taboo, but would not be censored. By showing characters with relationships that violated social norms meant Williams could illustrate the uncertainty individuals experienced with a binary division of sexuality and gender, thus undermining the conventional presentations of these. According to Savran, Williams also displaced his homosexual characters in order to protect his homosexual characters by not allowing them to speak.

The characterization of Big Daddy mirrors Cold War masculinity. John Bak examines this hyper-masculinity, which differentiated between homosexual act and homosexual identity. Bak examines "*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*", and argues that Brick is experiencing a homosexual existential crisis. Brick´s understanding of homosexuality is based on the effeminate man as a stereotype for homosexuals, and "gay acts". Bak examines a study by Alfred Kinsey which found that a considerable portion of the male population had some homosexual experience without identifying as homosexuals. As a result, rather than question who was homosexual, the study problematized what constituted hetero- and homosexuality. Bak also quotes Eve Sedgewick, wrote about changes in socio-sexual conventions, and explored the division of homosexuality. Sedgewick argued that defining homosexuality only on the basis of an effeminate identity meant that anyone who portrayed a masculine identity could avoid being suspected of homosexuality. This notion extended to the gay community,

and created a new form of masculinity; cold war homomasculinity. Like heteromasculinity, Cold War homomasculinity also extracted homosexuality from sexual activity and reframed it as an effeminate identity, resulting in a divide between queers and fairies. This blurred the lines between hetero- and homosexuality, and Bak argues that Brick is stuck in a "no man´s land between hetero- and homosexuality". This uncertainty of what it means to be homosexual is the root of Brick´s homosexual existential crisis. He does not understand the difference between heterosexual and homosexual desire.

Socially constructed gender and sexuality was not limited to men, women as well were subjected to constructed gender roles and controlled sexuality. Andrea Gencheva explores this in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in which she argues that Blanche acts as the epitome of a Southern belle. The belle was a constructed gender role which placed limits on sexuality. Gencheva argues that constructed gender roles, specifically the belle, can stagnate the development of gender consciousness, as portrayed by Blanche. Gencheva argues that Blanche was conditioned by Southern Puritanism preferably eradicate her sexual desire. This means Blanche must walk a precarious line between the oppositions of chaste and desiring, lady and whore in order to fulfil her duty and find a husband. These oppositions serve to confine Blanche´s gender consciousness. Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulge in it. Because she is not able to let go of her role as belle, she can only ever inhabit these roles, meaning that she can never develop her gender consciousness to be a version of a belle that also has and enjoys sex. And because she is unable to let go of her desire, not only because this is a natural human reaction, but because sex has become a tool to deal with her guilt, she can never be a true belle either.

What Brick and Blanche have in common, is that they both experience paradoxical identities. Brick is heteromasculine, however, Bak argues that due to Brick´s homosexual existential crisis, he becomes both hetero- and homomasculine. He is both in the sense that he is incapable or unwilling to identify as either one, and cannot reject them both. He is, like Blanche, in a state of limbo. Blanche continuously jumps between her roles as belle and whore, and is never able to fully embrace one or the other. However, despite Brick and Blanche developing paradoxical identities which are the focal point of their identity struggles, a paradoxical identity is not inherently negative. This is because both Brick and Blanche portray how gender and sexuality are not binary identities, but rather fluid concepts.

This is explored by Emmanuel Vernedakis, who argues that Williams employed Nietzsche´s Apollonian and Dionysian paradigms of behaviour to portray homosexuality as a

paradoxical identity, and make the main character of “One Arm” an icon for homosexuality. Oliver´s paradoxical identity is implied in the title of the story: “One Arm”. Not only is the title referring to Oliver´s most defining feature: one arm, but it also refers to both the apollonian and dionysian paradigms as equal parts of his identity. Furthermore, Vernedakis argues that the parallel between Oliver´s lost arm and the South´s lost cause promotes a politics of fragility. Oliver´s fragility, when imbued with power, not only makes him both broken and beautiful, but makes the comparisons to art turn him into an icon.

The third chapter reviews my close-reading of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. which shows how Tennessee Williams employs myths and gender identity to portray Blanche and Brick as attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, yet ending up being devoured by their own human nature. The myth of “the original sin” sets up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. The societal versions of this dual human nature manifests as paradoxical identities. Brick´s inability to redefine his identity leads to homosexual existentialism, and causes his identity to be both hetero- and homomasculine. Blanche´s inability to develop her gender consciousness causes her to develop a belle/whore identity. The Sothern belle and the heteromasculine identity emphasize the primacy of spiritual love over physical desire. These contradictory identities cause the characters to experience alienation and existentialism, thus portraying post-WWII disillusionment. Blanche´s belle identity comes from an outdated society, and makes Blanche behave according to the rules of this society. However, these rules are obsolete, causing Blanche to become “other” from the other characters in the play. It makes Blanche see Stanley as not worthy of herself and her sister Stella, despite having to throw herself at their mercy. Brick, on the other hand, does not address his paradoxical identities, which also causes him to experience existentialism, in addition to becoming alienated from his family. His inability to redefine his identity, makes him unable to participate in society. In addition, Blanche and Brick are cast in the roles of Persephone and Odysseus from Greek mythology. Both Brick´s and Blanche´s paradoxical identities break with the myths they are portraying, thus creating a new narrative, which makes them archetypal figures in their own right. This serves to cast them as icons for gender liberation.

In the close reading of Streetcar, I applied the myth of Hades and Persephone to the play. The play is set on a street called Elysian Fields, yet it soon becomes apparent that both Blanche and Stella inhabit other places in the Greek mythological Underworld, at least psychologically. Stanley controls Stella´s and Blanche´s states of mind, thus influencing which region of the Underworld the women stay in. This suggests that Stanley is not only an

inhabitant of the Underworld, he is its ruler: Hades. The clearest case of Stanley portraying Hades is when Stanley exclaims that he is the king around here. Stanley draws a parallel to Hades being king, and ruling only over his own realm. As Hades is the king of the Underworld, having Stanley exclaim that he is a king cements his role as Hades.

Both Stella and Blanche can be cast in the role of Persephone. Stella, because she is married to Stanley, which mirrors how Persephone is the wife of Hades. And Stanley alludes to Hades´ kidnapping of Persephone, when Stanley tells Stella that he pulled her down from the columns of her plantation home. Yet, Blanche also implies that she is Persephone, the Goddess of Spring, when she compares her name, Blanche DuBois, to an orchard in spring. Furthermore, as Blanche is the one who is raped in the play, this brings to mind the well-known motif in Western art: "The rape of Proserpina" (Persephone). As such, both Stella and Blanche could both be seen as portraying Persephone.

The original sin portrays the characters, especially Blanche, with a dual nature. Williams sets up a division between body and soul where the urges of the body defeat the spiritual inclinations of the soul. Blanche is the only one who is attempting to overcome the primal urges of her body, which could be interpreted to mean that she views acting on her bodily urges as a sin, and overcoming them could be seen as a return to the garden of Eden. However, Williams wants to confront the myth of Eden, by showing that the only nature that exists is cruel and devouring. Furthermore, that real nature consists of predators and prey.

The attempt to transcend the body´s urges is portrayed in Blanche´s pursuit of a spiritual relationship, like the one she had with Allan. Recreating this would allow her to achieve her soul´s spiritual inclinations, or return to the garden. Blanche´s pure love elevates Allan to a spiritual level, and as a result, their relationship also is elevated to a spiritual level. However, Allan betrayal of Blanche enacts the original sin of the body´s betrayal of the soul. This transfers to Blanche, and manifests as her need to recreate their spiritual relationship, but ultimately succumbing to her physical desire. This is exemplified in her relationship with Mitch, and in her betrayal of Mitch with a young man. After she gives in to her desire and kisses the young man, she says she has to be good, implying that acting on her desire is bad, or even a sin.

Blanche´s refusal to accept her dual nature means she attempts to overcome her body by repressing her sexual urges. This connects to her paradoxical identity, as the tension between her body and her spirit is mirrored in the tension between being considered a belle and a whore by society. The belle/whore paradoxical identity can be interpreted as the societal version of the body/spirit battle. The belle perpetuates a repression, or eradication of sexual

desire, thus emphasizing the primacy of spiritual love over physical love. The whore on the other hand represents the physical part of dual nature/paradoxical identity. Because Blanche is unable to incorporate desire into her identity as belle, means that she is forced to jump between trying to subdue her desire and indulging in it. Unlike Stella, who accepts sexual desire as part of her identity, Blanche´s belle identity does not allow her to assimilate desire into her identity. The belle stagnates Blanche´s development of gender consciousness, and demands that she hides behind a veneer of youth and innocence. Her belle identity keeps Blanche trapped in an obsolete past, alienating her to the point that she is unable to function in society.

All the characters face a tension between bodily urges and the spiritual, but Stanley and Stella embrace their violence and sexual desire. By accepting the duality of their human nature, they create a kind of unity in their identities. Their relationship is purely physical, which results in Stanley not only abusing Stella when he gets upset, but also using sex as a means to ask for and express forgiveness. This kind of physical love, consisting of primal urges like violence and desire, is at odds with Blanche´s quest for spiritual love. Stanley does not fight to supress his body´s urges, in fact, he embraces them to the point that he becomes a representation of the primal. This is illustrated by Blanche, who describes Stanley as bestial, sub-human and a cave-man. Furthermore, the scene directions before the rape describe noises of the jungle as Stanley stalks Blanche through the apartment. Stanley is a representation of the primal urges of the body, and the reference to jungle is made right before he rapes Blanche, a sort of devouring of itself. The parallel between the urges of the body and the wildness of nature makes Stanley a representation devouring nature as well. This acts as a challenge to the myth of Eden. There can never be a return to the garden, only the discovery of devouring nature. Stanley´s rape of Blanche emphasizes this. Furthermore, the rape also emphasizes how everyone eventually become corrupted.

Portraying Stanley as Hades serves to demonize him. By portraying Stanley as an archetypal figure emphasizes his conventionalized hyper-masculinity. Yet, Hades, the devil of Greek mythology, paints Stanley as a villain. According to Karzan, audience members laughed when Stanley raped Blanche. Something so heinous as rape was met with laughter, because Blanche was seen as deserving of it. So, by portraying Stanley as Hades, rather than Odysseus, Achilles or Heracles, emphasizes that he is not a hero. He is a villain, and whereas in the myth, Hades only kidnaps Persephone, Stanley enacts the popular western motif which depicts the rape of Persephone. Portraying Blanche with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying her as Persephone creates a break or deviation from the myth.

Whereas Stella portrays the traditional Persephone, who falls in love with her abuser, Blanche creates a new narrative. Rather than being a subservient housewife, like Stella, who accepts abuse and misogyny from her husband, Blanche is portrayed as a woman who is struggling with her sexuality and a confining, constructed gender role. Yet, her portrayal as Persephone allows her to emerge as an archetypal figure, and consequently as an icon for gender liberation.

In the close reading of *Cat*, I applied the myth of Odysseus and Circe to the play to portray Brick as Odysseus and Maggie as Circe. Brick attempts to overcome the primal urges of his body, yet ends up being devoured by his human nature, specifically his paradoxical identity which is divided into hetero- and homomasculinity. This paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from society, to the point that he can no longer function in society. This reflects the post-WWII disillusionment many experienced during the mid-century era. In addition, by portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his existential crisis is a journey to redefine his identity. His portrayal as a mythical figure in combination with his paradoxical identity creates a new narrative, and serves to reframe him as a new archetype, and thus an icon for gender liberation.

Maggie is portrayed as Circe, a predatory female with emasculatory power over men. This is exemplified in the incident with Skipper. Not only is Skipper unable to have sex with her, her accusation that Skipper loved Brick might also be the cause of Skipper inability to perform sexually. Like Circe, Maggie also has the power to transform men into animals. She transforms men and children figuratively into animals.

The only male in the play who is not affected by Maggie, is Brick, which portrays him as Odysseus. Brick is not aroused by Maggie, which mirrors Circe´s inability to transform Odysseus into an animal. The play breaks with the myth, as Odysseus does have sex with Circe, but Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. In the myth, Circe transforms Odysseus´ crew into swine, but Odysseus manages to persuade her to turn them back. However, in the play, no such persuasion or transformation happens. What this means is that Maggie repeatedly refers to the children as animals, transforming them, in a sense, into animals in her own mind. However, the interaction between Big Mama and Maggie suggests that Maggie might view the children differently if she were to have children herself. Yet, unlike Odysseus who persuades Circe to transform animals back into humans and fathers two of her children, Brick refuses to sleep with Maggie. This results in her being unable to have a child of her own, and in extension, unable to figuratively retransform her nieces and nephews from animals into children.

Brick is portrayed as Odysseus, a mythological figure who journeyed for several years before he was able to return home. Brick´s homosexual existential crisis mirrors this journey. Brick is trying to find his way "home", in other words, he is trying to define his identity. Furthermore, applying the myth of the original sin to the play, shows how Brick´s relationship with Skipper is of a spiritual nature. Brick tells Maggie that he has one true and pure thing in life, which was his friendship with Skipper. Brick´s relationship with Skipper was not based on physical love, which is similar to the love Blanche and Allan shared. Even though the one great thing Brick had in life, was his relationship with Skipper, he cannot admit that their love for one another was anything other than heterosexual. Unlike Blanche, who tries to recreate a spiritual relationship with other men, Brick attempts to forget about Skipper.

In *Cat*, the original betrayal of the soul by the body may refer the incident with Maggie and Skipper. However, Maggie and Skipper did not actually have sex, despite Skipper being willing to go through with it. This may have implications for how it affects Brick, as he does not try to recreate the spiritual relationship he had with Skipper. Yet, he still refuses to sleep with Maggie, possibly because he is attempting to overcome the primal urges of the body, and because this would be seen as a betrayal of Skipper. Brick´s attempt to forget Skipper, is akin to attempting to suppress or overcome his bodily urges. There is some ambiguity in the play in regards to Brick´s homosexuality, which makes it difficult to suggest that he felt sexual desire for Skipper. Yet, like Blanche, Brick has been brought up in a society with strict gender roles, and he might have been subconsciously or not repressing any sexual desire he felt for Skipper. Constructed gender roles may stagnate the development of gender consciousness, and Brick´s hyper masculinity does not allow him to develop his understanding of homosexuality. Brick´s paradoxical identity mirrors the soul/body battle. For him, homosexuality, or homomasculinity is equal to physical and sexual desire.

Heteromasculinity encompasses a love that is spiritual and pure, which justifies homosocial bonds. Brick can justify his relationship with Skipper, because their love for each other is spiritual, and therefore heterosexual, which makes Brick by extension, heteromasculine. Because the primal urges of his body are tied to homomasculinity, Brick suppresses these urges in order to avoid defining his identity. Brick´s inability to redefine his identity, thus forcing him to have a paradoxical identity is devouring him. Brick´s alcoholism and his paradoxical identity causes him to become alienated from his family, and also from society. He cannot bear to speak to anyone unless he has a drink in his hand. His refusal to make a decision regarding his sexuality, despite being asked repeatedly to do so by his family

members, results in him barely speaking to anyone. He has withdrawn into his own world, so despite being present at gatherings, he is not really there.

Brick´s constructed gender role does not allow him to develop his gender consciousness. He is stuck between hetero- and homomasculinity, and can be seen as being both. Although Brick is similar to Blanche, in that he has a spiritual connection with someone, they differ in their responses to the primal urges of the body. Brick´s issue is that he does not know what his sexuality is, and therefore cannot accept or embrace it. He is unable to have sex with Maggie, because doing so would imply or suggest what his sexual identity is. Blanche cannot accept her sexuality, which means she cannot let go of her paradoxical identity. But whereas Blanche is actively trying to find a new spiritual connection, which might make her accept the duality of her human nature like Stella, Brick does not. Not only does he not try to recreate his relationship with Skipper, albeit with someone else, he does not even try to redefine his sexuality. Whereas Blanche is aware of her dichotomous identity, yet cannot seem to be either one or the other, Brick does not even raise the question. This is what leads to his existential crisis.

Portraying Brick with a paradoxical identity, while simultaneously portraying him as Odysseus illustrates a deviation from the traditional myth. Whereas Stanley is portrayed as Hades to demonize his hyper-masculinity, Brick is portrayed as Odysseus to imply a certain perseverance. Even though Brick does little to address his paradoxical identity, the play ends unresolved, which can suggest several outcomes to Brick´s situation. Portraying Brick as Odysseus illustrates how his homosexual existential crisis is actually a journey, and emphasizes how struggles with gender identity can be arduous, yet are not in vain. Odysseus travelled for more than a decade to come home to his family. Therefore, Brick as Odysseus creates a new narrative, which casts Brick as an archetypal figure in his own right. This makes him an icon for gender liberation. Furthermore, by portraying struggles with gender identity as a journey creates a more positive outlook on this issue than Streetcar does.

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