Tennessee Williams and New Orleans: Rewriting the Playwright, Rewriting the City.

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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND NEW ORLEANS:
REWITING THE PLAYWRIGHT; REWRITING THE CITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

The Department of Theatre

by
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He thought of the tall iron horseman before the Cabildo, tipping his hat so gallantly toward old wharves, the mist of the river beginning to climb about him.

He thought of the rotten-sweet odor the Old Quarter had, so much like a warning of what he would have to learn.

He thought of belief and the gradual loss of belief and the piecing together of something like it again.

—from "Mornings on Bourbon Street" by Tennessee Williams
Dedication

The seed for this work was planted during those wonderful years at 163 Summit Drive. To Mom, Dad, and Michelle, and that boy you inspired. Those were the days in which you first introduced me to this country, trusted me to explore on my own, encouraged my imagination, and instilled in me an appreciation of literature, music, and theatre. To those golden days, and to the memory of Dr. Stanley Wood whose career was the stuff of boyhood dreams.
Acknowledgments

Tennessee Williams' works made me fall in love with the South. I had visited New Orleans as a child and recalled a certain fascination with the city, but Williams' rendition of it in A Streetcar Named Desire inspired wonder in me. Living in Baton Rouge has refreshed my appreciation for the disparity between reality and literature. I credit family, teachers, and friends (both near and far) with helping me overcome all the obstacles and duties associated with a doctoral program.

A special thanks to my parents, sister, and grandparents for their unconditional support and encouragement. Thanks to my committee--Les Wade, Robin Roberts, Jennifer Jones, Bill Harbin, Femi Buba, and Irene Di Maio--for their insightful suggestions and consistent faith in my abilities. As committee chair, Bill Harbin exhibited unfailing confidence in me, offering valuable advice to improve this work. As my minor advisor, Robin Roberts worked far beyond the expectations of her position, providing me with drive and focus that enabled me to do my best. I appreciate my committee's help not only with the dissertation, but also in their classroom instruction over the years.

I am blessed by a wide circle of friends and I thank each of the following people for their good deeds, positive thoughts and prayers, and for putting a smile on my face or
providing laughter: Eric Wiley (particularly for your help surviving German!); Don Whittaker; Drayton Vincent; Jill Tyler and Steve Miller; Larry Thelen; Wendell Stone; Shawn Shepherd; David and Donna Sedevie (especially for your refreshing Midwestern energy and the best parties in Baton Rouge); Matthew Schmall; Brendan Rush; Tony and Pem Medlin; Ann Mason; Amber Lynch; Kelly James; Jay Jagim; Anita Hall; Mark and Rebecca Gruber; Rob Glenn; Diane Finnerty and Jill Jack; Terry Converse; Connie Canaday Howard and Rex Howard; Tim Budd; Mary Brown; Stephen Berwind; Lisa and Tracy Bales (the best grandkids anyone could hope for); Hamilton Armstrong; and Nels Anderson.

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Abstract

_Vieux Carré_ (1978), _Suddenly Last Summer_ (1958), and _A Streetcar Named Desire_ (1947) are among the many Tennessee Williams' plays and short stories that take New Orleans as their setting; they demonstrate how the city offered an appropriate and complex metaphor to explore his themes.

This study centers on Tennessee Williams and New Orleans and explores how the two are linked in a mutually advantageous relationship, how the city informed his work, how his works reflect/re-create the city, and how the combination has passed into popular culture. This work examines the themes and images prevalent in Williams' work that also pertain to New Orleans; it examines biographical, intertextual, and contemporary popular culture materials to explore the relationship between the playwright, his works, and his favorite city. American ideas about New Orleans rely heavily on Tennessee Williams' version of the city.

Chapter One introduces the methodology and approach of the entire study. Chapter Two addresses the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival which annually celebrates the playwright and the city. Partly serious and partly frivolous, the Festival demonstrates the multiple demands now being placed on the playwright and his works, and amounts to a popular performance that rewrites Williams for today.
Chapter Three evaluates travel and tourism as a dramatic device and as a shaping force within the actual city. Chapter Four explores male sexual objectification and its violent consequences, active in New Orleans and Williams' dramas. His male characters continue to represent the current masculine ideal. Chapter Five explores drug use in the world of New Orleans and Williams' works. Art and artists are the focus of Chapter Six, and work in a multi-layered fashion in both the playwright's texts and the actual city. Chapter Seven analyzes the three film and television versions of A Streetcar Named Desire which globalize Williams' depiction of New Orleans, shaping our expectations of the city.

This manuscript demonstrates how the symbiotic relationship between Williams and New Orleans transcend time and place, keeping his works and his favorite city active and vibrant in our continuing popular imagination.
Chapter One—
Introduction

Many of Tennessee Williams' works take New Orleans as their setting, and demonstrate how the city offered an appropriate and complex metaphor to explore his themes. Among the short stories, New Orleans serves as background for "The Angel in the Alcove" (1943), "The Coming of Something to the Widow Holly" (begun 1943), "In Memory of an Aristocrat" (c. 1940), "One Arm" (begun 1942), and "The Yellow Bird" (1947),¹ and the city serves as locale for the one-acts: Auto-Da-Fé (c. 1941), The Lady of Larkspur Lotion (before 1942), Lord Byron's Love Letter (before 1946), and The Mutilated (1966).² Of the major plays, three are set in the Crescent City. The highly autobiographical Vieux Carré (1978) follows the varied fortunes of numerous residents of a French Quarter boarding house. Set in New Orleans' Garden District, Suddenly Last Summer (1958) pits the family matriarch against her niece as they battle over whose tale of a dead, sexually suspicious poet will dominate.³ Finally, A Streetcar Named

¹Tennessee Williams, Tennessee Williams Collected Stories (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 608-611. "The Angel in the Alcove," "One Arm," and "The Yellow Bird" were collected in One Arm which was first published in 1948. "The Coming of Something to the Widow Holly" was first published in 1953, and "In Memory of an Aristocrat" was not published until 1985.
²Auto-Da-Fé, The Lady of Larkspur Lotion, and Lord Byron's Love Letter were first published in 1953. The dates indicate approximately when the works were written. See Catherine M. Arnott, comp., Tennessee Williams on File, Writers on File Ser. (London: Methuen, 1985) 18, 19, and 29.
³Suddenly Last Summer opened on Broadway with Something Unspoken "under the collective title of Garden District." See Tennessee
Desire (1947) brought the playwright and New Orleans to the forefront of American culture.

This dissertation centers on Tennessee Williams and New Orleans and explores how the two are linked in a mutually advantageous relationship, how the city informed his work, how his works reflect/re-create the city, and how the combination has passed into popular culture. This work examines the themes and images prevalent in Williams' work that also pertain to New Orleans. Exploring travel and tourism, male sexual objectification and its violent consequences, intoxicants such as alcohol or cigarettes, and art and artists, reveals the common ground between Williams and the city. American ideas about New Orleans rely heavily on Tennessee Williams' version of the city. As Milly Barranger rightly notes, "American drama and theatre are far richer today because of this unique symbiosis between playwright and city, artist and environment."4

In exploring the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, the works set in the city, the three

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film and television versions of A Streetcar Named Desire, and the motifs which dominate both the city and the playwright's representations of the city, I demonstrate not only how the two are joined in mutual benefit (i.e., enriching Williams' craft and attracting tourism for New Orleans), but how together they have entered national, popular myth. In short, New Orleans rewrote Williams and he rewrote the city. My study investigates how Williams discovered his leitmotifs in New Orleans, infused his works with them and thereby passed his version of the city into popular culture. In turn, the city actively shapes itself after Williams' representation, hosting an annual festival that reaffirms the connection.

One could argue that Williams would not have become one of America's foremost playwrights had he not visited New Orleans.5 Williams himself supported this idea, claiming that fifty percent of his work had been completed while residing in the Crescent City.6 At the height of his career the playwright declared, "If I can be said to have a home, it is in New Orleans where I've lived off and on since 1938 and which has provided me with more material

5For a discussion of the significance of place see Tim Cresswell, In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
than any other part of the country." New Orleans had a significant influence on Williams' life and art.

The playwright has been the subject of at least eight biographical studies, and critics have long recognized the importance of his life experiences on his works. As Lyle Leverich, Williams' latest biographer notes, "In his short stories and plays, Williams exists in myriad ways and speaks through almost every character." Gore Vidal echoes this statement in his introduction to Williams' collected short stories, noting that Tennessee spent "a lifetime playing with the same vivid, ambiguous cards that life dealt him." As these writers indicate, a biographical lens offers valuable insights into the relationship between Williams and New Orleans, but such an approach has

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7"Williams TV Debut Plays Grew from New Orleans," Times-Picayune [New Orleans] 13 Apr. 1959. Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Biographical Files: Reel 34. Williams' New Orleans emphasizes the French Quarter; the Marigny neighborhood, Garden District, Lake Pontchartrain, and City Park are also significant in his depictions, but the playwright restricts the boundaries of the actual city in his artistic renderings.


9Leverich, Tom, xxiii.

limitations; Williams' works are more than the mere reportage of his personal experiences in New Orleans.

In addition to using biographical information in this study, I draw on literary analysis to discover how Williams' incarnation of New Orleans is complex and intertextual. At first glance, New Orleans seems to personify many twofold opposites: the "openness [and] public elegance" of the broad boulevards in the fashionable Garden District "contrasts sharply with the narrow streets and closed courtyards of the Quarter"; the world famous Mardi Gras celebration followed by the austerity of Lent as police promptly sweep revelers off the streets at midnight on Fat Tuesday, and so on. By the same token, Williams' works appear to adhere to tidy binary oppositions: the Puritan and the cavalier; the North and the South; the wealthy and the impoverished; the sensitive poet and the insensitive brute; male as object of sexual desire (associated with violence such as death and rape) and female sexual desire (aligned with madness and hysteria); and the tension between private and public places, to list just a few. Such obvious binaries in a brief view of Williams' works or guidebook summations of New Orleans become inadequate, because both the works and the city

11 Ultimately, biography only assists us in understanding the playwright's ideas about the city.
12 Louisiana, We're Really Cookin'! (N.P.: N.P., N.D.) 5. Louisiana Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. Tourism Brochure Files.
remain mysteriously complex, ambiguous, and irreducible to simplistic capsulized opposites. Thus, intertextual techniques (like biographical criticism) provide valuable insights into Williams' work, but do not explain how the playwright and New Orleans continue to resonate today. Drawing upon postmodern ideas, I explain the assemblage of Williams, his works, and New Orleans in popular culture in the present day, and suggest that Williams' texts remain active, resisting closure.

Although postmodernism varies widely from theorist to theorist, Regenia Gagnier offers a helpful and fairly concise definition:

> With respect to individuals, postmodernism refers to the diffusion and dispersal of the centered, self-reflective subject among multiple signifying practices, namely the practices in the construction of meaning and value. With respect to society, it refers to the heterogeneity and nontotalizable quality of the social; it presents the social bond as an effect of the multiplicity of historical meanings and values that intersect in individuals.¹³

As Gagnier implies, postmodern theory reveals the fragmentation of subjectivity and that we make meaning through a diffuse array of stimuli.¹⁴ It suggests that traditional divisions between genres and forms have broken down, and that demarcations such as elite and mainstream

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art have little significance. In my reading of the locus formed by Williams, his works, and New Orleans, I discuss how Williams' texts and the city reflect postmodernity with characteristics such as the displacement of boundaries (fluid sexual identity, a refusal of labels like "high" and "low" art), cross-gender sexual objectification, and a pastiche of styles evoking numerous artistic movements and mediums. Applying postmodern notions to Williams' works shows how the playwright and his texts are now part of culture generally and not limited to traditional academic culture. The allusive, constantly evolving attributes of both Williams' work and the Crescent City appeal to the contemporary postmodern audience accustomed to confronting multiple signs in constructing meaning. As Stephen Watt states, "[R]ead the contemporary stage will invariably take us out of the theater and into larger cultural formations." 

Williams' New Orleans' works show that he drew upon diverse cultural and social structures in re-creating the

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15Andreas Huyssen identifies the delineation between high and low art as one of the major differences between modernism and postmodernism. See his After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 194.  
16David Savran notes that Williams' techniques "anticipated many of the theatrical practices that now pass as postmodernist." See Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992) 98. Marc Robinson suggests that A Streetcar Named Desire is "more a collage than a narrative." See The Other American Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 43.  
city. My study investigates these configurations through the historical New Orleans Williams first visited, his fictional renditions, and the present city. For example, in 1946, Williams lived at 632 St. Peter Street where he was at work on The Poker Night. From the window of his apartment, the playwright could see the streetcars operating on Royal Street and may have been inspired by them to re-title his play. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche rode the Desire streetcar line into the French Quarter, but she had to transfer to the Cemeteries line to complete the journey to Stella's home. Leaving the line that signifies life and abandonment of cares, Blanche transfers to the line whose name implies decay, mourning, and death. Williams captured the essence of New Orleans in the image of the streetcar—an alluring exoticism with the faint warning of inevitable decline.

By 1987, James Randal Woodland argued that A Streetcar Named Desire had done more to "popularize" New Orleans than any other fictional work. Thanks to this play, the streetcar became synonymous with New Orleans. Thus, from an event in Williams' life to A Streetcar Named Desire to

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19 Actually, Blanche's trip was not possible. The Desire streetcar did run up and down Royal Street through the Quarter day and night, but the Cemeteries line ran on Canal Street. See Holditch, Last Frontier, 20.

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modern reception, we see the transmutation of New Orleans into contemporary parable.

My three-pronged, ultimately ahistorical blend of the past, the text, and the present (biography, intertextualism, and popular culture) shows how Williams' New Orleans and New Orleans' Williams continue to speak to us. The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival provides an ideal example of how this triad of factors operates, and demonstrates how the playwright and the city have become a popular culture performance site.

Chapter Two, "'It's the Festival, Babe. It ain't always Festival': The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival; A Popular Performance," illustrates how the annual celebration rewrites the playwright. Williams, his writing, the city, and the motifs common to all intermingle at the Festival; therefore, it demonstrates the multiple demands now being placed on the playwright and his work. Reflecting the postmodern breakdown between genres, the Festival highlights not only academic scholarship, but also gossipy panels that offer anecdotes about Williams' personal and professional life or feature stars such as Alec Baldwin reading the playwright's works. Thus, the event's tone remains partly serious and partly frivolous, and it encapsulates both impulses that now inform our view of Tennessee Williams--academic investigation and popular celebration.

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While the excuse for the Festival is grounded in Williams' stature as American artist, it has less to do with what he did and more to do with what he has come to mean. Each individual attends the Festival for disparate reasons: to gain a greater understanding of the playwright and his work; to experience the city through Williams' vision of it; to see a movie star or get the autograph of a favorite writer; to simply enjoy the city, to list a few possibilities. As a participant and witness to the 1996, 1997, and 1999 Festivals, my experiences and observations will inform my delineation of how the junction of Williams, his works, and New Orleans marks a significant intersection that acts to enrich our appreciation of the playwright and the city itself.

I evaluate travel and tourism in Chapter Three—"'Traveling wears me out.': Travel and Tourism in Williams' Favorite City." As a popular vacation destination, New Orleans promotes itself for public consumption through guidebooks as well as other tourist information, yet its reliance on tourists' dollars makes for an uneasy dependency. Tourism ultimately reshapes New Orleans, forcing it to perpetuate its marketing image while simultaneously threatening to alter everything that attracts travelers to the city. For example, the city's reputation as a carefree, party zone lessens inhibitions,

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21I was unable to attend the 1998 Festival and regret missing Michelangelo Signorile.
resulting in infractions ranging from reckless littering to violent behavior. The city beckons and repulses simultaneously, acting as a combination of allurement and destruction, and Williams capitalizes on these intricacies.

In the playwright's works, New Orleans represents not only sanctuary (symbolized by the St. Louis Cathedral), but the abyss. For example, in A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche arrives in New Orleans hoping to find a haven, but meets destruction. Vieux Carré is constructed around the arrival and departure of the protagonist, and (unlike Blanche) the Writer visits New Orleans only long enough to be positively influenced rather than ruined. Reflecting the actual city's reliance on vacationers' money, the characters in Lord Byron's Love Letter operate a concession in the Quarter and display the romantic poet's epistle to any paying tourist. In exploring the travel motif, this study reveals how Williams not only exploited the valuable dramatic device of arrivals and departures (also prevalent in Anton Chekhov's drama), but tapped into tourism as a way to delineate character while reflecting New Orleans itself.

Chapter Four, "'What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!' : The Male as Object of Sexual Longing and Perpetrator of Violence," centers on masculine desire. As a gay man, Williams was acutely aware of the male's sexual attractiveness. New Orleans was central to the writer in his appreciation of the male form, and he claimed
he "came out" there. A metaphor for sexual fluidity, the French Quarter gay clubs (hidden from view and away from heavily traveled areas in most American cities) compete with straight venues within a few blocks of Bourbon Street. New Orleans celebrates the male in the prominent gay subculture, and this celebration is reflected in Williams' works.

Since A Streetcar Named Desire premiered, the type of male represented by Stanley Kowalski has exploded from the bounds of theatre into mass culture as the epitome of masculinity. In the other works set in New Orleans, Williams frequently evokes the male type embodied by Stanley and undermines sexual identity as a fixed trait. In Vieux Carré, Tye (though he lives with Jane) is available to any man with a hundred dollars. Oliver, in the short story "One Arm," is a street hustler.

Nevertheless, in Williams' works, free expression of one's sexual desires often results in violence, madness, or marginalization. Because of the repressed era in which he lived, Williams kept most of his gay characters off the stage, but "to ignore the homosexual subtext of Streetcar

23There is also a published, unproduced screenplay by Williams of the same name, but I do not analyze it in this work. See Tennessee Williams, Stopped Rocking and Other Screenplays (New York: New Directions Books, 1984) 193-291.
is to reduce the play."^{24} Allan Grey (Blanche's young husband) killed himself before his wife's eyes, and, in Suddenly Last Summer, Sebastian dies because of his forbidden sexual desires. In "One Arm," Oliver awaits execution after murdering one of his tricks. This tension between desire and regulation is present in the works and in the city. However, though his gay characters are severely restricted and often punished with death, any of Williams' female characters who too freely express their own physical desires suffer equally harsh fates.

Blanche's desire for men results in her ostracism, while Catharine is deemed "mad" as a means to conceal the circumstances surrounding her cousin's death. Sebastian forced Catharine to use her desirability as a lure for men, and after he is violently murdered, Catharine is institutionalized and faces the prospect of horrible violence in her proposed lobotomy. Jane moves Tye into her apartment after a sexual encounter with him in the doorway of a French Quarter shop, but her lover ultimately rapes her. Like the gay male characters, Williams' sexually forthright female characters meet disturbing ends.

Though less invasive and violent than the regulation in the plays, laws in the city constrict sexual behavior or limit its expression to fixed, community celebrations like Mardi Gras. Desire is held captive by civic authority and

Southern propriety much like the threatening, tropical garden imprisoned within the Venables' Garden District mansion in Suddenly Last Summer. While one's every sexual desire can probably be fulfilled by some denizen of the Quarter, the city remains governed by the prominent, respectable families of the Garden District.  

Williams' works tap into the omnipresent sexuality that he observed in the Quarter. Furthermore, his texts prefigure our current understanding of gender issues, and he imbued many of his characters with an appeal that cuts across sexual identity as they often blur the traditional lines between homosexual and heterosexual. The city serves as a conduit regulating desire, which is often transformed in the plays to madness, marginalization, or death. Williams comprehended the chaotic nature of sexual desire that remains evident in the multiple venues of carnal expression offered in the Vieux Carré. In Williams' works, as in the life of New Orleans, physical desire often intensifies when combined with drugs.

The consumption and abuse of alcohol and other substances informs the central motif of Chapter Five—"'Set down on the steps and have a cigarette with me.': Drugs in the City Care Forgot." In virtually all his works,

Williams repeatedly uses cigarettes, spirits, and hard drugs as a metaphor for the masculine, and they act as totems simultaneously embodying the desirability and violence of the male. Like the physical effects of the actual substances, a character's drug choice often mirrors his/her fate. For example, when Alma begins smoking in the short story "The Yellow Bird," the habit actually propels her toward a more fulfilled life. Blanche's alcoholism demonstrates a different dynamic, revealing another symptom of her desperate need for a peaceful haven. In addition, she drinks to alleviate her anxieties and combat isolation. Sometimes she uses alcohol as a seduction strategy, but liquor ultimately exacerbates her destruction. In Vieux Carré, Tye's heroin addiction identifies him as a dangerous, if alluring, character. No doubt, cigarette and illegal drug use in New Orleans remain comparable to any other major city, but alcohol retains a special association to the Crescent City just as Williams foregrounds it in his works.

Alcohol consumption is perhaps the major activity of any visitor to the French Quarter where many venues have two drink minimums and the laws are relaxed to invite frequent imbibing. The city encourages the free flow of alcohol and is the only community I know in which liquor may be carried along streets provided it is contained in something unbreakable. Many local festivals fuel this
Dionysian atmosphere; throughout the Vieux Carré a bar always seems nearby. Nationally, the "Hurricane" drink probably competes with the streetcar and crawfish as the most widely known symbol associated with New Orleans. Williams intensifies this connection between intoxicants and New Orleans in his works, employing drugs not only to delineate character but frequently as a sign of resistance against societal restraints.

Chapter Six, "'Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then!': Art and Artists as a Sanctuary from Squalor," turns from matters of sensuality to those of spirituality. Blanche valued and taught great works of literature by Whitman and Poe, while Sebastian was a rarefied artist composing a single poem during each summer's travel. In Vieux Carré, Nightingale regrets that he no longer creates paintings, but makes idealized portraits of spoiled customers in a shabby restaurant. In the short story "In Memory of an Aristocrat," Irene struggles to gain critical respect for her disturbing paintings that depict social unrest.

In these and other works, Williams exposes the tension between aspiring to fine art and the more common reality of popular art, which reflects something of the aesthetic polarities of New Orleans, where "high" art prevails in galleries along Royal Street and "low" art litters the
souvenir shops in the city. A similar dynamic is at work in the Crescent City dining experience with haute cuisine restaurants at one extreme, and the Lucky Dog wiener vendors at the other. Williams depicts New Orleans' artistic milieu to establish setting and mood, but gives the arts and artists even greater resonance as symbols and characters imbued with our best attributes. The playwright suggests that aesthetic objects possess restorative powers and that artists offer spiritual nourishment.

The leitmotifs of adventurous travel, sexual desire, madness, violence, drugs, and art are not only part of the city's mystique, but Williams' use of them has enhanced New Orleans in our nation's popular imagination. The city has become captive to Williams' images and promotes tourism through exploiting them. The film and television versions of A Streetcar Named Desire disseminated this depiction nationwide, and this matter forms the focus of Chapter Seven—"'Oh, well, it's his pleasure, like mine is movies': The Film and Television Adaptations of A Streetcar Named Desire; New Orleans in Mass Culture."

Having marked its fiftieth anniversary in December 1997, A Streetcar Named Desire has been given three screen and television adaptations, which speaks to its continued power, relevance, and popularity. The screen adaptations

26Williams' plays tend to have film and television adaptations made of them much more often than the works of his contemporaries. Both The Glass Menagerie and A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof have also been committed to celluloid three times, Suddenly Last Summer and Orpheus.
demonstrate how New Orleans is characterized and marketed for the mass, popular audience. To a greater degree than any theatrical staging, these three film productions propagate the most widely held perceptions of New Orleans, allowing the public to expect, indeed, almost demand, similar qualities from the actual city. For example, tourists flock to New Orleans despite its deserved reputation as a dangerous, crime-riddled city, and one might account for this through analyzing the celluloid versions. Elia Kazan's 1951 Hollywood film depicts New Orleans as rife with threat and seediness, yet shows that justice ultimately overpowers and contains these qualities. Conversely, John Erman's 1984 television production renders a New Orleans cityscape bathed in warm, inviting light and peopled with quaint, eccentric characters wandering around interesting local sights. In short, the screen adaptations tame and simplify the city.

Since film reaches a much broader audience than theatre, most people are familiar with Williams' works through the motion picture and television adaptations. I conclude my study with an examination of these three film and television versions to indicate how Williams' work remains an active part of popular culture. The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival celebrates the man Descending twice, and numerous other plays (among them, Summer and Smoke, The Rose Tattoo, Sweet Bird of Youth and Night of the Iguana) once. Meanwhile, Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman has received two filmic treatments and The Crucible just one.
and his works on a regional, temporal level, while the
screen adaptations constitute a national commemoration,
freezing the playwright's work and the city in a permanent
form that allows repeated viewings.

In 1961, one critic degraded Williams' work, noting
that he often wrote "like an arrested adolescent who
disarmingly imagines that he will attain stature if (as
short boys are advised in Dixie) he loads enough manure in
his shoes."27 Others were advocates, primarily because of
Williams' mainstream commercial popularity. In fact, "some
critics . . . found greater literary merit in the works of
O'Neill, Wilder, Saroyan, Miller, and Clifford Odets."28 At
the conclusion of her 1965 study, Esther Jackson states
that "history must make the final judgment of [Williams']
lasting achievement."29 Thirty years later, Alice Griffin
acknowledges posterity's assessment of the playwright:
"Williams's plays are as fresh and relevant today as when
they first appeared [and this] is a tribute to his genius.
. ."30 Today, Williams has become a canonized writer, and
he retains mass popularity as evidenced by the frequent
revivals of his plays on stage,31 television versions such

27"A Small Thing but His Own," rev. of Summer and Smoke (film), dir.
Peter Glenville, Time 1 Dec. 1961: 76.
28Esther Merle Jackson, The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (1965;
29Jackson, Broken World, 158.
30Alice Griffin, Understanding Tennessee Williams (Columbia:
University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 18.
31Twenty-two North American professional theatre revivals of
Williams' dramas were scheduled for the 1998-1999 theatre season.
as The Simpsons rendition of A Streetcar Named Desire, and new motion picture and television adaptations. Williams has been transformed from the writer of "specious pageant[s] of depravity"\(^{32}\) to "genius." How does one account for this change?

To use Williams' phrase, the bird that I hope to catch in the net\(^{33}\) is an examination of how the playwright's works straddle the boundary between high and low art, obscuring the delineation between them and exemplifying both. The complex and diverse assessments Williams' works have received over the years are reflected in the man himself. He was poet and hedonist, both Blanche and Stanley.\(^{34}\) New Orleans unlocked the complicated duality of Williams' nature, while simultaneously personifying a similar dynamic. In turn, the playwright imbued New Orleans with a mythic quality. The following chapters analyze the intersection of Tennessee Williams, his works, and New Orleans, and explain the rewriting of this many-sided, complicated site that blends fiction with reality. My study demonstrates how the symbiotic relationship between Williams and New Orleans transcends time and place, keeping his works and his favorite city active and vibrant in our

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\(^{32}\)“A Small Thing,” 76.

\(^{33}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 114. The phrase comes from key stage directions in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

\(^{34}\)Williams claimed he was Blanche DuBois. See Nicholas Pagan, Rethinking Literary Biography: A Postmodern Approach to Tennessee Williams (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1993) 69-70.
continuing popular imagination. It suggests Williams' voice will escape the tyranny of time, shaping America's sense of New Orleans and its national identity long into the future.
Chapter Two--
"It's the Festival, Babe. It ain't always Festival":¹ The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival; A Popular Performance

Since 1987, New Orleans has hosted the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, the very title of which highlights the significant connection between the artist and the city. The annual event has become an obvious reminder of how Williams and the Crescent City continue to intersect in our cultural imagination over fifteen years after the playwright's death. The Festival keeps Williams active in our world and promotes his vision (or at least our current interpretations of it) in the present era. It simultaneously embodies and renews Williams, providing a forum for his works that enriches our understanding of them. Therefore, the Literary Festival is worth examining as evidence of what we make of the playwright's art today as a popular performance site. The geography and culture of New Orleans unites the past with the present and links his works to today's audience. Jackson Square resides at the epicenter of this confluence of the past, Williams' works, and popular culture.

Many of the Festival's major events are held at the Le Petit Théâtre just off Jackson Square. Little changed since Williams first arrived in the city,² the square

²Three of the streets surrounding the square (Chartres, St. Peter and St. Ann) were closed to traffic and converted into a pedestrian mall.

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constitutes the heart of the French Quarter and reflects the city's dual personality. Tourists wander about with a beer or a frozen daiquiri examining the street artists' works fastened to the wrought iron fence surrounding the central gardens or perhaps get a Tarot card-reading from the numerous soothsayers surrounding the park. Some may watch a mime or listen to a guitar player or eat a Lucky Dog wiener. Meanwhile, the St. Louis Cathedral dominates the vista, balancing these more visceral pursuits with an air of spirituality. Blanche DuBois was comforted by the bells of the cathedral over fifty years ago, and beneath the shadow of its spire a wide array of Williams' aficionados gather each spring to celebrate his life and work. While Jackson Square remains much the same, Western theatre has altered since Tom Williams first saw the city's streets.

Williams' modernist world and art have transformed to the postmodernist vision of today. The playwright's work frequently relies on linear narrative, psychologically motivated characters, as well as an Aristotelian, cause and effect dynamic. Postmodernism tends toward episodic structure and fragmented action, the liberal blending of historical contexts, genres, and styles, as well as characters that resist explanation and reflect this chaotic collage. The modernist concept posits truth in the

artist/creator like Williams. Under this model, critics look for the "message" the artist has enclosed within his art object. In contrast, the postmodernist view privileges the audience. The individual's interpretation of the art object becomes as important and valuable as any other reading. Once universalized, meaning has become individualized. In the postmodern age, "truth" (if there is any) must be discovered by the individual within the multicultural, multimedia, multiperspective whirlpool; and, the Festival simultaneously uses modernist and postmodernist perspectives in celebrating the playwright and his work.

As a 1996 and 1999 participant in the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, and an observer in 1997, I was a primary witness to the remaking of the playwright in this era. I arrived in New Orleans expecting (perhaps naively) a unified vision of Williams, but came away from the Festival with a Williams collage. The man and his works share multiple meanings for the legions of writers, academicians, fans, tourists, and other hangers-on.

Professional writers at the Festival tend to draw audiences and help make the event appealing and popular. Authors like John Berendt (Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil) attend largely to promote their own works and possess only tenuous links to the playwright. Like
Williams, playwright Mart Crowley wrote about gay characters, but since Crowley's *Boys in the Band* was reissued in 1996, self-interest could be an important motivation for his appearance. Associated to the playwright through their professions and the Festival, these writers tend to utilize his image as a way of selling their own works. Likewise, the scholars appropriate Williams to advance their own careers.

University teachers attend the Festival and delineate how Williams' works contain embedded meanings. No doubt, the academicians are interested in the man and his works as demonstrated by the commitment of their time and energy to critical studies. They may not be able to create masterful dramas, but they illustrate the ability to understand them in the smallest detail. The scholars bring seriousness to the Festival, counter-balancing the profit motives of other parts of the celebration. Nevertheless, self-interest remains, and if the writers are interested in capital, the scholars are interested in stature or another resume credit.

At the Festival, the living writers draw larger audiences than the scholars. The average New Orleans' tourist has the opportunity to get a personally signed copy of Berendt's book, or hear locals tell colorful stories about Williams' activities in the city, or collect another coffee mug as a memento of their latest experience in
vacationing through America. They may be admirers of Williams' works or simply travelers taking in a local event, but they briefly partake in the attention, hovering around a famous playwright in the city that encouraged much of his creativity.

Just as Williams used his New Orleans' experiences as resource for his life and art, the Festival exploits his image as a draw for tourism under the veneer of appreciating and paying tribute to his art. On the surface, the event maintains a seriousness of purpose in providing visitors with an opportunity to evaluate his art in the city that inspired him, but one would do well to recall that New Orleans is also known as the city that care forgot. This apt subtitle reminds us that the city remains (at core) a carefree playground that encourages partying, exhibitionism, and irresponsibility. One goes to Las Vegas to gamble. One goes to New York for theatre and museums, or to shop. One goes to New Orleans to eat, drink, and be merry.

The Literary Festival supports New Orleans' reliance on tourism by using Williams' image as an additional attraction. It shapes the playwright in a wide array of forms making him palatable to a diverse audience. It de-centers the text and privileges the reader. The Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival implies that one may participate in fame within the city that fostered it. As
the current favored son of New Orleans, Williams' image provides cause for celebration, but his first appearance in the city was far less heralded.

In December 1938 when he first arrived in New Orleans, Thomas Lanier Williams was twenty-seven and a recent college graduate with a degree in English Literature from the University of Iowa. He came to New Orleans in hopes of gaining employment with the city's "Federal Writers' Project, which, under the guidance of Lyle Saxon, was involved in producing guides to the city and to the state of Louisiana, as well as other literary ventures."3

Ironically, though Williams would become a tourist attraction for the city fifty years later, he did not find employment with the Project, but became a waiter. Part of his responsibilities included the distribution of cards advertising the restaurant and bearing a slogan of his own creation: "Meals for a Quarter in the Quarter."4 Thus, Williams from the start became a servant of the entertainment industry and acted as an advertisement copywriter promoting the unique offerings of the Vieux Carré.

The New Orleans that Williams discovered was inexpensive; he paid only ten dollars a month rent for his

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first residence at 722 Toulouse Street; however, the French Quarter was regarded "in a large part [as] a slum area, off-limits to the respectable classes from uptown." His mother, Edwina Williams summarized her son's first encounter with the city:

The effect of New Orleans on Tom was a profound one, even though he did not stay long, returning however during the following years. He became acquainted with a new kind of life in the French Quarter, one of wild drinking, sexual promiscuity and abnormality. Here he was surrounded by the lost and lonely people about whom he later wrote. He has said of New Orleans, "My happiest years were there . . . I was desperately poor . . . hocked everything but my typewriter to get by . . . New Orleans is my favorite city of America . . . of all the world, actually."  

Not only was food and housing cheap, but the city revealed a hedonistic side of life to the young playwright. He witnessed the drunkenness and blatant sexuality omnipresent in the city, and must have experienced the aftermath of hangovers after a night of pleasure. He saw how the city offered the fulfillment of desires, but was just as apt to leave revelers isolated and adrift. The young man notes that terrible poverty was not too high a price to pay for the potential pleasures of New Orleans. He sold everything except his typewriter. It was all he needed. Sexual desire, drug use, art (from catchy ad slogans to serious, creative writing) were all before

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^Holditch, Last Frontier, 5.
^Edwina Dakin Williams, and Lucy Freeman, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963) 103.
Williams in the city, and he highlighted these and other motifs in his writings of New Orleans.

By the time Tom left New Orleans in February 1939, he had experienced his first gay affair and was sending out scripts under the name Tennessee. Williams returned to the French Quarter for longer stays in 1941 and 1945, and said that those early years provided him with "a kind of freedom I had always needed. And the shock of it against the Puritanism of my nature has given me a subject, a theme, which I never ceased exploiting." Clearly, the city shaped Williams' persona, and he would return the favor throughout his career by creating works that imbue New Orleans with a mythic quality.

Nevertheless, as the years passed, Williams became increasingly concerned about the transformation he witnessed taking place in the French Quarter. "New Orleans," he noted, "should not be too reformed. You don't

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7 In Suddenly Last Summer, Catharine says, "I came out in the French Quarter years before I came out in the Garden District" (See Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 413). Loaded with gay subtext, it takes on new power with this biographical detail and Leverich's belief that Williams spoke through his characters.
8 Holditch, Last Frontier, 15.
9 Four months after A Streetcar Named Desire opened in New York in December 1947, the Times-Picayune reported that the French Quarter streetcars were to be retired. The article further stated that "few think the loss of the streetcar will provoke nostalgia" (See Streetcar Name," Times-Picayune [New Orleans] 12 Apr. 1948. Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Biographical Files: Reel 34). When the play finally premiered in New Orleans in 1949, the Desire streetcar that ran along Royal had been replaced by the "bus named Desire" (See "Streetcar Heads for New Orleans," Times-Picayune [New Orleans] 30 Oct. 1949. Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge, LA. Biographical Files: Reel 34).
want it to be like Kansas City, do you?" Unfortunately, the commercialization of the Quarter continued. Though he still loved it, by 1981 Williams was disturbed by what New Orleans had become: "Certain aspects of it I don't like, a certain amount of corruption one encounters on Bourbon Street. You feel like you're walking through a quagmire. It didn't use to bother me as it does now." The city had become strange to him, no longer coinciding with its earlier incarnation. Set in 1938, *Vieux Carré* was Williams' last depiction of New Orleans, and he evoked the city as he remembered it during that important first visit. Perhaps he preferred New Orleans in this earliest incarnation? Nostalgia for a bygone age conquered present reality. Not unlike the critics and the public who had turned their backs on his recent plays, New Orleans ceased to welcome and engage Williams. When he died early in 1983, many believed he was two decades past his prime, and indeed, the city seemed to have forgotten him during the four years following his death. There is still no memorial to Williams in the French Quarter, although the streetcar Desire stood as a haunting artifact for several years in the French Market and later on the grounds of the old

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However, during the last dozen years the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival marks a renewed interest in the playwright.

The Festival was established in 1987 by four New Orleans' "arts and tourism figures" and had an initial budget of two thousand dollars. Thus, from the beginning, two impulses were at work in its creation—celebrating art and seeking tourist dollars. The first Festival was simple and reflected this duality. Artistic celebrations included a plaque dedication at 632 St. Peter Street where Williams completed *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a jazz mass tribute to the playwright at Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel, and two panel discussions. These events affirmed the relationship between Williams' life and New Orleans. Acknowledging the location where he composed one of the best American plays of this century seems the least city officials could do. Furthermore, the jazz mass fused the mutually beneficial relationship between the playwright and the city by honoring an important artist in a uniquely New Orleanian way. The fact that the mass was celebrated at midnight simply adds to the legendary aura around Williams in New Orleans.

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12 Holditch, *Last Frontier*, 37. According to an agent at the Jackson Square Tourism Office, the streetcar Desire has been under renovation for a number of years and eventually will be put back in service along the tracks that parallel the river walk.
As for money-making enterprises, the first Festival-goers were enticed with literary walking tours, a book fair, and a "tea with Tennessee." Williams and these aspects of the Festival were more tenuously connected. The walking tour focused on many other writers associated with New Orleans, such as William Faulkner and Walt Whitman. The tea provided an excuse for Festival-goers to hob knob with actors portraying Williams' famous characters from a diversity of plays at an "informal reception." Meanwhile, the book fair represented another opportunity for retailers to make a living. Finally, some events combined artistic aspirations with profit-making enterprise, such as performances of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and a one-man play about Williams with Ray Stricklyn impersonating the playwright (which he continued to do at the 1996 conference), or the lecture by Lyle Leverich regarding his upcoming biography.14

By the tenth Festival in 1996, the budget had grown to one hundred thousand dollars, plus donated services worth one hundred and fifty thousand. Events included: plays, music, master classes in acting and writing, panel discussions on genre (such as "popular nonfiction" or "spiritual autobiography") and minority perspectives (such as feminist or queer reception), guest interviews with personalities such as Lyle Leverich (Williams' latest and

authorized biographer) and the playwright's brother Dakin, book sellers, souvenir peddlers (hawking their wares before each interview or panel), as well as a scholar's conference presenting academia's various perspectives on the writer and his work.

In 1996, the impulses of art and profit continued hand-in-hand, but the variety of attractions had considerably expanded. This expansion shows how the larger Festival budget forced organizers to broaden offerings in an attempt to attract a wider variety of people. Increasingly, the Festival celebrates the city's connection to literature in general rather than Williams specifically. In the program, events "devoted" to Williams were accentuated by a handwritten and underlined numeral ten—"Williams's signature on letters to friends and family." 15 Thus, the highlighted number guided people to forums featuring Williams rather than the numerous other tangential offerings that constituted the majority of the expanded Festival. Regardless, the broader focus of the Festival remains positive as it introduces Williams to a wider audience and rewrites him as a popular performance site. The rarefied atmosphere of the first year with its almost singular focus on Williams (save for the book fair and literary walking tour) has given way to a multiplicity

of interests emanating from Williams as the headliner for a celebration of New Orleans. Promotion for the 1996 Festival reflects this growing trend toward a variety of events and audience diversification.

In 1996, the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival was featured in Southern Living magazine, which called it "one you don't want to miss," and a local monthly brochure for tourists highlighted the weekend. Geared toward retirees and tourists, both publications suggest that to better understand the region, one needs to participate in area events, and experience life as locals do day-in and day-out. Scholars were beckoned to the Festival through a call for academic papers circulated through Southern universities. In 1997, academicians were further enticed by the possibility of having their essays published in the premiere issue of the Tennessee Williams Annual Review. As these popular publications and academic postings show, the Festival's intended audience had become widely diversified in comparison to the initial event. A multifaceted audience implies a multiphasic text, thus traditional academic analysis only partially accounts for


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the Festival as it re-creates Williams as a popular performance collage. In short, the Festival suggests that a modernist vision of Williams can no longer be sustained.

In investigating modernist art, New Critics\textsuperscript{17} sought to isolate the text and analyze it without interference from cultural and personal bias. In addition, they banished the artist’s biography and cared little about the literary tradition by which his/her style was shaped. Ultimately, the art object was to become isolated from all outside influence, emanating with fixed, encrypted meaning like an island unto itself. The New Critics’ idealism should be respected, but such readings are as vulnerable to error as any others. Neither writer nor reader can protect against every bias. Furthermore, a text does not remain stable over time, but either slips into irrelevance as sensibilities change or becomes transformed through reader response in succeeding generations.

Postmodernism acknowledges these textual instabilities. The postmodernist does not privilege one reading over another, but celebrates the variety of possible readings emitted from the text. We no longer hope to examine the text in isolation, but analyze it through audience reception as the art object reactivates in today’s world. Williams’ work has joined this march, escaping

\textsuperscript{17}Also known as formalism. The movement championed close, analytical readings of texts and was advocated by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, among others.
modernist dogma to be renewed by the postmodernist worldview. The Festival, reflecting how Williams has been altered by this change in critical perception, features events that demonstrate the dichotomy between traditional and popular approaches to his work.

At the Festival, academic investigations are on equal footing with anecdotal panels offering enticing tales about Williams' personal and professional life. Seating capacity for these presentations are roughly the same, although the latter tends to draw larger crowds. The interview with Leverich or events featuring stars such as Alec Baldwin reading the playwright's works are held at the largest venue (Le Petit Théâtre), which holds approximately five hundred people. Baldwin was the hot ticket at the 1997 conference, and both his appearances were sell-outs. Nevertheless, few seats were available during Leverich's presentation, and this trend shows that audiences are nearly as interested in serious discussion about Williams as they are in seeing a Hollywood star.

Leverich and Baldwin represent the dual impulses of the Festival. One is a scholarly biographer researching the life and work of an important artist; the other is an actor borrowing Williams' voice as his own, invited to the

18Unfortunately, Baldwin did not deliver much artistry or insight beyond the curiosity of seeing a famous movie personality. By his own admission, he had partied too strenuously in the Quarter the night before his readings. Consequently, he interrupted his interpretations of Williams' poems, essays, and short stories with frequent throat clearings and sips of water. Le Petit Théâtre, New Orleans. 22 Mar. 1997.
Festival because he had enacted the latest stage and television versions of Stanley Kowalski. One might view Leverich as a representative of modernism, while Baldwin poses for postmodernism. Even newspaper coverage for the tenth Festival acknowledged the duel focus of modernist and postmodernist perspectives at the event. Imagery from the front page of the entertainment section during Festival weekend acted as a metaphor marking Williams' transcendence from literary icon to popular performance.

For example, the Times-Picayune weekend culture guide for March 29, 1996 featured a collage of ten pictures of Tennessee Williams with the headline, "10 for Tennessee: Revealing the many faces of the festival, named for New Orleans' favorite playwright, on its big birthday." The cover photographs offer multiple visages of the playwright through various stages of his life and career. One image depicts the fresh-faced, innocent, hopeful youth of St. Louis of circa 1936 when his first plays were reaching the stage in amateur productions. This young man was establishing his place in the world through a university education in starts and fits, and working in the shoe warehouse. He had visited Europe with his grandfather and had published a few stories, but life was just beginning for Tom, a transplant from the rural South to an industrial city.
Another photograph presents us with the sophisticated and somewhat dissipated looking Williams around the time *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened in 1947. Perhaps he prays for his second hit? *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) had already brought him attention and money. Now he had traveled extensively through North America, anchored himself within a homosexual identity, and neared the embrace of international fame. He projects casual sexuality with his aloof gaze, sporting a mustache and wearing a black shirt opened down several buttons.

Another picture offers us the Tennessee of the fifties—happy, smiling, maybe a little drunk and looking vaguely like Gomez Addams lounging on what appears to be a bed. He is at the height of the good life, at the pinnacle of his artistic powers, traveling the world, and living happily with Frank Merlo. The photograph presents an artist who has satisfied his desires and is desired.

The next image offers the Williams of the early seventies, having just emerged from his "Stoned Age" and playing Doc in his own *Small Craft Warnings* (1972) off-Broadway. He has dried-out after the heavy alcohol and drug use of the previous decade landed him in an institution. Merlo has died. Critics and public alike have turned on him, but he has renewed himself, rising from the darkness of his overwhelming depression. Perhaps great work still remains?

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Also, we see the resolved, calm Williams of later that decade, with his hands folded thoughtfully under his chin. His new plays continue to be ignored, but his Memoirs (1975) has created interest in his life. He is among the first gay celebrities to come out. Now he performs himself—eccentric, blunt, outrageous—whatever the media circus demands, but his tight-lipped smile implies the joke is on us.

Finally, we see the image of the grand old man of the American theatre from the eighties. In his ascot and Panama hat, he gazes away from the camera. Perhaps he contemplates how he will be remembered. He still makes art in these final few years of his life, but the audience has lost interest. Longing marks this period of his life, and a new hit play must be his fondest desire. Nevertheless, he fights on, still travels, still writes, still drinks, still desires human contact.

The collage provides a linear progression of Williams' life and tracks him from unknown writer, to the height of popularity, to the retreat from the public spotlight. It metaphorically demonstrates the multiple perspectives that the Literary Festival captures; all these versions of Williams make fleeting appearances at the event named for him. Academicians tend to offer the least ambiguous accounts of the playwright, but their work ultimately
amounts to a collage of disparate parts much like the newspaper cover art.

I doubt if Tennessee would have approved much of the scholar's conference, a first time event in 1996 held in conjunction with the Literary Festival. According to nonfiction film maker, Harry Rasky, "[Williams] had no patience with academics at all."\(^{19}\) The playwright would probably have enjoyed the Stanley and Stella shouting contest (another first time offering in 1996) for the outrageous sense of fun, but would have found the great and small of the intelligentsia too stuffy and serious.

The scholars huddled together in a third floor meeting room of the Cabildo, with historical artifacts from Louisiana's past displayed throughout the two floors of museum space below us. We were preaching to the converted. I read my paper to a group of approximately twenty, and maybe eight of those were "civilians." David Savran got the biggest draw with around thirty-five in the audience, of which perhaps two dozen were from the general public. By the end of the day, interest had waned. Philip Kolin read his paper to twelve--more than half were participating scholars. Despite the lack of public interest, we forged onward, and the papers reflected the postmodern condition as each academician perceived a unique Williams who had

little and sometimes nothing to do with other scholars' versions. The various essays provided strong evidence for the significance of audience reception as Williams' social views, homosexual desires, and writing habits were among the topics addressed.

Philip Supina pronounced Williams guilty for sins of omission, because the playwright never confronted McCarthyism or the Red Scare in his works. On the other hand, Allean Hale felt he was a proletarian playwright (at least early in his career) thanks to a never-published play called Candles to the Sun (1935) which focuses on an Alabama miners' strike. Supina's argument loses strength when one recalls that Williams gave oppressed groups (notably women and gays) visibility. Often called the "laureate of the outcast," Williams' net was all encompassing as he consistently championed the disadvantaged over the powerful. Hale refuted Supina's position by demonstrating that Williams' social conscience was apparent in his early sociopolitical plays using Epic Theatre techniques such as projected titles. Williams' use of devices pioneered by Piscator and Brecht suggests he believed theatre could reshape the real world. Supina regretted Williams was not more vocal in his opposition to

McCarthyism, while Hale suggested his earliest impulses were rebellion and linked him to the proletarian cause opposing domination by the wealthy, ruling class. Leaving Williams' social consciousness and political agenda behind, the next presenters concentrated on angel imagery as manifestation of the gay imagination and homoerotic qualities.

James Schlatter drew significant parallels between the predominance of angels in Williams' work and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, while David Savran detected a significant link between homosexuality, cannibalism, and masochism in works like *Suddenly Last Summer*. Many of Schlatter's ideas were heavily indebted to Savran's earlier scholarship, and, unlike the previous one, the panel cohered in their views. Schlatter's reliance on Savran's research (especially *Communists, Cowboys and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*), signified Savran's prominence among the highest ranks of Williams' scholars and suggests why this panel had the largest audience.

According to Schlatter, Williams' use of angel imagery amounted to "a queer, white male phantasm of the 1950s," but the diversity of Williams' metaphors was equally

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significant. At one end of the continuum, a multitude of spiritual beings (such as angels) hover over characters in forgiveness and redemption. On the other end, brutal physical images of violent sexual encounters and primitive, ritualistic death abound. These images reinforce the spiritual and physical duality that Williams constantly explored, but Savran detected something greater from this binary structure.

Savran astutely declared Williams a great poet of desire rather than of love.\(^{24}\) This emphasis on desire further highlights the complexity of Williams' works. Love tends to be grounded in a specific object, while desire migrates in continual pursuit of fulfillment. Modernism and postmodernism mirror this dynamic. Modernism focuses on specific, "controllable" factors, while postmodernism tries to account for unstable sites of meaning. These panelists grappled with Williams' contradictory, dense imagery, revealing its instability. Schlatter and Savran's scholarship suggest that postmodern perspectives offer valuable insights into Williams' works. Other panelists utilized traditional literary analysis.

On a panel featuring studies which center on original documents, Albert Devlin discussed his forthcoming book of selected Williams letters.\(^{25}\) Devlin's work demonstrates the

\(^{24}\)Savran, reading.
continued interest and market for biographical criticism; he suggests that traditional methods still have value. Furthermore, one imagines a larger popular market for a collection of Williams' letters as opposed to Savran's more complex analysis, although the latter rightly deserves admiration in academic circles.

Though two collections of Williams' letters are already in print,²⁶ Devlin believes the editors of these volumes engaged in too much editorializing. Apparently, Devlin's collection will allow Williams' letters to speak for themselves without further comment, but he fails to note his own bias as compiler of the letters when selecting those he feels are most significant. He may not offer commentary, but the selection process remains a shaping of Williams. Devlin's fellow panelist, Brian Parker, was more willing to forthrightly express his own views.

Parker's presentation delineated the various incarnations of Camino Real (1953). He called the play twenty years ahead of its time, because it retains qualities more typical of contemporary theatre. Furthermore, Parker pronounced the play anti-Aristotelian; in its rejection of a cause and effect dynamic, it becomes

more like a poetic collage—a primary postmodern metaphor. Like Savran, Parker perceives the postmodern characteristics of Williams' works that more and more scholars are beginning to stress.

The last pair of scholars reinforced Parker's use of current perspectives by emphasizing minority groups in Williams' works, centering on his depiction of African-Americans. George Crandell discussed how the African-American male becomes a figure of fear and desire, while Philip Kolin concluded the scholar's conference with a survey of Williams' black characterizations, concentrating on the film Baby Doll (1956). The work of Crandell and Kolin demonstrates the breadth of cultures, people, and themes with which Williams dealt. With the exception of the short story, "Desire and the Black Masseur" (begun 1942), Williams granted little major attention to African-American characters, but he created many brief portraits. They now gain scholarly attention for two primary reasons: first, black characters allow additional and fresh research of a canon already thoroughly analyzed; second, these

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characters demonstrate that Williams adopted devices of interest to postmodern perceptions, infusing his works with multiple views across gender identities, sexual orientations, and racial demarcations.

Perhaps the most traditionally modernist in approach, Supina's analysis was least persuasive and easily refuted by Hale's work. Savran and Parker presented the most thought-provoking papers, relying on postmodern criticism. Obviously, postmodern analysis allows us to see Williams in a new light, and it demonstrates his capacity to reach the current, diverse audience.

The scholars showed how Williams' work has been appropriated by contemporary culture, and this idea gained further strength during the question and answer segments following each panel. Observers of the scholars' sessions sought to assert their own visions of the playwright, offering highly individuated readings as opposed to the ideal audience reception sought by modernism. These observers often claimed a version of Williams for themselves that was at odds with the scholarly examinations, and their comments suggest how even the masses reclaim the playwright for the current age.

After Savran's presentation, a gentleman in the audience hoped to restore Williams to the heterosexual majority by pointing out that the playwright had consummated at least one sexual affair with a woman. This
man's comment implied he was more comfortable with a version of Williams that contained some sexual contact with women. Perhaps it allows Williams to resist being labeled a gay writer, thus preserving his work as art objects of the mainstream. Perhaps it grants the plays greater flexibility rather than constricting them with a minority label.

Other commentators were equally concerned with Williams' biography. A female observer wanted to make us all aware that she knew Williams, and he was a lovely, courteous man. Having informed us of these personal memories and apparently not really having a question to ask, she promptly fell silent. The elderly woman respected and admired the Williams she remembered, and what the scholars revealed about his work apparently made her uncomfortable. We had disturbed her vision of the dramatist, and she needed to reaffirm her personal version. Not unlike the scholars, these observers hoped to achieve some measure of recognition by associating themselves with Tennessee Williams. Nevertheless, the efforts of the academicians and their audience provided only brief views of the playwright in comparison to Lyle Leverich's exhaustive biography.

As discussed in the introduction, biographical criticism has merit as a method of analyzing Williams' work. Biography, which often fascinates the reader while
informing him, is accessible to everyone, as we all have families, similar educational experiences, memories of our first sexual awakenings, and so forth. The familiarity of biography makes it non-threatening to the reader and the most popular form of academic writing. Therefore, although some scholars argued for Williams' resurrection as a postmodern text, it is not surprising that Leverich's biography demonstrates how the playwright remains an icon of modernism.

Leverich dedicates his biography to Williams, "Who asked me to report, in truth, his cause aright." The biographer takes the modernist stance that thorough research will reveal the "truth," a position that continues to be favored by the majority of Festival attendees. Comparing audience numbers confirms this trend: at most, fifty people were present for a given scholarly paper versus nearly ten times that number for the Leverich interview. Biography seems to explain everything for the reader, while the short scholarly papers show the validity of Williams' works as postmodern sites. In short, Leverich's work fixes our attention to Williams' life as an artist, and the scholars' papers strategize how his works remain active in contemporary theatre and culture.

Leverich's biography, Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams runs over six hundred pages of text and notes, carrying the reader through the writer's triumph with The
Glass Menagerie. Eagerly anticipated by Williams' fans, the work had been complete since 1990, but Maria St. Just (Williams' estate co-executor) blocked its publication. With her death, the book appeared, but nearly forty years of Williams' life and art remain to be catalogued. Leverich has devoted a tremendous amount of time and energy to his subject, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. One imagines Leverich's own life has been consumed by Williams', and at the Festival he was honored for this self-sacrifice and devotion. Observers treated Leverich like the ultimate celebrity of the conference, frequently taking his photograph before, during, and after his interview with Kenneth Holditch. He became imbued with significance and mysticism like a son fulfilling his fallen father's last request.

Although in print less than six months at the time of the 1996 Festival, Leverich's biographical version of Williams (at least for the time being) has become the holy grail of research on the playwright. Leverich spoke of his first meeting with Williams and their developing friendship, "I was in awe of him." His words reveal a bias in his almost reverential regard for the playwright. Nevertheless, Leverich was humble and still seemingly

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30Lyle Leverich, interview with W. Kenneth Holditch, Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. Le Petit Théâtre, New Orleans. 30 Mar. 1996. Unless otherwise indicated, this and all subsequent references to Lyle Leverich refer to this interview.
perplexed that he had been thrust into the role of Williams' authorized biographer.

In addition to his commitment to Tennessee, Leverich was motivated to complete the biography for one other important reason: He felt Williams' own *Memoirs* did the playwright a great disservice. Generally, critics agree with this assessment. Though *Memoirs* became a best-seller, the work was regarded as sloppy and full of errors.31 Donald Spoto's comments are typical: "*Memoirs* conceals more than it shares, misrepresents more than it documents, omits major events, confuses dates and, as every critic lamented, tells virtually nothing about the playwright's career."32

Despite criticism that *Memoirs* was undisciplined and self-indulgent, the work reads almost as Williams' stream of consciousness, and one wonders if we are not privy to the way he thinks and creates. Williams insists on taking the reader into his confidence, offering unguarded thoughts, feelings, and behaviors for public view; thereby, readers gain a greater understanding of and compassion for the playwright than is achieved through the more objective methods of biography.

In contrast to the autobiographical depiction, Leverich found Williams, "Very professional [and a]

completely different person from [the one in] Memoirs." Thus, Leverich disputes Williams' own version of himself. He suggests (and may be correct) that a biographer can understand a subject better than the subject himself. Although Leverich's remarks may appear to be arrogant, he acknowledges what the conference is about—shaping Williams to meet our current needs and understandings. Leverich subtly notes that refashioning Williams is at the heart of his work.

As Williams' biographer and the other scholars have shown, the Festival concentrates on rewriting Williams, but these groups (plus those that gathered to hear them) remain at the furthest reaches of the playwright's art. We scholars, the biographers, and the conference organizers all make our livings through analyzing and marketing Williams' labors. Some (like Leverich) actually knew Williams personally and others may have met him, but the vast majority know the man through what he wrote or what is written about him.

Dakin Williams (1919– ), the playwright's brother, retains a unique bond to Tennessee. Despite perks such as wealth, attention, and honor, fame deprives one of privacy, attracting flatterers and hangers-on. Such pressures had a debilitating effect on Williams, but fame also had its effects on his relatives. A lawyer from Illinois, Dakin became a minor celebrity thanks to his older brother. As
the last surviving member of Williams' immediate family, he has become the touchstone to the household that fostered an artist. Dakin might have chosen to exclude himself from the spotlight, but he embraces his fame by choosing to become a participant at the annual Festival. We gravitate to him, hoping to catch glimpses of the mysterious sources that inspired his brother. Dakin seems aware of our fascination and choreographs himself for his appearances. I saw him first at the scholars' conference, and perhaps he realized this group would be most likely to recognize his face.

As a long day of readings was coming to an end, and about half way through Philip Kolin's paper, the presentation hall was interrupted by the stately entrance of Dakin Williams. Amid hushed murmurings, and as Kolin continued reading, Dakin slowly sauntered down the center aisle, finally coming to rest in a seat fourth-row-center. What attention we had devoted to the presentation was disrupted when Dakin reached across a bank of seats to pat Robert Bray (the scholar conference organizer) on the shoulder, thus making his presence known. Though pianissimo, Bray reacted with enthusiastic astonishment as he turned around to greet Dakin. The focus of everyone seated behind the two men was instantly drawn to the exchange. I was mesmerized. In the same room with a Williams family member! Crossing his arms over his chest,
Dakin listened to the remainder of the final paper thoughtfully. After Kolin's conclusion, there were few questions and the pooh-bahs (to borrow Philip Supina's often repeated phrase) descended upon Dakin. Fearing that I would appear too much the groupie, I retreated.

The following day, I attended an interview with Dakin Williams in the more intimate environment of the Children's Corner at Le Petit Théâtre. He arrived on stage in a plum suit jacket with a silk shirt in green and purple stripes—the picture of eccentricity. With little fanfare, Dakin pronounced his brother's death a murder through the conspiracy of Williams' estate co-executors John Eastman and Lady St. Just, the New York City police chief and coroner, as well as Tennessee's regular New York lover of the eighties—a street hustler. No one seemed to take Dakin's charges too seriously, although he kept re-introducing the subject despite the interviewer's best efforts to get him off the topic.

I sympathized with Dakin's perspective on his brother's death. We all feel cheated that one of America's greatest playwrights died by choking on the cap of a Visine...
bottle, and we wish we could believe that other forces had brought about his demise rather than a silly accident. Dakin's intense, lively blue eyes added to his seductive power as he spun his tale. We wanted to believe, but finally were not persuaded.  

Like the scholars' essays and Leverich's anecdotes, Dakin's story adds another piece to the Williams' collage—a cottage industry at the Literary Festival.

Taking on the mannerisms of his brother and even some of the vocal qualities, Dakin interpreted bits of Tennessee's poetry. He became a theatrical showman (he is paid five hundred dollars plus travel expenses to appear). He said he wants to give people "their money's worth," and this concern caused him to incorporate readings from Tennessee's works with his appearances. In addition, he sometimes performs as Blanche DuBois in a rendition where he utters her nemesis's famous line, "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!"  

As Blanche, Dakin changes the text, not only borrowing Stanley's dialogue, but also co-opting his actions and promptly raping Kowalski!

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34 I found myself believing Dakin might have a sound theory that his brother was murdered after listening to further details during the 1999 Festival. Dakin claims Tennessee was suffocated and the medicine bottle cap placed in his throat after his death. He says the cap was too small to choke an adult and that the bottle it belonged to was never found. Not surprisingly, Dakin's agent believes the murder theory, and it was to be featured on an E! Network series called Mystery and Scandals in April 1999.  

35 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 402.
Dakin has become a willing prisoner of his brother's fame, welcoming opportunities to perform his works. He not only represents his brother in life, but appropriates his voice in renditions of his poetry and in a portrayal of Blanche DuBois. Thus, Dakin represents Tennessee on three levels: the flesh and bones incarnation of the family bloodline; the imitated voice of the brother through his poetry; and the enactment of Tennessee's most famous character ignoring gender barriers and the play's intent—though one imagines Tennessee would enjoy such antics. Perhaps Dakin can be famous not only as Williams' brother, but as one of the few male actors to portray Blanche DuBois. The gender reversal performances are an obvious marker of postmodernism, and like the other presentations at the Festival, Dakin's work provides another example of how a postmodern lens forces us to reexamine Williams' work.

The audience's comments after the conclusion of Dakin's formal presentation demonstrated further rewrites of the playwright. During the question and answer segment, an audience member asked Dakin to reflect on his family, and wondered what they all felt about Tennessee being gay. Having called the Lady St. Just a "fag's hag" earlier in the interview, Dakin seems to have grudgingly accepted his brother's sexual identity; however, Miss Edwina never believed it. Even when Tennessee talked about his sexual
experiences openly in Memoirs, his mother maintained it had all been added by his editor. Thus, we are given a glimpse of yet another version of the playwright.

Considering that she was born in 1884 and raised in the rural South, Edwina's denial of Williams' sexual identity appears unremarkable. Nevertheless, as early as 1950, Tennessee lived openly with Frank Merlo and did not conceal this from his family. This suggests that his mother chose to see her son as straight despite obvious evidence of his homosexuality. With Edwina's self-deception revealed, the audience's focus shifted to other Williams' family members.

Someone asked Dakin about his sister, Rose. The model for Laura in The Glass Menagerie and arguably Williams' reason for writing, Rose remained alive during the 1996 conference, confined to a care facility in New York State. Dakin never visited her, he said, as he feared John Eastman would have him murdered should he travel to New York.

The central inspiration for much of her brother's work, Rose remained marginalized and hidden away, frequently institutionalized since 1937, lobotomized in

37See Williams, Remember Me, 225-230. Edwina received letters from her son and father (who lived with Williams and Merlo periodically) in which Merlo is often mentioned and treated as part of the family. Dakin called Merlo a "wonderful person" during "ASK DAKIN ANYTHING" in 1999. Further, he said Tennessee would have gone insane earlier without Frank Merlo.
38During "ASK DAKIN ANYTHING" in 1999, he claimed John Eastman was going to have him murdered that very weekend in New Orleans.
1942, and confined until her death in September 1996.\textsuperscript{39} Without her, one wonders if Tennessee Williams would never have emerged, remaining forever Tom Williams. Rose's tragic breakdown and surgery haunted her brother, inspiring Williams to create works as a monument to her losses. He made "something imperishable he could give to the world."\textsuperscript{40} Tennessee's feelings for his brother Dakin were less tender.

In his will, Williams left most of his estate to Rose, but only twenty-five thousand dollars to Dakin "that was not due to be paid until Rose died."\textsuperscript{41} Given an estate estimated at ten million dollars,\textsuperscript{42} Williams' lack of generosity with his brother suggests estrangement. The tensions between Williams and Dakin seemed to have begun when the latter had Tennessee confined to a mental hospital in the late sixties. Though Dakin may have saved Tennessee's life through this action, Williams never forgave his younger brother for it.\textsuperscript{43} Given the hostilities between the brothers, Dakin's self-serving appropriation of Tennessee's works might be justified. Ultimately, Dakin does provide the Festival audience with a singular view of Tennessee not available through any other source, but his

\textsuperscript{39}Leverich, \textit{Tom}, 210 and 480.
\textsuperscript{40}Leverich, \textit{Tom}, 448.
\textsuperscript{41}Hayman, \textit{Everyone Else}, 239.
\textsuperscript{43}Hayman, \textit{Everyone Else}, 209.
rewrite remains more self-seeking than the scholars or Leverich's work because it fails to rise above curiosity.

While Dakin sometimes performs Blanche, the original Stella appeared at the 1999 Festival. Kim Hunter was featured on several panels, acting as headliner for the latest celebration, honored with a cocktail reception, and providing a one-on-one interview at the opening night party.\textsuperscript{4} Fifty-two years had passed since Hunter made her Broadway debut in \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}, but she remained energetic and her eyes revealed a lively fire.

Hunter noted that Marlon Brando never felt he was right for the role of Stanley, and she discussed some of her experiences with Elia Kazan during rehearsals,\textsuperscript{45} but recalled few specifics about the production. She said everyone felt that they were doing a good play, but no one realized that it would one day be regarded among the most significant dramas of the century. Throughout her life, Hunter has remained unable to watch other productions of \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire} because of her involvement in the original. She noted, "It's my family";\textsuperscript{46} her words suggest that the experience lives on in the present tense, as if


\textsuperscript{45}Kazan felt she was freezing up too much in the early stages of rehearsal, and asked, "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

\textsuperscript{46}"I Remember Tennessee" panel discussion, Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. Le Petit Théâtre, New Orleans. 28 Mar. 1999.
Kazan's production has escaped time, remaining active and vibrant today. Her experiences with the play seem so personal that words do not effectively communicate them, as if she places the production beyond memory as an ongoing event in her life. In short, she imbues Williams' play with mystery and mysticism. Despite feeling that the original creative team were like relatives, Hunter could recall virtually no stories about her interactions with Williams during the rehearsal period, but an interpersonal connection to Tennessee remains the grounding factor in many of the events at the Festival.

On panels in 1996 and 1997, Jack Fricks and Robert Hines shared personal recollections about the playwright from day-to-day experiences with him. Fricks (who met Williams in 1948) and Hines (who met Williams in 1959) offered little insight into the writer beyond quaint reminiscences. In 1997, Fricks reported that Tennessee would sing when he had a good time at dinner parties, and Hines said that "none" of Williams' paid companion/secretaries could type. Not motivated to reclaim, rewrite, or use Williams, both gentlemen shared glimpses of the playwright with an audience intrigued by anything related to the famous man. Unlike Dakin, Fricks

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and Hines expected nothing from their relationship to Tennessee, but another one of the writer's old friends, Donald Windham, might be accused of using the relationship for personal gain.

I eagerly anticipated seeing Windham at the 1997 conference, but I already harbored a bias against him. I found Windham's career suspicious and believed he might be parasitic, making a living off Williams' fame. Windham collaborated with Williams on the little known play You Touched Me (1945), but in more recent projects, he seems to seek book sales through his association with famous writers. Windham edited collections of letters from both Williams and E. M. Forster, and he wrote Lost Friendships: A Memoir of Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams and Others (1987). Though they met in 1940 and sustained a friendship for over two decades, Williams finally believed that Windham only contacted him when he "wanted something." By the late sixties, Windham himself admits that Williams' complaint was true. Nevertheless, whether because of the death of Williams or the passage of time, Windham was no parasite, but attended the Festival to honor his old friend.

Photographs of Windham prove that he was handsome in his youth, showing a young man with a winning, open smile.

48 The play was produced in Cleveland and Pasadena in 1943, but was not staged in New York until after the success of The Glass Menagerie. See Hayman, Everyone Else, 90.
49 Windham, Williams' Letters, 317.
Even in repose, Windham suggests energy and an exuberance for life. I was shocked by the small, frail, gray man before me now, a half century after the youthful pictures of him had been taken. I guess I believed I would see the man depicted in the old snapshots. Williams' works are ageless. In my mind, so is he; therefore, why not all the people he associated with?

Seeing the aged Windham, I recalled Chance Wayne's concluding line from *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959): "I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding—not even that—no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all." Time has already stolen away Williams, and little time remains for those who actually knew him.

Though I never saw Williams' alive, I was seeing Windham. Forced into silence by his more youthful, energetic, and better known fellow panelists, Windham sat thoughtfully as his cohorts discussed their work as gay, Southern writers. The sound system was poor, and I rapidly lost interest in the younger writers whose work I did not know. I wanted to hear Windham and patiently waited for him to speak. He had little opportunity.

He noted that his novel, *The Hero Continues* (1960) was partially based on his relationship with Williams. This

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50Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 4, 124.
revelation added support to my preconceived notions of Windham's self-serving nature. The moderator asked the panelists what made them want to be writers. Windham responded last, saying he always tried, "to do the writing as best I could and that was because of Tennessee." Then, he began to cry. He was moved by his memory of how Williams' inspired him. In turn, Windham's tears moved me, and I realized that here was a man who truly respected and appreciated Williams as an artist, friend, and motivational force. Suddenly, I comprehended that Windham's books about Tennessee were not motivated by self-interest, but something more charitable. Perhaps he hoped to demonstrate what a powerful and positive shaping force Williams had been for him. As Windham's collection of letters from Tennessee was the first published, perhaps he wanted to share them with the wider world; they reflect too much artistry and insight to remain private. Perhaps Windham sought to make a tribute to Williams. If so, this latter goal hopefully remains at the heart of all those participating in the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. Many may reshape Williams for the purposes of gain; however, at the center of the postmodern rewritings perpetuated to varying degrees by the scholars, Leverich, Dakin, and all the others, is an attempt to shield Tennessee and his works from the enemy time. We want to keep him relevant in today's world any way we can.
Back in 1996, leaving Dakin's presentation, I walked into the French Quarter at twilight. A few of the painters and street musicians remained working Jackson Square, but the atmosphere of the Quarter was shifting into its nighttime aura. More passersby had drinks in hand, and they plunged deeper into the neighborhood toward Bourbon where the majority of strip joints and gay discos are located. In a few more hours, physical desire would rule, transforming the daylight Quarter with its tourist families ogling street artists and eating beignets into an adults only playground. Loud music will pour into the streets from every bar and club, with barkers enticing the folks to enter. People will become more demonstrative, bellowing and acting wildly as alcohol gets the better of them. The more conservative crowds will have dinner at Antoine's or Galatoire's. After an early meal, perhaps they will attend Confessions of A Nightingale at Le Petit Théâtre. Finally, late into the night come the disappointments: The attractive man who had been chatting-you-up at Parade goes home with someone else. Failing to generate business, a hustler calls it quits with a burger at Clover Grill, an all-night diner on Bourbon. Many people going back to hotel rooms together, but just as many returning alone. New Orleans offers it all.

Despite the temptations of the Quarter, I ventured up Royal Street toward my hotel to change for a reception
honoring Festival participants at the Monteleone-- "Tennessee Williams' Favorite Hotel." I felt I should mingle with other Williams' fans. I might learn other interesting tidbits. I stopped in a bar on Decatur for one fortifying drink, and went no further for a couple of hours. I yielded to the enticement of New Orleans. Besides, I wanted to be alone with my thoughts to process all I had witnessed during the day. Well, as Williams himself noted, "I've never known anybody who lived in, or even visited the Quarter who wasn't slightly intoxicated." It happened like that in my actual experience as my time at the Festival came to an end in 1996. I had too much to drink and returned to my hotel alone, but I did not stop thinking about the events of the conference or Williams' life and art. I was preoccupied. I decided to create my own individual reading of Tennessee Williams--my rewriting of the playwright in New Orleans.

In my rewrite of that final conference day, I would have left the Le Petit Théâtre and crossed into the heart of the Quarter toward Bourbon. In this art object, within a text of a Williams' text, within another time and reality, my gaze would fall upon a huge statue coming into view, and I would recall Williams' reflections on this very vision from the window of one of his early New Orleans' apartments: "... I could see in the garden behind the

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cathedral the great stone statue of Christ, his arms outstretched as if to invite the suffering world to come to Him."54 The stone Christ's shadow appears tremendous across the church wall at night, and you (perhaps with a drink in hand or a lover in your embrace) can see it while you wander down Bourbon. It is a startlingly perfect image for New Orleans—sinning, with the promise of salvation looming. In my rewrite, I would sit near the idol and contemplate Williams in New Orleans; what he made of it in his works for all of us to partake in. Like our vision of him, Williams' understanding of the city that inspired him changed with time.

In 1970 over Campari and soda, Williams was interviewed in his suite at the Royal Orleans Hotel. He gazed out another window overlooking the Quarter, as though he was in a dream:

"That's Chartres Street down there, isn't it? My, but it looks so different from up here. I walked down it this morning, and I thought, "This is the same street I walked down thirty years ago. Most of the same buildings." Somehow it seemed to have changed so much. And then I thought, "So have you, Tom. So have you."55

When Williams died in February 1983, he was a millionaire, but this great wealth could not guarantee his final wish—to be buried at sea.56 Like Blanche DuBois, he

55Keith, "Williams Rises," 160.
perhaps wished to "be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as my first lover's eyes!"\textsuperscript{57} Like the sea, death remains vast, mysterious, and uncontainable.

Williams, celebrated by a sea of voices at the Festival, finds resurrection through various rewrites by scholars, biographers, acquaintances, friends, fans, and a younger brother. Each survivor offers a singular version of Tennessee and for various ends. His favorite city celebrates him only once a year, but Williams' vision of New Orleans haunts us more frequently.

As I walked into Jackson Square in March 1996, the final afternoon of the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival, I was greeted by a perfect vista: white azaleas surrounding the park pathways, ocean-going ships moving along the Mississippi River, and a sky as blue as the eyes of Blanche's ideal love. In March 1983, a special memorial service was held for Williams in New Orleans. As a mourner left the cathedral and came into Jackson Square she said, "Well, they may have buried his body in St. Louis, but now we've brought his spirit back here to stay, where he belongs."\textsuperscript{58} Even his death created multiple readings, new scraps for the Williams' collage.

\textsuperscript{57}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 410.
\textsuperscript{58}Holditch, \textit{Last Frontier}, 37.
While the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival tends to recycle participants year after year, it remains a valuable celebration of the playwright, keeping Williams' canon active and rewriting him for consumption today. It helps prevent his work from becoming museum theatre. Perhaps most importantly, thanks to its mass-marketing promotion, the Festival introduces Williams to a new audience who may not go to theatre, but who might come to see movie stars read his words or find their interest ignited due to the whimsy of the Stanley and Stella shouting competition. The Festival demonstrates that Williams remains a potent spokesman for New Orleans. In celebrating him, the city also celebrates itself to the betterment of both.

59From 1996 to 1999, Dakin Williams attended each Festival, Allean Hale three, Lyle Leverich two, and John Clum two, to list only a few repeat attendees.
Chapter Three--
"Traveling wears me out.":¹
Travel and Tourism in Williams' Favorite City

Once an unknown, transient visitor to the city, Williams has become important in New Orleans' marketing for tourists. In addition, Williams uses the city's reputation as a tourist center within his works: travel and tourism help him establish setting and propel plot; he shows how tourism shapes his characters, as well as the city around them; travel (whether through literal movement or journeys of the imagination) becomes a tactic to assist character survival. Travel sometimes acts as an escape, as a sign of social status, or as a means of fulfilling desire. Many of these elements are mirrored by the Crescent City. Despite the heat and humidity, New Orleans demands movement and energy; it is a city of travelers, offering myriad celebrations and attractions, of which the Williams' Literary Festival remains relatively minor. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, New Orleans has promoted itself through its association with the playwright.

Beginning in the late seventies or early eighties,² New Orleans used the playwright to market the city. The

²Tourist brochures often omit publication dates; however, by tracking the St. Charles streetcar ticket prices, one can estimate when New Orleans' promotions began to exploit Williams' image as a tourist attraction. In 1980, the St. Charles streetcar fare was thirty cents. In the first guide mentioning Williams, the fare remains the same. See American Automobile Association, New Orleans Citibook (N.P.: N.P., 1980) 22. Louisiana Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. Tourism Brochure Files.
streetcar itself became a promotional icon due in large part to its association with Williams' famous play. In a brochure from around 1980, Williams earned his first reference in relationship to the streetcar named Desire. Displayed at Decatur and Barracks Streets, the guide describes the attraction in the following way:

This vintage streetcar, which played the title role in Tennessee Williams' Pulitzer-Prize-winning play and Academy-Award-winning movie, rumbled along its Desire Street route from 1920 until 1948, and it has been placed on exhibit here by the Louisiana State Museum.³

The description draws the reader's attention to the streetcar's service as mass transportation as much as to the playwright. It reads as though the streetcar remains relevant as an antiquated travel mode rather than being significant because of Williams' play. The blurb fails to acknowledge that tourists would have little interest in the streetcar were it not for the famous dramatic work. As time passed, the streetcar became virtually synonymous with New Orleans in travel brochures, but only rarely do photograph captions credit Williams for making it noteworthy.⁴ In short, the playwright's imagery serves New

³7th Annual Tour Guide: Louisiana déTours (N.P.: N.P., N.D.) 70. Louisiana Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. Tourism Brochure Files.
Orleans' tourism with little recognition of the source play.

Williams connection to the city fares better in more recent state promotions, and he gains recognition as part of New Orleans' "wildlife:" "Wildlife at the Audubon Zoo. Wild life on Bourbon Street. The bellow of a gator in the Honey Island Swamp. The bellow of Stanley Kowalski at the Tennessee Williams Festival." As the pamphlet demonstrates, Williams' play has become so famous that the title does not require mention. Besides this nod to an important play, the promotion emphasizes the Festival rather than the playwright. As noted in the last chapter, the Literary Festival remains the primary vehicle celebrating Williams in New Orleans and forms the locus of his drawing power, enticing travelers to the city. Yet, long before New Orleans appropriated Williams' image as a tourist attraction, the writer enjoyed a journey. Williams' personal travel experiences suggest why tourists and touring remain integral to his works.

After graduating from the University of Iowa in 1938, Williams traveled throughout much of the United States. His letters to Donald Windham attest to his frequent

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5Louisiana Travel Promotion Association, Louisiana Tour Guide, 36.
movement. In the twelve month period from May 1940 through
May 1941, Williams spent time in the following cities:
Lake George, NY; Provincetown, MA (coming into New York
City often and then returning to the cape); Monterrey,
Mexico; Acapulco, Mexico; Clayton, MO; Key West, FL;
Atlanta, GA; and back to Clayton.7 Eight different
locations in one year, and these are only the places from
which he wrote letters. The list merely hints at the
variety of cities, towns, and villages he experienced while
in transit. Williams’ travel habits continued throughout
his life. For example, his itinerary from April 1955
through April 1956 included: Key West, Rome, Athens,
Istanbul, back to Rome, Barcelona, back to Rome again,
Hamburg, New York City, Miami, and Key West. Once again,
the tally reflects locations from which he wrote letters,
although he mentions plans to go to Scandinavia, Berlin,
and Tangiers.8 Even in the last weeks of his life
beginning in December 1982, Williams traveled from New
Orleans to Europe where he visited London, Rome, and
Taormina; he finally returned to New York City one last
time and died there in February 1983.9

His life suggests restlessness and an inability for or
disinterest in putting down roots. Wealth allowed him to

7Donald Windham, ed., Tennessee Williams’ Letters to Donald Windham,
8Tennessee Williams, Five O’Clock Angel: Letters of Tennessee
Williams to Maria St. Just, 1948-1982, comp., Maria St. Just (New
9Williams, Five O’Clock Angel, 390-392.
tour the romantic cities of Europe, but even before he became famous, Williams resisted stasis. When he left Iowa City in 1938, Williams returned to St. Louis to visit his family. His father insisted his son needed a job, and the younger Williams went to Chicago hoping to find one. Tom had no success there, but he learned that "the Writer's Project [in New Orleans] needed a larger staff." Williams bid his family farewell and headed South for his first visit to New Orleans.

Williams' initial reflections on New Orleans read like exuberant travelogue. In a letter written in January 1939, the young playwright tells his mother:

> I'm crazy about the city. I walk continually, there is so much to see. The weather is balmy, today like early summer. I have no heat in my room—none is needed. The Quarter is really quainter than anything I've seen abroad—in many homes the original atmosphere is completely preserved. . . .

As this brief passage shows, Williams was enthusiastic about New Orleans, and he mentions characteristics that set it apart from other cities. One can imagine this young man marveling at the wrought ironwork of acorns and oak leaves on the La Branche Building galleries and being inspired by the dilapidated charm of Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop. New Orleanians of the time may have viewed the French Quarter
as a slum, but Williams appreciates the environs like an awestruck tourist.

In the same letter, the playwright mentions Lyle Saxon twice. He hoped an introduction to Saxon (State Director of the Federal Writers' Project) would help him secure employment. Among other responsibilities, Saxon oversaw the publication of the New Orleans City Guide. Released in 1938, the work discusses New Orleans' history, as well as its economic and social development; about half of the guide concerns city tours and tourism. An early example of how New Orleans marketed itself for tourists, the guide shows that strategies used in the thirties persist today.

Introduced by a nineteenth century account of New Orleans by Colonel Creecy, the guide suggests the city has attracted visitors for over a century: "HAVE you ever been in New Orleans? If not you'd better go. / It's a nation of a queer place; day and night a show!" Creecy's appeal goes on to list the ethnic diversity of the city (Frenchmen, Creoles, Tennesseans, and so forth), the wild mix of professions (lawyers, assassins, gamblers, drunkards, pimps, imps, pretty girls, ugly fortune-tellers, and so on), and unusual sights like alligators or cockfights. The Colonel's description makes the city sound more like a circus, but it entices travelers effectively with the promise of unusual sights.


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The guide suggests that by 1938, alligators were "now seldom encountered" in the city, and that many of the nineteenth century attractions have endured. The guide emphasizes, "To the tourist the city is first of all a place in which to eat, drink, and be merry." It suggests that New Orleans remains the ultimate playground, a site that encourages self-indulgence and relaxation. Like modern guides, it lists restaurants, night clubs, hotels, and other entertainment venues. Sight-seeing recommendations include twelve walking or car tours of New Orleans and nearby locations. It even offers a glossary of words unfamiliar to visitors, but its section on literature constitutes the most interesting similarity between the early tourist's guide and those of today. Even in 1938, the city marketed itself through connections with writers.

To endorse New Orleans, the guide cites the opinions of writers such as Thackeray and Twain. It devotes a chapter to literature, not only noting many of the writers associated with the city, but often mentioning works set in New Orleans. In addition, it provides an early example of how writers' homes, or buildings made famous through their fiction, became worthy tourist attractions. Among others, it singles out locations associated with the lives and works of George Cable and Grace King. While Williams

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15Federal Writers', City Guide, 109-120.

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remained an unknown writer in 1938, after his fame, guidebooks list him among New Orleans' notable literary figures and highlight locations where he lived.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, guides demonstrate the connection between New Orleans, tourism, and literature, celebrating writers who celebrate the city.

Williams infused his works with travelers and tourist sites. In the plays and short stories, his characters frequently travel. They often wander to New Orleans for rest or inspiration, but find their stays hectic and debilitating. They come for adventure or freedom, but sometimes experience entrapment. On rare occasions, they gain what they sought, but more often the city rewrites their expectations.

At a fundamental level, Williams uses travel and tourism as a structural device. The short story, "Two on a Party" (1951/52),\textsuperscript{18} perhaps best illustrates Williams' use of travel as technical means for propelling plot. Finding better luck operating as a team, Billy and Cora barhop in hopes of picking up men. Their adventures together begin in New York City, but the two soon take to the road.

\textsuperscript{17} See Delehanty, \textit{Ultimate Guide}, 119. Delehanty also credits Williams' with "immortalizing" the Desire streetcar line and suggests reading the play to get acquainted with the "city's literary psyche." See 27, and 77. Also see Zibart, \textit{Unofficial Guide}, 43, and 181. Zibart is incorrect in stating \textit{The Rose Tattoo} has a New Orleans setting as it is set in a village on the Gulf coast between New Orleans and Mobile.

\textsuperscript{18}Tennessee Williams, \textit{Tennessee Williams Collected Stories} (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 611. The story was published in 1954 in the collection \textit{Hard Candy}. 

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Coming from El Paso, Billy and Cora buy a convertible in Galveston, and then head east. A tire blows out, forcing them to stop in New Orleans:

They are still on the Wild West kick. Billy also presents a colorful appearance in a pair of blue jeans that fit as if they had been painted on him, the fancily embossed cowboy boots and a sport shirt that is covered with leaping dolphins, Ha Ha! They have never had so much fun in their life together, the colored lights are going like pinwheels on the Fourth of July, everything is big and very bright celebration.19

Their travels continue through Mobile, Pensacola, and Miami, with the final destination in the Florida Keys, but their best times were shared in New Orleans. Sexual fulfillment enhances their experience in the city. Returning to Stanley Kowalski's euphemism for sexual pleasure, Williams informs us that Billy and Cora really got "the colored lights going" in New Orleans. Clearly, desire motivates the characters in "Two on a Party," but the pair's long road trip and the many locations presented in the story drive the narrative.

Like many travelers, Billy and Cora partake in local customs and styles. Billy's cowboy boots and tight jeans suggest western Texas, but the sport shirt with dolphins implies tropical seaside resorts more typical of Florida. Thus, Billy's outfit symbolizes the pair's travel itinerary and marks him as a tourist in New Orleans. It shows he calls no place home, but remains a man in motion. Too

19Williams, Collected Stories, 310.
polished and unusual appearing to be mistaken for a drifter, Billy's attire suggests a chameleon attempting to alter its appearance to suit a given background.

A short story can suggest touring more easily than a theatrical staging. Fiction allows rapid, frequent scene changes without sacrificing visual details of a specific locale. By contrast, theatre cannot reproduce numerous, realistic locations in a single evening; therefore, Williams' depiction of travel becomes necessarily less vivid in his stage renderings, with protagonists limited to moments of arrival and departure rather than in transit. Nevertheless, Williams retains the idea of travel in his plays, and solves the physical limitations of the theatre through hotel or boarding house settings for characters who are travelers and tourists.

Boarding house and hotel settings let Williams highlight characters' comings and goings. Auto-Da-Fé, The Lady of Larkspur Lotion, and Vieux Carré are set in boarding houses, while The Mutilated is set in the Silver Dollar Hotel on South Rampart Street. Such locations imply impermanence, allowing the audience to anticipate that the works will feature visitors to New Orleans rather than natives. As outsiders, these traveling protagonists discover New Orleans and act as guides for the audience. For example, in The Lady of Larkspur Lotion, Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore complains about flying cockroaches in her
room, but Mrs. Wire (the landlady) rebukes her tenant:
"Flying cockroaches are nothing to be surprised at. They
have them all over, even uptown they have them."20
Hardwicke-Moore's shock over the insects reveals her status
as visitor, while Wire's comments reflect the lackadaisical
attitude toward flying roaches that any resident of south
Louisiana might profess. Temporary residents such as
Hardwicke-Moore help reveal New Orleans to audiences who
know the city only through reputation, written accounts, or
as tourists themselves. In addition, the device highlights
New Orleans as tourist destination.

Unlike many New Orleans' visitors who might stay at
finer hotels like the Monteleone or the Bienville House,
Williams' transient characters frequently have no money and
consequently come into conflict with their landlords.
Discord between boarders and landlords occurs in The Lady
of Larkspur Lotion and Vieux Carré. In both plays, the
landlady is named Mrs. Wire and she hassles her tenants
over non-payment of rent.21 Though she disapproves of their

20 Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 82.
21 The short story, "The Angel in the Alcove" served as partial basis
for Vieux Carré (see Williams, Collected Stories, 608), but the
landlady is not provided with a name. I have found no scholarship on
similarities between The Lady of Larkspur Lotion and Vieux Carré, but
they are obvious. Not only do the landladies share the same name and
a relationship to New Orleans' police officers, but Jane in Vieux
Carré complains about flying roaches like Hardwicke-Moore (see
Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 9). Furthermore, Williams describes their
rooms similarly. Characteristics of the single room in The Lady of
Larkspur Lotion are used in the description of two rooms in Vieux
Carré. In both cases, Williams clearly had his room at 722 Toulouse
in mind (see Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 81, and vol. 8, 4). In both
the short story and Vieux Carré, the writer character leaves New
personal habits such as promiscuity or drunkenness, Mrs. Wire disregards those activities as long as the rent gets paid. In *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, she explains: "The first thing a landlady in the French Quarter learns is not to see and not to hear but only collect your money! As long as that comes in—okay, I'm blind, I'm deaf, I'm dumb! But soon as it stops, I recover my hearing and also my sight and also the use of my voice."22 In other words, Wire's contempt for Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore begins when she ceases to behave as a paying tourist and becomes a squatter. Wire's scorn might be applied to the general business climate of the French Quarter; as long as guests have money, almost any behavior remains acceptable, but when the cash stops flowing, one becomes a nuisance rather than a welcomed visitor. As Wire says later, "Completely fed-up with all you Quarter rats, half-breeds, drunkards, degenerates, who try to get by on promises, lies, delusions!"23 Wire ceases to view tenants as tourists once rent payment stops; she re-inscribes them as part of the local socioeconomic landscape. In Wire's view, Hardwicke-Moore has become a vermin, making the Quarter less appealing to paying tourists and jeopardizing Wire's income. Landlord contempt for tenants appears in other

Orleans for the West coast (see *Collected Stories*, 125 and *Theatre* vol. 8, 77-78, and 115-116), but in *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* he joins Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore in her travels of the mind. I will discuss imaginary travel in greater depth later in this chapter.  
22Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 85.  
23Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 86.
Williams' works, and economics often determine a character's treatment.

The Mutilated opens as Celeste returns to the Silver Dollar Hotel accompanied by her brother, Henry, an undertaker. Just released from jail, Celeste was incarcerated for shoplifting. Despite her thrift shop clothes and unkempt appearance, we discover she comes from a respectable family. Henry's patience with Celeste at an end, he asks her to use an alias and explains: "I got children growing up here. I don't want you using our name." She agrees to abide by Henry's request. As he departs, Celeste says she will see him at the family Christmas dinner and Henry retorts, "I never want to see you again in my life, so bum your Xmas dinner off somebody else." Celeste is no longer welcome in her family's embrace, and Henry banishes her to homelessness as she nears eviction from the hotel.

24In Auto-Da-Fé, Madame Duvenet and her son, Eloi, operate a boarding house in the Vieux Carré "not far off" Bourbon Street. Eloi dislikes all their boarders and suspects they spy on him. The play ends with Eloi setting the house on fire, presumably incinerating himself and the current boarder, Miss Bordelon. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 131, 148, and 150-151.
25The play was first staged in 1966 with The Gnädiges Fräulein "as part of a double bill entitled Slapstick Tragedy." The Gnädiges Fräulein is set in "Cocaloony Key." See Williams, Theatre, vol. 7, 78, and 217.
26Williams, Theatre, vol. 7, 83.
27Williams, Theatre, vol. 7, 84.
Celeste's descent in social status mirrors the hotel's shift from single family residence to home for wanderers. Both Celeste and the building where she lives have become figures in transition. Further, the alteration from house to hotel symbolically shows how tourists' needs transform the landscape of New Orleans. Fittingly, Henry (an undertaker) announces the death of Celeste's familial bonds. She now verges on life as a Quarter Rat, and The Mutilated offers a unique example of a once established New Orleanian as she descends into the ranks of transients. Her class conscious family abandons her when she becomes an economic burden, not unlike Wire's eviction of Hardwicke-Moore. Once a New Orleans' insider, Celeste's fate mimics both those of the hotel and of destitute visitors to the city.

The Mutilated also provides another example of dispute between owners and renters. Like Mrs. Wire, Bernie (desk clerk at the Silver Dollar Hotel) resents the guests upon which his salary relies. Bernie performs only his necessary job duties, never offering assistance to guests unless they provide a substantial tip. By order of the unseen owner, Mr. Katz, Bernie locks away Celeste's possessions and completes her "check-out." As employee

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28 A "pale blue neon" sign announces the structure as The Silver Dollar Hotel, but the converted building was once a private residence. See Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 7, 79, and 81.
29 Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 7, 97.
rather than actual landlord, Bernie remains aloof and his actions become more callous as Celeste has no appeal to Mr. Katz. The tension between landlord and tenant remains, but at a corporate rather than a personal level. Bernie might be viewed as representative of the general New Orleanian attitude toward tourists: happy to serve as long as generously tipped, but resistant and difficult once a traveler's spending money has been depleted.

As demonstrated by Williams' works, the stress between owner and guest alters both parties. Tenants lose a roof over their heads, becoming wanderers again or finding temporary housing through fellow, rent-paying residents. Once renters can no longer pay, the landlords reconfigure their former guests as worthless outcasts. In effect, they dehumanize them. They descend from tourists to street people. Like Mrs. Wire, Mr. Katz cares only that guests pay. Money not only informs the way landlords view their tenants in Williams' texts, but shapes the actual city's civic priorities.

Tourists' interests often remake the Crescent City. New Orleans' public schools are notoriously poor. Public housing communities are riddled with gangs, violence, and drugs. In the early nineties, violent crime was so out of control that local businessmen worried it would dampen

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31See Williams, Theatre, vol. 7, 123-124. Trinket forgives Celeste and invites her into the room.
tourism.\textsuperscript{32} Ironically, only when crime threatened to undermine tourism did New Orleans' civic authorities act. Ineffectual schools and unsafe housing were not enough to create action, but a threat to tourism prompted reform. In short, tourists and tourism shape New Orleans. Like Williams' greedy landlords reacting against non-paying boarders, New Orleans responds to social problems when tourist dollars retreat.

Williams incorporates another technique into his plays that mimics the actual city: New Orleans actively courts tourism through attractions. In recent years, the city has attempted to attract tourists with the Aquarium of the Americas and the adjoining IMAX Theater. In the future, a land-based gambling facility (left partially constructed thanks to a dispute between Louisiana and casino owners) may entice even more tourists to the city.

While Williams can hardly capture the grandeur of such large scale city attractions on stage, he offers reduced spectacles that suggest the typical street performers of the French Quarter. Commonplace in New Orleans, street entertainers make their living by attracting crowds of tourists and performing for donations. Some sing and play musical instruments. Some perform comic sketches or mime. Others manipulate puppets or make hats and animals out of colorful balloons. Some become frozen, living statuary by

remaining motionless for lengthy periods of time dressed in white or silver for greater realism. These performers might move suddenly and startle a tourist who gets too close. Such entertainers feature their bodies as spectacle, echoing the circus freaks of yesteryear, such as the bearded lady or the man covered in tattoos. Williams' "Bird-Girl" in The Mutilated springs from this tradition.

A former Bird-Girl herself, Celeste notices Maxie gathering a crowd outside the hotel. She sees an opportunity to make some money by blackmailing him, and threatens to reveal the Bird-Girl's secret:

VOICE [strident, approaching]. See the Bird-Girl, two bits to see the Bird-Girl!

CELESTE. OH-oh!—Dropped the price! [A fat man, Maxie, appears before the hotel with a cloaked and hooded companion who moves with a shuffling, pigeon-toed gait.] Hi, Maxie! Merry Xmas, Bird-Girl!

MAXIE [viciously, to Celeste]. Git lost, yuh bum!—See the Bird-Girl, two bits to see the Bird-Girl uncovered, unmasked, the world's greatest freak attraction! [A few drifters pause on the walk. A drunk staggers out of the Silver Dollar Hotel, digging in his pockets for a quarter.]

CELESTE [seeing the drunk is a live one]. Shoot, that's no Bird-Girl, I know her personally. That's Rampart Street Rose with chicken feathers glued to her. It's a painful, dangerous thing, I know from experience, Mister. [She turns to the Bird-Girl again.] Hey, Rose, how much does Maxie pay you, how much is he payin' you, Rosie? [Maxie raises a threatening hand over his head. The Bird-Girl makes angry bird noises.] Maxie? Maxie? [She rushes up close to him.] I ain't gonna expose you, just give me five dollars, Maxie.33

33Williams, Theatre, vol. 7, 85-86.
The Bird-Girl appeals to drifters and drunks, and they may be the only ones naive enough to offer money to see her. A seasoned local, Celeste knows Maxie's scam; it is difficult to imagine any New Orleanian volunteering money to see Bird-Girl. Like New Yorkers who ignore the people who squeegee their car windows at a stoplight, New Orleans' natives overlook street performers as part of the daily landscape. Familiarity breeds indifference. In contrast, visitors regard the Bird-Girl as something unique and pay to see her.

A transitory figure, Bird-Girl metamorphoses from woman to bird. The image suggests migration, following the season to warmer, more hospitable climates when winter comes to the North. Birds imply tourists just as the familiar moniker "snow-birds" marks Northerners who come South to escape winter cold. Furthermore, the price to view Bird-Girl has lowered, indicating fewer tourists—not surprising for New Orleans at Christmas. No doubt, Maxie makes most of his money at Mardi Gras. When Celeste starts to reveal how Maxie creates the illusion, both he and Bird-Girl react violently. This shows not only their precarious economic situation, but the importance of keeping the tourists naive. A personal anecdote may make this point clearer.

I was a trusting, young Iowan when I first visited New Orleans as an adult nearly two decades ago. I walked down
Bourbon Street and was stopped by a man saying, "I'll bet you ten dollars where you got dem shoes." I hesitated. He pulled out a bill, and told me to do the same. He said I could even hold the money. I got out my money, and he gave me his ten. Feeling certain I was about to make some money, I asked, "Where did I get these shoes?" He smiled and said, "You got dem shoes on Bourbon Street in Nawlins, Lou's-e-ana." I paused, gave him the money without comment, and hurried on my way.

Visiting New Orleans a few years ago, I was stopped by another man using the same line. I said, "I know this one," and walked on down the street. The man called after me, "Well don't tell anybody!"34

Harmless stings such as "where you got dem shoes" are part of visiting New Orleans. The savvy street artists and con men add to the New Orleans' experience. Wise to such scams, Celeste undermines tourism by exposing Bird-Girl's secret. Her knowledge of the trick proves her status as native, and she threatens to destroy a tourist attraction. Like "where you got dem shoes" or mimes who pretend to be statues then suddenly move, Bird-Girl's mystery makes her an attraction. The simple tricks and illusions offered by such street performers shows the carefree, whimsical aspects of New Orleans' tourism, but also suggest it is a

34Zibart reveals this scam in her guidebook. See Unofficial Guide, 143.
tourist trap full of illusionary charms, as Blanche discovered.

Williams' fictional tourist attractions are not limited to outdoor performers; in Lord Byron's Love Letter, the letter of the title becomes a New Orleans' attraction and sole means of support for its owners. Set in the late nineteenth century during the Mardi Gras celebration, Lord Byron's Love Letter foregrounds tourism and begins with the arrival of the Matron and her Husband (tourists from Milwaukee) at the French Quarter home of the Spinster and the Old Woman. While reveling on the streets (the Husband enters wearing a paper cap and has been drinking\(^35\)), the couple noticed a sign advertising Byron's letter:

MATRON. . . . . How did you get it?
SPINSTER. It was written to my grandmother, Irénée Marguerite de Poitevent.
MATRON. How very interesting! Where did she meet Lord Byron?
SPINSTER. On the steps of the Acropolis in Athens.
MATRON. How very, very interesting! I didn't know that Lord Byron was ever in Greece.
SPINSTER. Lord Byron spent the final years of his turbulent life in Greece.
OLD WOMAN [still behind the curtains]. He was exiled from England!\(^36\)

The Matron's queries demonstrate the enthusiasm of a tourist learning new things. Discovering something different validates traveling, and one can almost imagine the Matron's excitement as she recounts seeing Byron's letter upon her return to Milwaukee. The exchange

\(^{35}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 158.
\(^{36}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 156.

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emphasizes travel not only in the present tense, but also by recounting the historical adventures of the grandmother and Byron. For anyone who knows Byron's biography, mention of his exile hints of scandal and reminds us of his flight and frequent movement around the Continent. The sequence focuses on traveling in the privileged nineteenth century tradition of the Grand Tour. Later we learn Irénée was native to the United States and traveled to Europe "[l]ike many other young American girls of that day and this," enhancing the exoticism and adventure of touring earlier in the century.\textsuperscript{37} Though the Spinster indicates things remain the same and Americans still do the Grand Tour of Europe, their concession and the Milwaukee tourists suggest otherwise.

In addition to exhibiting the poet's letter, the Spinster offers readings from her grandmother's travel journal, as well as the poem she composed in Byron's memory. Like any good tour guide, the Spinster has practiced, but gets frequent coaching from the Old Woman:

OLD WOMAN. Skip that part! Slip down to where—
SPINSTER. Yes! Here! Do let us manage without any more interruptions! "The carriage came to a halt at the foot of the hill and my Aunt, not being too well—"
OLD WOMAN. She had a sore throat that morning.
SPINSTER. "—preferred to remain with the driver while I undertook the rather steep climb on foot. As I ascended the long and crumbling flight of old stone steps—"
OLD WOMAN. Yes, yes, that's the place! \textit{The Spinster looks up in annoyance. The Old Woman's}

\textsuperscript{37}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 6, 159.
cane taps impatiently behind the curtains.] Go on, Ariadne!
SPINSTER. "I could not help observing continually above me a man who walked with a barely perceptible limp—"
OLD WOMAN [in hushed wonder]. Yes—Lord Byron!
SPINSTER. "—and as he turned now and then to observe beneath him the lovely panorama—"
OLD WOMAN. Actually, he was watching the girl behind him!38

The sequence not only implies the Old Woman wrote the journal (revealed at the play's conclusion when we also discover Ariadne is Byron's granddaughter), but also demonstrates how the pair have performed the readings before. The Spinster's annoyance with the interruptions suggests an established pattern. Williams notes the repetitive nature of the presentation earlier in the play, too, when stage directions indicate that she speaks, "repeating automatically."39 Routine and tiresome, the Spinster's speech patterns reflect boredom, while the Old Woman relives the experience anew. She travels within her mind back to a distant country and a defining moment of her life. My point here remains that the letter and travel journal (themselves souvenirs of tourism) have become a tourist attraction. The Milwaukee couple see Byron's letter and partake of a unique New Orleans' tourist attraction, but the actual artifact remains a token of someone else's travel adventures. The Matron and her

38Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 161-162.
husband make a travel memory of the Old Woman's travel experiences.

Having seen the letter after a lengthy presentation from the travel journal, the Husband endures a brief poetry recitation, but "lunge to the door" when he hears a passing parade, and quickly disappears into the Mardi Gras celebration.\(^{40}\) As the Matron begins to follow him, the Old Woman and the Spinster request a donation. They first ask for a dollar, but rapidly lower the price to fifty cents or a quarter. The Spinster quickly pleads, "We usually accept a little money for the display of the letter. Whatever you feel you are able to give. As a matter of fact it's all we have to live on!"\(^{41}\) Oblivious to their demands, the Matron rushes into the street after her husband. The Spinster cries, "Canaille! . . . Canaille!"\(^{42}\) Thus, like Williams' landlords who call their guests Quarter Rats when rent remains unpaid, tourists become riffraff when they fail to give donations.

**Lord Byron's Love Letter**, an excellent example of Williams' focus on New Orleans' tourism, highlights tourism as an integral part of the city's economy, and demonstrates the precariousness of such a dependence. By their own admission, the Spinster and the Old Woman cannot live without donations for the viewings. The play shows the

\(^{40}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 166.
\(^{41}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 167.
\(^{42}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 167.
occasional resentment expressed by natives when tourists become too frugal or callous or distracted. With the drunken Husband, the play suggests that New Orleanians can even lose patience with those indulging themselves in the complete abandonment of Mardi Gras—the city's most famous tourist attraction. Finally, and perhaps better than any other Williams' play, *Lord Byron's Love Letter* centers on traveling, pitting those dependent on tourism against the tourists, and implying their interaction alters one's perception of self and the other.

While it retains focus on tourism and relations between landlords and tenants, *Vieux Carré* places emphasis on how visitors to New Orleans become transformed through their stays in the city. Some characters undergo positive experience, while for others the city becomes a dead-end. Gentler and more sympathetic than her incarnation in *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, Mrs. Wire in *Vieux Carré* nevertheless manages to fight with her tenants and sometimes sleeps in the hallway to monitor their comings and goings.\(^{43}\) Still, she tolerates Mary Maude's and Miss Carrie's non-payment of rent, thus breaking the pattern of Williams' other landlords.\(^ {44}\) Despite her protestations that her tenants are "less than strangers" to her, Wire shows fleeting compassion for Nightingale and experiences

\(^{43}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 73-76, and 11.
\(^ {44}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 72.
"maternal concern" for the Writer. In *Vieux Carré*, Wire acts more like the matriarch of a household of misfits, demonstrating that Williams resists depicting characters as entirely villainous in his full-length dramas. This version of Mrs. Wire not only behaves charitably, but she aspires to operate other tourist attractions in addition to letting rooms; perhaps this additional factor allows her greater tolerance of her strapped boarders.

To get herself "back in the black," Mrs. Wire decides to convert her bedroom into a dining room and serve lunches. Though Williams offers no scene depicting the lunchroom, he suggests that Wire establishes a successful business. The Writer pays his rent by working for Wire in advertising and running the restaurant, and later complains that the amount of time he devotes to it "has begun to exceed the time originally agreed on." This comment suggests that business thrives. When identified as the "proprietor" of a "rooming house," Wire "shrilly" corrects, "Restaurant and roomin' house respectfully run!" She takes pride in her lunch business, feeling that it gives her greater legitimacy. We never learn the makeup of her

45Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 65, 76, and 43.
46One has little opportunity to develop sympathy for Wire in *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* due to the brevity of the play and its central focus on Hardwicke-Moore. In his full-length plays, Williams usually makes his characters sufficiently complex that they withstand melodramatic labels like good or evil.
47Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 44-45.
48Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 44, and 71.
clientele, but the inexpensive food is advertised with the following slogan: "Meals for a quarter in the Quarter."\textsuperscript{50} Tourists probably frequent Wire's lunch business, for her courtyard also becomes a tour stop.

With "Azalea Festival trade" "swarming" all over the Quarter, Mrs. Wire harangues the Writer to get onto the streets and advertise the restaurant.\textsuperscript{51} Resisting this idea, he insults the boarding house by calling it "moldy" and "old," and Wire launches a spirited defense: "Don't talk that way about this—historical old building. Why, 722 Toulouse Street is one of the oldest buildings in the Vieux Carré, and the courtyard, why, that courtyard out there is on the tourist list of attractions!"\textsuperscript{52} Even on the phone calling for an ambulance, Wire identifies the house as, "Known to the authorities on the list of attractions."\textsuperscript{53} A capable business person, Wire understands tourists have come to the Quarter for the Festival and demands the Writer work the sizable crowd. In addition, she markets the decaying structure as "historical"—a savvy recasting of her dilapidated building. Regarding tourists as an unreliable, fickle, and temporary market, she fights for their dollars through bullying and creative advertising.

\textsuperscript{50}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 45. This mirrors Williams' own experience in New Orleans as mentioned in the last chapter.
\textsuperscript{51}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{52}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 72. The Federal Writers' City Guide describes ninety locations on its French Quarter tour and recommends eight different garden courtyards in the Vieux Carré, but makes no mention of 722 Toulouse Street. See 229-269, and 223.
\textsuperscript{53}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 88.
that puts the best possible gloss on her lackluster attractions. Indeed, her efforts do entice tourists into the courtyard.

In scene eight, Nursie reports, "Mizz Wire, the courtyard is full of them Azalea Festival ladies that paid admission to enter!" However, Williams does not leave it at this brief mention, but reminds us about the tourists in the courtyard; we hear them in scenes eight, nine, and eleven. Their voices and isolated comments act to accentuate tourism as a significant element bringing positive and negative consequences to New Orleans. Though an economic asset for Mrs. Wire, the tourists mangle the azaleas they have come to see and disrupt life for the boarders. In addition, two separate groups of tourists perceive radically different things despite little substantive change in their tours of the space.

Nursie supervises the courtyard, but she remains ineffectual in preventing the visitors from picking the azaleas off the bushes. The action symbolizes how tourists do often alter the very sights that fostered their desire to tour them. In the microcosm of Wire's courtyard, Williams provides a clear example of how tourists impact New Orleans. Tourists transform any sight they visit; eventually, any attraction can become enslaved by tourists'

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54Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 75.
55Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 77.

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demands upon it. The varied readings of the courtyard by the separate groups accentuate this point.

The first offstage voice we hear exclaims, "Edwina, Edwina, come see this dream of a little courtyard. Oh, my yaiss, like a dream." These tourists perceive the romantic, mythical version of New Orleans--the city that care forgot. The audience knows better. The house surrounding this courtyard contains an artist dying of tuberculosis, a landlady about to go mad, and a rapist. In addition, the banana palm in the "dream-like" courtyard harbors "a pack of bats."57

The second bunch of tourists has a different view of what a New Orleans' courtyard has to offer. Inside the house, after Tye finishes telling her the graphic details of a murder, Jane feels ill and staggers onto the courtyard gallery for air. Tourists see her:

TOURIST 1. Look at that!  
TOURIST 2. What at?  
TOURIST 1. There's a whore at the gallery window! Practically naked!58

This version of the courtyard tour gives us travelers who see the darker side of New Orleans--the nightlife, the sin, the squalidness, the fulfillment of closeted desires. Again, the audience knows better. Though she comes close to prostituting herself,59 Jane came to New Orleans to die

56Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 85.  
57Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 5.  
58Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 99.  
59Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 85.
and find enjoyment during the last months of her life. In short, the two tour groups rewrite the tourist attraction. To an extent, we see what we wish to see. New Orleans becomes a dream, or a nightmare, or a den of sin, depending upon a viewer's reading. Through the tourists' varied reactions to the courtyard, Williams captures the complex, elusive nature of New Orleans.

Though a recent tourist herself, Jane, frustrated by the disturbance of the courtyard tours, complains, "Those tourists down there in the courtyard! If I'd known when I took this room it was over a tourist attraction—" Tye interrupts, "It's the Festival, Babe. It ain't always Festival . . . ."60 Naturally, Jane (a short-term visitor) resents the disruption created by other tourists, a reaction common to any traveler who regrets the crowds that spoil one's experience;61 however, Tye (a long-term resident and a realist) tolerates the disruption, because life in New Orleans includes hordes of tourists. For Jane, a romantic, tourists destroy her illusions of the New Orleans' experience.

Neither tour group comprehends the reality of the environment surrounding them. The tourists do not see the actual New Orleans, but rather what they choose to see and

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60Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 83.
perhaps what they imagined they would see. The tourists, like Jane, attempt to rewrite the city according to their expectations. In *Vieux Carré*, tourism shapes city attractions, proprietors, guests, and tourists themselves. Furthermore, implicit in the script is the idea of travel and tourism as suggestible, unpredictable, and open to multiple readings for the participants— not unlike one's experience at the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival. Perhaps it is significant that in Williams' plays, characters that continue to travel tend to fare better than those who settle in New Orleans. This trend is apparent in the shorter plays, and it continues in *Vieux Carré*.

From the opening of the *Vieux Carré*, Williams calls our attention to travel. Early in the play, Nursie stumbles on Sky's "heavy knapsack" left in the hallway of the boarding house for storage. Not only does the action call attention to the prop, but Williams emphasizes it through dialogue:

NURSIE. It's got something written on it that shines in the dark.
MRS. WIRE. "Sky"— say that's his name. Carry it on upstairs with you, Nursie.  

The name itself suggests motion, the lack of grounding, a far horizon, and Williams continues to evoke the image. Nursie fails to carry the bag upstairs, and the Writer not only runs into it, but carries it into the

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62Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 6.
kitchen where it remains in light for the balance of the scene.\textsuperscript{63} The knapsack offers an obvious symbol for Sky and travel, both of which play an important role in the Writer's development.

Sky personifies travel and remains only a symbolic presence until the second half of the play when he appears at the boarding house and helps the Writer with his jammed typewriter. Sky has come to New Orleans from Florida after escaping a marriage "with the prettiest little bitsy piece of it you ever did see. There, now the [typewriter] ribbon's reversing, it slipped out of the slots like I slipped out of matrimony in Tampa."\textsuperscript{64} Though apparently attracted to his wife, Sky could not remain settled in marriage and fled. Even his stay in the Crescent City remains transitory; he plans to leave in "a day or two."\textsuperscript{65} In repairing the typewriter, Sky rescues the Writer from impotence, freeing him to write again. Furthermore, this action foreshadows their eventual departure together for the West Coast.

Ironically, the Writer records why he came to the Crescent City just as he meets Sky. In contrast to Jane's annoyance with the city's tourists, the Writer's words suggest the lazy, lethargic pace of a steamy, summer evening; he notes that "instinct . . . must have . . .

\textsuperscript{63}Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 8.
\textsuperscript{64}Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 69.
\textsuperscript{65}Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 70.
directed" him "to the Vieux Carré of New Orleans, down country as a—river flows no plan. I couldn't have consciously, deliberately, selected a better place to discover—to encounter—my true nature." His instincts must be at work when he follows Sky. As the passage implies, the Writer's time in New Orleans has been positive, allowing him to explore his sexual identity and inspiring him to create.

Like the Writer, Jane came to New Orleans from the North; however, unlike the Writer, her reasons for coming have little to do with instinct. At first, she shrouds her motivations in secrecy: "So I quit my former connections, I came down here to—[She stops short.] Well, to make an adjustment to—[Pause.]" Her hesitancy and halting speech hint to a deeper mystery, but only much later do we learn that she has come to New Orleans to die. Jane finally admits to Tye:

It hasn't been just lately I've lost weight and energy but for more than a year in New York. Some—blood thing—progressing rather fast at my age . . . I think I had a remission when I met you. A definite remission . . . here . . . like

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66 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 69.
67The Writer's counterpart in "The Angel in the Alcove" imbues New Orleans with a mystical, healing power of which he partakes in later years when he returns to the city (Williams, Collected Stories, 128). In addition, the protagonists of "The Yellow Bird," and "The Coming of Something to the Widow Holly" also experience almost magical benefits from their association with New Orleans. In the former, Alma becomes happy and wealthy (See 239). In the latter, Mrs. Holly gains a religious tranquillity thanks to the arrival of Christopher Cosmos (See 351-352).
68 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 34.
the world stopped and turned backward, or like it entered another universe—months! 69

At first, New Orleans restored her health and brought a passionate relationship into her life. Her excursion in the city becomes so significant that she compares it to visiting another universe. Time reversed itself; she became young and vibrant again, but these benefits are short-lived. Her relationship with Tye nears an end, as does her very existence. The city that once assured life metamorphoses into the city of death.

At first, Jane's trip to New Orleans offers renewal, but it becomes the journey to death. The playwright uses travel as a metaphor for the life cycle, and his characters' travel habits often highlight their position in life's course toward death. Eventually, all trips come to an end, and Williams metaphorically links death to travel earlier in the play; thus, travel becomes a constant reminder that we cannot outrun the inevitable.

Although the Champagne Girl never appears on stage, the details about her death emphasize travel. While her death will be analyzed in greater depth in the following chapter, the circumstances causing it resulted from her desire to leave New Orleans. Again, the city becomes a site of doom. After ending her sexual relationship with her mob-like boyfriend, the Champagne Girl wanted to move. As Tye tells Jane, "She was offered a deal on the West

69Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 104.
Coast, Babe. The Man said, 'No.' The Champagne Girl said, 'Yes.' So the Man . . . you don't say no to the Man—so if she's going to the West Coast it'll be packed in ice—[.]

The West offered her a new start; already associated with positive attributes through Sky, the West becomes a place of hope and renewal for the Champagne Girl too. Mentioned twice in the brief passage, and thereby demonstrating its significance, the Champagne Girl's desire to go West causes her death. Now she can only go West dead, like tourists' luggage rather than like a tourist herself. Tye continues the metaphorical connection between travel and death later in his tale, and Jane borrows the analogy during the closing scene.

Apparently used to the sudden disappearances of coworkers, Tye has a coded way to refer to their deaths:

Y'know what you say when the Man wastes somebody? You got to say that he or she has "Gone to Spain." So they tole me last night, when people ask you where's the Champagne Girl, answer 'em that the Champagne Girl's gone to Spain. —Sweet kid from Pascagoula.

The Champagne Girl's desire to travel meant a death sentence, and now her death becomes a metaphor of travel. Spain means death, and Jane's longing to visit there suggests that she accepts her own pending departure. In the closing moments of the play, just as the Writer verges on leaving with Sky, Jane explains her own itinerary:

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70 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 97-98.
71 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 98.
Well, I have travel plans, but in the company of no charming young vagrant [such as Sky]. Love Mediterranean countries but somehow missed Spain. I plan to go. Now! Madrid, to visit the Prado, most celebrated museum of all. Admire the Goyas, El Grecos. Hire a car to cross the—gold plains of Toledo.72

The passage contains three important elements. First, she uses the word Spain through Tye's context as a metaphor for death. Second, the sequence blends a discussion of the Writer's actual travel plans with Jane's journey toward death. For him, the trip to the West Coast with Sky offers untold possibilities and hope. Jane's journey alone, east to the Old World, offers only the unknown and the unimaginable. Her crossing offers no guidebooks or travel journal accounts. Third, Jane attempts to confront the uncertainty of death by creating imagery of museums filled with beautiful artworks and vistas of natural wonder. She imagines things from the manmade and natural worlds that inspire awe in her, and, simultaneously, she names actual Spanish tourist sights. The tourist attractions help mediate her acceptance of death. If death offers tourist delights such as Spain provides, she has no need for fear or dread. Traveling to Spain in her mind helps her accept her fate. She can no longer travel West with the Writer for a chance at a better life, but must make the best of what life she has left in New Orleans. Her imaginary travel eases the way.

72Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 114.
Travel offers varied outcomes for the characters in *Vieux Carré*. Getting to New Orleans often suggests salvation akin to Jane's remission, but when characters try to get out of the city, their sufferings often begin. As demonstrated by Jane, mental travel becomes one strategy for dealing with the disappointments found in New Orleans. Other characters use this gambit as a survival tactic.

Like Jane, Mrs. Hardwicke-Moore in *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, wanders distant lands through her mind, but whereas Jane appears sane, Hardwicke-Moore seems on the verge of insanity. Thus, her travels do not help her prepare for death, but assist her in negotiating reality. Knowing she must pay the rent or face eviction, Hardwicke-Moore retreats into her imagination to her Brazilian plantation. Supposedly the source of her income, the plantation may be fictional. The Writer assists her in her imaginative journey and the plantation relocates to within a "mile or two" of the Mediterranean where one can see "the white chalk cliffs of Dover" on a clear morning. Without any basis in geography, Hardwicke-Moore's fantastic travel itinerary shows she has lost touch with reality. She still inhabits her New Orleans' room, but she lives in her mind. Ultimately, Blanche makes a similar retreat to the confines of her mind, and remains Williams' best known mental traveler.

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73Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 6, 88.
A Streetcar Named Desire not only demonstrates how visitors to New Orleans become profoundly altered by their stays, but depicts how Blanche negotiates her losses through imaginary tourism. Blanche uses travel as an illusion of grandeur, as an avenue of escape, and as an attempt to remake herself. Marilyn Wesley notes, female characters often travel to create an unrestricted space as opposed to the prohibitive space associated with home.\textsuperscript{74} Blanche illustrates Wesley's point: When she left Laurel for New Orleans she hoped to reclaim her essential self, to suppress her hometown reputation as a "morally unfit" woman.\textsuperscript{75} In an effort to control her own destiny, Blanche traveled as long as she was financially able. Though it is difficult to know when she reports facts or fictions, Blanche may be truthful when she tells her sister about encountering Shep Huntleigh the prior Christmas in Miami.\textsuperscript{76} Blanche frequently associates Huntleigh with escape through both literal and imaginary travels. In a later scene, Stella wonders what Blanche is laughing at and her sister responds:

\begin{quote}
BLANCHE. Myself, myself, for being such a liar! I'm writing a letter to Shep. \textit{[She picks up the letter]} "Darling Shep. I am spending the summer on the wing, making flying visits here and there. And who knows, perhaps I shall take a sudden notion to swoop down on Dallas! How would you
\end{quote}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Williams1} Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 386.
\bibitem{Williams2} Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 315-316.
\end{thebibliography}
feel about that? Ha-ha! [She laughs nervously and brightly, touching her throat as if actually talking to Shep] Forewarned is forearmed, as they say!"—How does that sound?

STELLA. Uh-huh . . .

BLANCHE [going on nervously]. "Most of my sister's friends go north in the summer but some have homes on the Gulf and there has been a continued round of entertainments, teas, cocktails, and luncheons—" 77

Blanche creates the illusion of wildly touring all about the Southeast to entice Shep. For her, great travel activity and many social functions imply romance, worth, and status. Touring requires capital as Williams' landlords recognize, and Blanche's attitude toward travel supports this claim. Further, as Jane's arrival in New Orleans demonstrates, travel inspires desire, and, again, Blanche also takes this view. While travel often brings woe to Williams' characters, he consistently mediates it with joys such as adventure, desirability, and self-expression. Travel provides freedom, but such independence often comes at a price.

Laughing anxiously, Blanche fears Stella will not approve of her fabricated adventures, and perhaps she worries that her illusions have become increasingly transparent. Regardless, the sequence further demonstrates how Blanche uses imaginary travel as a means of seeking rescue from a former beau. She wants to insure him that she remains desirable. As the play reaches its conclusion, Blanche uses the tactic for her very survival.

77Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 325.
After Mitch rejects her, Blanche, wearing an old evening gown and rhinestone tiara, retreats to a distant dance and the longed for "moonlight swim at the old rock-quarry;" however, her mind trip abruptly halts with Stanley's arrival.\textsuperscript{78} She escapes into illusion to mediate the disappointment of Mitch's abandonment, but claims before Stanley that she wears the old clothes because Huntleigh has invited her to join him on a yacht. Using the same tactic as in her letter to Shep, Blanche imagines a trip for self-preservation: "I hadn't seen [Shep] again until last Christmas. . . . Then—just now—this wire—inviting me on a cruise of the Caribbean! The problem is clothes. I tore into my trunk to see what I have that's suitable for the tropics!"\textsuperscript{79} Stanley allows Blanche to continue her bluff. However, once he exposes Blanche's fantasy, she makes a final effort to flee through travel by attempting to wire Huntleigh. Stanley interrupts the call, and, again, derails her aspirations of escape. The rape soon follows.

Although a source of comfort and release, Blanche's dream vacations lead to her undoing. Fed up with her lying, Stanley's patience ends once he realizes her Caribbean cruise is illusory. Ironically, Blanche came to New Orleans seeking a sanctuary, and an imaginary trip rushes her to madness. Earlier, Stanley offered Blanche an

\textsuperscript{78}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 391.
\textsuperscript{79}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 393.
escape with the bus ticket back to Laurel, but returning home meant reverting to the trap she had already fled.\textsuperscript{80} Her efforts to reach Huntleigh and join him in his travels also failed. Travel, both actual and imaginary, becomes a site of destruction. She travels in flights of fantasy as a means of escape, and even when her mind finally collapses, she returns to the refuge of an imaginary excursion. Before her actual departure from the Kowalskis', Blanche imagines a vacation, and Stella and Eunice assist her in this final retreat.

Hearing the poker players' voices, Blanche begins to panic and the other women try to distract her:

\begin{quote}
EUNICE. I understand you are going on a trip.
STELLA. Yes, Blanche is. She's going on a vacation.
EUNICE. I'm green with envy.
BLANCHE. Help me, help me get dressed!\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Delighted to inspire envy, Blanche hurriedly prepares for departure. Knowing Blanche's institutionalization approaches, Stella and Eunice borrow her tactic and plant a fantasy vacation in her mind. It calms Blanche and prevents her from becoming hysterical after hearing the men's voices. For a few more minutes, Blanche remains the woman envied for her beauty, refinement, and exotic globetrotting. Making the fantasy complete, she embellishes her travel itinerary:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{80}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 376.
\item \textsuperscript{81}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 408-409.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. You know what I shall die of? [She plucks a grape] I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean. I will die—with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond mustache and a big silver watch. "Poor lady," they'll say, "the quinine did her no good. That unwashed grape has transported her soul to heaven." [The cathedral chimes are heard] And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as [chimes again] my first lover's eyes.82

The Doctor and Matron arrive as Blanche completes this poetic monologue. She will remain at sea the rest of her days, suggesting not only the constant motion of water but also a ship. Her words such as "going," "transported," "out," "dropped," and "blaze," emphasize movement. Just as her mind slips away, Blanche's last travel fantasy evokes a ship drifting out to sea, cruising an ocean with no ports of call, no need to stop. Her final sanctuary becomes the imagination.

Blanche's journey to New Orleans ends negatively with madness and confinement, and perhaps she never traveled beyond the boundaries of her mind again. Other transients, such as Jane or Oliver Winemiller (the drifting hustler of "One Arm" who perpetually travels) meet their deaths in the Crescent City. None of these characters are New Orleanians, but rather short term visitors to the city.

82Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 410.
Suddenly Last Summer presents us with a tourist of a different sort. A privileged son of New Orleans, Sebastian Venable traveled each summer away from the sweltering, stifling atmosphere of his native city. Sebastian, perhaps the best traveled Williams' character, had the fiscal means to visit such far-flung locations as the Galapagos Islands, India, the Chinese Himalayas, Cairo, New York, Paris, the Riviera, Venice, and Madrid. He and Catharine planned to go to Northern Europe, but ended their touring days unexpectedly in Cabeza de Lobo. Traveling each summer with Violet and later Catharine, Sebastian's goals were more esoteric than most tourists; he had no interest in typical attractions. He searched for God in the Galapagos, and gave Buddhism a try in China. According to Mrs. Venable, his quest for a Higher Being was hindered by the lack of "guidebooks."

Akin to Blanche's imaginary journeys, Sebastian's wanderings were partially motivated by his humanist, philosophical search for tranquillity. Of course, Sebastian and Blanche were also motivated to travel to allay the demons of physical desire, but whereas Blanche came to New Orleans hoping to escape her past, Sebastian toured the world to avoid sullying his hometown reputation. Travel results in negative outcomes for both, but New

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84 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 375.
86 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 357.
Orleans becomes the site of oppression for Sebastian, while it initially signified release for Blanche and many of the other characters.

One might view Sebastian's spiritual investigations as an effort to mediate his desires. Like the current fundamentalist Christian sects that promise to "cure" homosexuals, his observations of nature in search for God, and his brief conversion to Buddhism, suggest he needed some explanation of the world and himself.87 Ultimately, we do not know enough about Sebastian to support such speculation. Regardless, he certainly traveled in hopes of fulfilling physical desires. Despite living in a city with an active gay subculture, Williams provides no evidence that Sebastian had sexual encounters in New Orleans, but always left the country to fulfill such longings.

In Suddenly Last Summer, Violet and the Hollys deny homosexuality exists in New Orleans, suggesting it can only be found in travels abroad. Sebastian traveled for sex, and the men he picked up, the same "beggars" that spoiled his experience of the countries he visited, motivated his touring.88 He could not risk scandal by indulging himself locally. The Hollys, who exemplify Garden District propriety, identify homosexuality and violence with alien cultures:

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87Mrs. Venable was so concerned about his stay in the Buddhist monastery that she had his bank accounts frozen so he could not give away his money. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 358.
GEORGE. You got to drop it, Sister, you can't tell such a story to civilized people in a civilized up-to-date country!
MRS. HOLLY. Cathie, why, why, why!—did you invent such a tale?
CATHARINE. But, Mother, I DIDN'T invent it. I know it's a hideous story but it's a true story of our time and the world we live in and what did truly happen to Cousin Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo. . . . 89

Though Catharine's tale of cannibalism certainly commands the focus of the Hollys' wrath, George demonizes homosexuality just as vehemently. The Hollys' colonial perspective denies the existence of gays or the horrific murders of them in "civilized" countries like the United States. They imply that the ideal world contains no gay people.

Demonstrating her worldliness, Catharine takes a global view, and knows that such things happen everywhere, even in New Orleans. The most honest and multicultural voice in the play, Catharine's "liberal" perspective must be silenced as surely as her story about Sebastian. He traveled to escape such provincial attitudes, and she will likely be lobotomized by the same philosophies that caused his flight. Travel led Sebastian to his doom. As his travel companion, Catharine saw sights regarded as so unbelievable by the homebodies that they deem her insane. They will erase Catharine's travelogue along with her mind.

89Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 381-382.

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Catharine's European vacation becomes the cause of her anguish.

Like Blanche, Catharine discovers that New Orleans does not offer shelter, but imprisonment. When lobotomized, Catharine may not enjoy the luxury of imaginary travel that comforts Blanche in her madness. Doctor Cukrowicz cautions Mrs. Venable that the proposed surgery will relieve "acute disturbances," but make the patient "limited." Violet counters, "Oh, but what a blessing to them, Doctor, to be just peaceful, to be just suddenly—peaceful. . . ."90 The Doctor describes a person robbed of imagination, while Violet emphasizes the peacefulness of such a condition. The surgical "blessing" seems more like walking death, and ultimately, Catharine's fate sounds worse than Blanche's. One wonders if Sebastian was not the fortunate one.

For Catharine and Blanche, New Orleans reveals itself as a site of doom masquerading as a haven. The city was a destination for Blanche and Catharine's home, but for both it becomes a cage. Sebastian kept moving and avoided their fates. He escaped the snares of the city only to be both sexual predator and victim abroad.

On an elementary level, Williams uses travel as a device to bring characters on and off his stage. He suggests touring implies renewal and relaxation for

90Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 366.
characters such as the Writer or Jane, while frequently harboring dissipation. Tourism not only reshapes the tourist, but reconfigures the destination and its attractions. Just as New Orleans mutates thanks to tourism, we transform because of our visits to the city. Williams' use of travel not only constitutes a valuable theatrical device, but reflects the dynamism of New Orleans itself.
Chapter Four—
"What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!":¹ The Male as Object of Sexual Longing and Perpetrator of Violence

In Williams' works, desire functions on a variety of levels, such as the desire for an artistic career, the desire to rest or find peace, the desire to escape by returning to a simpler past, or the desire to be desired. Central to this litany of longings is physical desire for contact with the masculine, yet when this want is fulfilled in Williams' world, it often results in violence, death, or madness. Desire for the masculine promises some kind of salvation, but in reality often delivers punishment. Paradoxically, Williams' male characters simultaneously promise salvation and doom, and New Orleans itself perpetuates this schizophrenic notion of the male in celebrating the masculine form with all its inherent qualities, both seductive and deadly. Desire for the male links Williams' characters to the city in which they reside.

As a gay man writing in the pre-Stonewall era, Williams' interest in the male as sexual object was driven by homosexual desire masquerading as straight. Our current masculine ideal as propagated by the entertainment and fashion industries finds roots in Williams' vision of the male; he imbued his male characters with qualities that

continue to conform to our era's view of the masculine archetype. Further, just as the media today blurs sexual identity, Williams frequently undermines fixed sexual preference, making his male characters the object of both heterosexual and homosexual desires. Characters such as Stanley, Tye, or Oliver are aware of their allure, and proud of their physicality, often using these assets to advance their agendas. However, while these hypermasculine studs\(^2\) remain at the pinnacle of desirability, the playwright draws other male types (like Mitch or Dr. Cukrowicz) whose allure resides in their ability to provide security or sensitivity to those who desire them. Nevertheless, attraction to the masculine often fosters destruction. Always marginalized by the world around them, Williams' women and gay male characters become crippled souls through their attraction to males, a desire that fosters madness, mutilation, and death. The works that take New Orleans as setting, and indeed the city itself, create a site that celebrates the masculine in its pleasing and lethal incarnations.

For Williams, New Orleans was a site bound to masculine desire. By the late thirties, Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop Bar and Dixie's Bar of Music were

\(^2\)I use terms such as hypermasculine, stud, or supermasculine in reference to the male characters Williams' describes as physically attractive. They represent the male type to which other male characters often aspire, and those that male and female characters desire. They are also almost always violent and unpredictable.
hospitable and supportive of gays.  

During his first visit to the city in the winter of 1938-39, Williams saw male hustlers working Bourbon Street. More significantly, he had his "first real [homosexual] encounter" in the city after a liaison with a paratrooper during that initial stay. For a short time in the early 1940s, he lived directly across from a gay bar on Royal Street. In New Orleans, Williams discovered his sexual identity and realized that desire for the masculine drove his libido.

Although he knew "a few respectable New Orleanians, who lived 'uptown' in beautiful old mansions in the Garden District, it was the subterranean world of the Old Quarter and its habitués—'Quarter rats,' as they were called—that caught his imagination." Williams preferred the freedom he discovered in the oldest part of the city to the regulation of desire present in the more traditional values embodied by the Garden District. Then and now, the French Quarter reflects sexual fluidity.

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6Hayman, Everyone Else, 79.

7Apparently, the worst "violence" that befell Williams in his liaisons with New Orleans' males was a case of "crabs," but he wrote poignantly about being gay bashed in New York City in 1943. See Leverich, Tom, 430, and 476-477.

8Leverich, Tom, 287.
Today, the French Quarter remains firmly associated with sexual adventurism and focuses special attention on the male body. Publications geared toward a gay male readership call New Orleans "a top priority destination," and a "gay magnet." The Unofficial Gay Manual lists New Orleans as one of nineteen United States cities with enough gay bars and nightclubs to offer a variety of entertainments every evening of the week. With a 1990 population of nearly half a million, New Orleans' gay community supports two bi-monthly newspapers—Impact and Ambush. Besides typical offerings, such as gay-friendly and gay-owned business advertisements, reviews, local community reporting, and phone sex ads, both newspapers often feature photo spreads covering local festivals like Southern Decadence and Mardi Gras. Half-clad, buff male bodies are featured prominently in these sections. Yet, the gay community is not alone in highlighting the male. Mainstream publications featuring the Crescent City also celebrate the masculine form.

In New Orleans: The Passing Parade, Mardi Gras festivities are illustrated by three males wearing golden codpieces or dance belts. A special chapter devoted to

"gay Mardi Gras" features drag balls and feathered go-go boys in massive headdresses and skimpy shorts.\textsuperscript{12} The same book shows only one nearly naked female, and she acts as an illustration of the strip clubs on Bourbon Street.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, both gay and straight representations of the French Quarter highlight the masculine body to a greater extent than the feminine body; however, popular renditions of the city fail to depict the prevalence of violent crime.

It is not surprising that a city so enamored with the male form should harbor masculine violence. In 1997, New Orleans had a murder rate five times higher than that of New York City,\textsuperscript{14} and in the previous three years averaged a murder a day, a rate eight times higher than the national average.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, the high number of reported rapes (500 in 1995) indicates additional male hostility.\textsuperscript{16} The city is awash in masculine violence, and Williams transferred this powerful combination of New Orleanian male desirability and malice into his works, most famously in \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}.

Gore Vidal rightly credits Williams with establishing the image of the male as sexual object, which thereafter has influenced contemporary perceptions of the masculine body:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 12Osborne, \textit{The Passing Parade}, 123.
\item 13Osborne, \textit{The Passing Parade}, 79.
\item 14Daniel Pedersen, "Go Get the Scumbags," \textit{Newsweek} Oct. 20, 1997: 32
\item 16Pedersen, "Scumbags," 32.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
... when Tennessee produced *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he inadvertently smashed one of our society's most powerful taboos (no wonder Henry Luce loathed him): He showed the male not only as sexually attractive in the flesh but as an object for something never before entirely acknowledged by the good team, the lust of women. In the age of Calvin Klein's steaming hunks, it must be hard for those under forty to realize there was ever a time when a man was nothing but a suit of clothes, a shirt and tie, shined leather shoes, and a gray, felt hat. If he was thought attractive, it was because he had a nice smile and a twinkle in his eye. In 1947, when Marlon Brando appeared on stage [as Stanley Kowalski] in a torn sweaty T-shirt, there was an earthquake; and the male as sex object is still at our culture's center stage. ... 17

It was Stanley who was startlingly new when the play premiered. Stanley, both brutal and abusive, yet boyishly needy of Stella's love, was simultaneously attractive, dangerous, and sexy. His allure is so powerful that Stella disregards Blanche's account of the rape, and accepts Stanley's lie in order to remain his lover. In short, the masculine Stanley, highlighted as object of desire, replaces the feminine as site of desire. Certainly, *A Streetcar Named Desire* features the female body as well, most clearly perhaps in Stella's sultry descent from the Hubbells' apartment to embrace her bellowing husband. Although the female body has titillated audiences from the stage for centuries, the male body as sexual object was new, and the forties' patriarchy found it disturbing.

In the example of Henry Luce, co-founder of *Time*, Vidal suggests the hegemony was deeply disturbed by Williams' depiction of Stanley; yet, Vidal stops short of acknowledging the obvious homoerotic qualities of the character.\(^{18}\) In the half century since Stanley's debut in American culture, the physical ideal he represents has transcended the female leer to become the paragon of male lust. The hypermasculine male created by Williams and realized by Brando has become today's ideal within the gay community and the youth oriented mainstream public at large.\(^{19}\)

Outspoken critic of contemporary gay culture, Michelangelo Signorile notes that this phenomenon of the supposed heterosexual male as queer male fetish continues unabated. In interviews, Signorile found many gay men sought "straight-acting and -appearing" partners.\(^{20}\) Williams' male characters such as Stanley the confirmed heterosexual, Tye the homosexual partner for monetary

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\(^{18}\)Eric Bentley felt Brando added to this disturbing effect through his androgynous characteristics. He noted, "Brando has muscular arms, but his eyes give them the lie . . . a rather feminine actor overinterpreting a masculine role." Quoted in C. W. E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 47.

\(^{19}\) *Time* singles-out Brando as one of the twenty most influential artists or entertainers of the twentieth century, not only featuring a full page photograph of him as Stanley, but noting Brando "provided one of our age's emblematic images, the defining portrait of mass man—shrewd, vulgar, ignorant, a rapacious threat to all that is gentle and civilized in our culture." See Richard Schickel, "Marlon Brando," *Time* 8 June 1998: 134.

compensation, and Oliver the initially reluctant gay man, remain the type of men who would have sexual appeal to modern gays because they are all straight acting and appearing. Williams created a male type that he himself probably found appealing, and he objectified them in his art. As characters, these creations imbued with animal magnetism captivated audiences. Suddenly, a new, dangerous male emerged in the American theatre. One can scarcely think of Stanley Kowalski without envisioning the young Marlon Brando embodying the role. Brando, the dangerous rebel, threatened the patriarchy through masculine physicality and sexual passion. Privileged or educated men became pale reflections of masculinity in the light of Brando's Stanley, the loutish vulgarian exuding sex appeal. Not surprisingly, Stanley's type rapidly escaped the confines of the theatre into the rest of the culture.

Though often unacknowledged or overlooked, America's youth culture has been influenced by a gay aesthetic for over three decades.²¹ Today, gay culture has become almost indistinguishable from the mass marketplace. In recent years, Calvin Klein advertisements featuring Mark Wahlberg and Iowa farm boy Joel West are ostensibly pitched to the heterosexual majority, but their portraits project a homoerotic dynamic. While the influence of gay America on

the public mainstream deserves further analysis, my discussion of how the hypermasculine persona affects viewers remains the focus of this chapter. Williams negotiated same sex desire through the disguise of a heterosexual one, borrowing the sexual freedom he found in the French Quarter and tempering it with the strictures that the city's ruling classes demand. Williams' work significantly influenced the trend toward male body fetishism, and our current sensibility toward masculine identity suggests how his vision remains active in the present era.

Likening the cult of masculinity to a fundamentalist religious sect, Signorile tracks the cult's rise from "the disruptions in the gender and sexual order caused by the Depression and exacerbated by the Second World War," to McCarthyism, to the sexual revolution capped by the Stonewall riots (1969), to seventies' free love, to AIDS, and culminating at its pinnacle in the early nineties. Primarily concerned with the gay community, Signorile nevertheless acknowledges that the cult of masculinity has seeped into the dominant American culture, forcing gays to idealize an ever greater hypermasculine male. A super-straight, masculine totem results in a male type devoid of body fat to reveal chiseled, "cut" muscle definition more typical of Renaissance statuary or modern, porn stars than

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Signorile, Life Outside, 43.
attainable by the masses. Hours of daily work-outs and the latest power diets are often not adequate in overcoming genetics or the tyranny of time. Men resort to steroids in an effort to achieve the masculine ideal, willing to risk long term physical and mental health. Those who cannot or refuse to conform to the cult of masculinity are rejected by it. Gay street wisdom echoes in an advertisement for a popular gym, "No pecs, no sex." Forced celibacy and ostracism remain the fate of many gay men who do not adhere to the cult. Similar to the beauty myth forced upon women, gay men without the "right" body type are deemed undesirable or unattractive. Signorile calls this phenomenon in which a rigid standard is set to which everyone must conform, "body fascism or looksism."

The cult appeals to gay men for two primary reasons: first, it offers acceptance, indeed worship, to "vulnerable, easily exploited" men outside the corridors of power (men like Tye, Oliver, and, less so, Stanley, match this description); second, as one of Signorile's subject's

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24An interesting personal incident illustrates this point. I visited New Orleans in March 1998, and went to the Parade nightclub on Bourbon Street where tanned, buff strippers danced on the bar. The male crowd adored the dancers who gathered tips and were often fondled. The strippers were relaxed and charming in manner. They knew their special place within the community. Later that night, I went to a bar off the main streets called Rawhide. In the back room there, I observed an overweight man remove his shirt and try to join a couple in their sexual activities. Not only did the couple move away, but most other men in the back room left as well. The beautiful strippers were openly celebrated, but the heavyset man could not generate interest even in a room where many men were engaging in sex.
25Signorile, Life Outside, 28.
noted, "to feel desired and wanted . . . makes me feel superior."26 Such a thought could come from Blanche in a more honest moment, and she courts the masculine even as her ability to attract males fades. Like some women, disenfranchised gay males chase after the hypermasculine body as compensation for their lack of power. To be desired brings parity, even superiority. Such dynamics operate in and around Williams' male studs, and A Streetcar Named Desire offers the widest array of masculine types.

A Streetcar Named Desire resists simple thematic statements, but chief among its motifs is the tension between desire and death. The male exemplifies both. Blanche links the two in the opening scene when she notes, "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries."27 In one line, Williams encapsulates the central theme of the play, and we witness Blanche's descent from desire to her figurative death confined in a mental institution. While hypermasculine males like Stanley remain the most potent objects of desire, all the males seen or mentioned in the drama act as desirable icons. Mitch, Allan Grey, Shep Huntleigh, and the newspaper boy from The Evening Star, to varying degrees, ignite desire within Blanche, and add to her undoing. She tends to desire males either as a physical escape from her guilt over Allan's death, or as providers

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26Signorile, Life Outside, 31 and 20.
27Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 246.
of a safe haven and financial security. Shep Huntleigh and Mitch belong in the latter grouping.

Though Huntleigh may be a figment of Blanche's imagination, he may also be actual and a former beau, since Blanche attempts to contact him in scenes four and ten.\(^{28}\) Furthermore, she claims that she wore Shep's ATO pin during her last year at college,\(^{29}\) and that he is wealthy.\(^{30}\) Whether he exists or not, Shep is Blanche's ace-in-the-hole, the man she thinks of in her most desperate hours, one who represents a sanctuary.

After the fight during the poker night, Blanche composes a telegram intended for Huntleigh, hoping he will finance her and Stella in opening a "shop of some kind" so they can live independently of Stanley.\(^{31}\) However, Shep is now married, which adds to Blanche's hesitancy in calling upon him. Nevertheless, Blanche thinks of him less in physical or emotional terms than as a means of survival. Shep's rescue would offer escape from financial ruin, but little nurturing, and Blanche wants more.

Mitch is the ultimate paradox of the masculine complex of desire and death. For Blanche, he represents the salvation which she has long sought, but he proves unable to rise above social convention. Blanche admits to Stella that she does "want Mitch . . . very badly," but her

\(^{28}\) Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 317, and 399.
\(^{29}\) Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 393.
\(^{30}\) Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 394.
\(^{31}\) Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 317.
desire ranks third in a list of wants headed by "rest" and "to breathe quietly again!" The home Mitch can provide appeals most to her, as well as his sensitivity rather than his physical attributes—a stark contrast to the dynamics of Stanley and Stella’s relationship. Devoted to his mother’s care, Mitch appears gentle and respectful in his courtship of Blanche. One suspects there was a time that Blanche would not have bothered with Mitch, but he has become exactly what she needs: docile, shyly sensitive, domestic, a provider. Mitch has been trained as a husband by a mother who shapes his every move. He hurries home to look after his mother after each outing with his poker buddies, and he implies that he has gone to her to discuss marriage with Blanche. Nevertheless, Mitch harbors potential violence and proves more complicated than he initially appears.

When Blanche begs Mitch to marry her, he cruelly observes, "I don’t think I want to marry you any more... You’re not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother." His rejection and attempted rape of Blanche pushes her into fanciful memories of lost youth; Stanley discovers her, and completes the cycle of descent set in motion by the lesser man. Though Mitch is not her executioner, he pushes Blanche toward her ruin, and

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32 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 335.
34 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 390.
Stanley's rape completes her undoing. Unfortunately, Blanche discovers that Mitch has become incapable of loving her because of the gossip about her promiscuous past. He readily believes the worst of her, and condemns her to further isolation and despair. Mitch proves as lethal as Stanley, but without the physical violence of rape.

While Mitch and Shep represent potential havens for Blanche, her doomed, young husband and the newspaper boy inspire something altogether different. Both youthful, attractive, and innocent, these young men trigger Blanche's deepest love and physical desire. They remind her of the purity, simplicity, and stability of her adolescence at Belle Reve, and embody the absolute opposite of Stanley.

We learn very little about Allan Grey's physical appearance, but he clearly was the love of Blanche's unhappy life. Stella describes him as "extremely good-looking," and reports that "Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human!" Blanche's overpowering desire for Allan made him seem god-like; her feelings for him went beyond bodily lust to a spiritual plane. As if immortal, Allan remains active in her imagination, an ideal that cannot be displaced or disrupted.

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35Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 364.
In what is perhaps the most famous monologue Williams wrote, Blanche describes Allan: "There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking—still—that thing was there." After falling in love at sixteen, she rushed into marriage despite an instinctual apprehension about Allan's sexual identity. Their marriage apparently lasted only a short time before she discovered his homosexuality and confronted him. During their union, Blanche was overwhelmed by passionate feelings, "I didn't know anything [my emphasis] except I loved him unendurably." Her physical and spiritual desire for Allan overwhelmed and dominated her being, making her blind to any signs of his inability to reciprocate her adoration.

For Blanche, Allan was the paragon of masculine desirability. Both physically handsome and artistically gifted, Allan was an ideal combination of masculine beauty and aesthetic sensitivity. In death his myth expands, and she shall never find his equal. He has become the perfect standard of the desirable male. Blanche finds qualities of her husband in other men, such as their youth or sensitivity, but these are illusions of the god-like Allan, offering only transitory consolation as she relives the past. Allan, the exceptional, matchless masculine object,

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36 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 354.
37 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 354.
became consumed by his own masculine desire which fostered self-loathing and culminated in suicide.\textsuperscript{38}

Widowed as a teenager, Blanche's guilt for her part in Allan's suicide, cripples her from that dreadful evening at Moon Lake to the moment she confesses the story to Mitch some two decades later.\textsuperscript{39} In all those years, Blanche never finds her desire for another to equal the depth of her feelings for Allan. Calling on the image of light as a metaphor for her overflowing love, Blanche tells Mitch that after her husband's death, "the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that's stronger than this—kitchen—candle . . . ."\textsuperscript{40} Blanche's subsequent promiscuity might be viewed as a desperate attempt to re-ignite her desire for love again, even if that love never

\textsuperscript{38}I am not suggesting that Williams approves of the death and isolation that visits his homosexual characters. It has always seemed to me that they act as a counterpoint to the homophobia that has dominated our culture much of this century. They are often tragic victims and Williams puts them on his stage to highlight social injustice. Unfortunately, many gay critics condemn Williams as self-loathing or psychologically troubled and see his gay characters as expresses of homophobia. See John M. Clum, Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 166; Georges-Michel Sarotte, Like a Brother. Like a Lover: Male Homosexuality in the American Novel and Theater from Herman Melville to James Baldwin, trans. Richard Miller (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1978) 109; and de Jongh, Not in Front of the Audience, 70.

\textsuperscript{39}Williams never provides Blanche's exact age, but she eloped with Allan when she was sixteen and must be in her mid-thirties by the action of the play. Stella says Blanche's marriage to Allan was a fairly long time ago. Further, she stops putting birthday candles on Blanche's cake at twenty-five, although she implies her sister is older than that number. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 354, and 364-365.

\textsuperscript{40}Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 355.
approaches the intensity and purity of her feelings for Allan.

The cause of her dismissal from teaching, Blanche's attraction to teenage boys is a constant search for Allan's replacement, worshiping of the male form:

After the death of Allan—intimacies with strangers was all I seemed able to fill my empty heart with . . . I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection—here and there, in the most-unlikely places—even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy but—somebody wrote the superintendent about it—41

At first glance, Blanche's desire appears purely sensual, but she longs not only for the physical but the spiritual union of love. She wants the kind of love that finds expression in freely giving over one's body to the object of one's multiple, complicated desires. Nevertheless, a strong physical component remains in Blanche's pursuit of comfort through anonymous sexual encounters.

She implies that her marriage was never consummated, that she "failed [Allan] in some mysterious way."42 Thus, she searches for the spiritual union that Allan represented, hoping to couple it with the physical passion she finds with the young men who are Allan's pale reflections. Although Allan cannot ever be replaced, Blanche remains haunted by the possibility of rediscovering

41Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 386.
42Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 354.
him. The newspaper boy attracts her, in part, because he recalls Allan's youth and sensitivity.

Though Williams provides no information about the physical appearance of the collection boy from The Evening Star, the stage directions and lines indicate that Blanche is attracted by the young man's innocence: he reminds her of Allan. Like Allan, the collection boy represents the unattainable ideal, a fleeting perfection that remains untouched, untainted, and unknowable. For the brief moments of the scene, Blanche experiences the illusion of her long lost love suddenly returning in the flesh.

While making his rounds, the collection boy nearly got caught in a rain storm, but escaped inside for a soft drink. Blanche guesses he had a chocolate soda:

YOUNG MAN.  No, ma'am. Cherry.
BLANCHE [laughing].  Cherry!
YOUNG MAN.  A cherry soda.
BLANCHE.  You make my mouth water.43

Williams was particularly proud of his comic abilities, and in this moment, his repetition of the word cherry highlights the sexual connotations of the exchange. The boy is oblivious to such a content, but in her laughter, Blanche reveals that she interprets it as more than a simple exchange of information. She views the cherry soda as a sign of the young man's virginity, which compounds Blanche's attraction to him.

43Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 338.
Discovering that Blanche has no money, the collection boy starts to leave, and she calls on him for a light of her cigarette. "He turns back shyly," lights Blanche's cigarette, and begins to exit again. She calls out to him once more, "he turns again, still more uncertainly."\textsuperscript{44} Blanche lapses into reverie comparing the rainy, New Orleans afternoon to eternity, and reaches out to touch him. She sinks into memories of another boy whom she loved with her whole being, and the music of the "Blue Piano" starts to swell. She kisses him "softly and sweetly" on the mouth, then hurries him out of the apartment. She admits, "It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good—and keep my hands off children. . . . She stands there a little dreamily after he has disappeared."\textsuperscript{45} Her bit of eternity comes to an end as Mitch appears. Blanche's desire of long lost love returns to the more practical desire for safety and security embodied by Mitch.

Virginal, innocent young men remind Blanche of a bygone era when anything seemed possible, and it follows that Stanley, the older, hypermasculine, potent, and worldly male, should represent a new world order. He drew Stella away from the DuBois family estate, and he now seems to command his wife's loyalties over her old family ties. Yet, Blanche comprehends Stanley's physical allure.

\textsuperscript{44}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 337.
\textsuperscript{45}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 339.
Early in the play, Blanche exhibits attraction toward her brother-in-law. In scene two, she admits to flirting with him, but after the brutality of the poker night fight, she rapidly reassesses her view of the man in their escalating conflict over Stella's loyalties. Blanche complains that Stanley is "common," that he has "an animal's habits," and is "sub-human" and "ape-like." Stanley overhears this name-calling in scene four, and their worlds collide during the balance of the play. His rambunctious, noisy behavior gets on Blanche's nerves (as when he searches for a clean shirt banging through the bureau drawers or in his frequently slamming doors). Blanche quickly comes to view Stanley as her "executioner," but he consistently dominates Stella's desire.

The battle between Blanche and Stanley for Stella's attention never seems in question. Metaphorically, Stanley represents the strength and regenerative power (sex) that the DuBois family lacked. Stella perceived that a fulfilled life at Belle Reve was no longer possible; she escaped, and met Stanley. However, Blanche clings to the past, denying the need for change that Stanley represents. She views the Kowalski union as demeaning to her little

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46 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 285.
47 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 322.
48 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 323.
49 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 328, and 367.
50 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 351.
sister, but Stella regards Stanley as her welcomed rescue from a barren existence. Stella will remain devoted to her postwar male, confident in his views, physicality, and future promise. He remains the primary object of masculine desire in the play.

Stella loves her husband, and the sexual component in their relationship holds them together. As she explains after their rough and tumble poker night fight, "But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem-unimportant." Stella overlooks Stanley's more boorish qualities because of the sexual passion they generate together. In addition, Stella is "sort of-thrilled" by Stanley's aggressive, wild behavior like his breaking all the light bulbs in their honeymoon suite or throwing the radio out of the window. In short, Stella finds Stanley's hypermasculinity attractive. Stanley is dangerous, uncontrollable, and vastly different from the sophisticated, upper class males Stella must have encountered while growing-up at Belle Reve. He offered an escape from the DuBois' sensibility, and Stanley realizes their marriage marked an important change for the better in Stella's life: "I pulled you down off them columns and how you loved it, having them colored lights going! And wasn't we happy together, wasn't it all

51 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 321.
52 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 313.
okay till she showed here?" In addition to rescuing Stella from the decaying Southern aristocracy, Stanley also acknowledges in these lines that a passionate sex life remains significant in binding the Kowalskis together.

In a brief sequence cleverly disguised by Williams' wicked sense of humor, the playwright infers that Stanley is well-endowed. Such a suggestion adds power to his image as a potent, male sex object. After their night on the town together, Blanche and Stella return to the apartment interrupting the poker game. As they change clothes, Blanche wonders if Mitch's career will advance, and Stella reports that Stanley is the only one of the group "likely to get anywhere." Stella maintains that Stanley's looks and manner make it obvious he will find continued success at work:

BLANCHE. I've looked at him.
STELLA. Then you should know.
BLANCHE. I'm sorry, but I haven't noticed the stamp of genius even on Stanley's forehead.
STELLA. It isn't on his forehead and it isn't genius.
BLANCHE. Oh. Well, what is it, and where? I would like to know.
STELLA. It's a drive that he has.

In Stella's second line of the exchange, we are left to briefly consider what gifts Stanley possesses beyond the intellectual. The mind and body polarity is implicit in the women's discussion, and we leap to the latter as

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53 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 377.
54 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 292.
55 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 293.
Stanley's strength. Cunningly, Williams suggests that Stanley's "genius" resides in his crotch before Stella more diplomatically states his "drive" makes her husband special, but that word too indicates an inherent, biological factor working in Stanley's favor. He is the prototype of the post World War Two, American male, driven by ambition and an unshakable confidence in his masculinity. He appeals to both women and men as seed bearer or as man's man or as sexual toy, but remains dangerous and threatening.

Stanley rapes Blanche after a fierce battle, and her mind finally breaks; led off to a state asylum by the gentlemanly doctor, she utters what is perhaps the most famous exit line of the American theatre. Indeed, it would seem that Blanche has been treated more kindly by strangers than males such as her brother-in-law or her unofficial fiance. Blanche's desire for the male has brought insanity and confinement; she is silenced. Stanley's supermasculine assertion of power, anger, and dominance, not only destroys Blanche, but forces Stella to accept duplicity and lies.

Blanche informs her sister of Stanley's rape, but Stella remains loyal to her husband and cherished lover. As Blanche bathes for her final exit from the household, Stella and Eunice pack her things and the former wonders if she is doing the right thing:

STELLA. I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.
EUNICE. Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going.\textsuperscript{56}

Stella and Eunice, the wives of working-class males who occasionally slap them around, have become hard-bitten realists forced into subservience by the male domination around them. Blanche is driven mad by masculine desire, and Stella is silenced by it. Both sisters will live in a world of illusions. The closing scene of \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire} reminds us of the totalitarian power male desire wields in Williams' world; he recycles the type of male he so vividly created in Stanley repeatedly.

Written after the liberation of Stonewall and long after Williams' reputation was secure, \textit{Vieux Carré} celebrates the male as the blatant object of both heterosexual and homosexual desire. Tye McCool, a barker for a strip joint currently sponging off his dying lover, Jane Sparks, constitutes the object of desire for both Jane and the young Writer. Though rapidly befriending Jane, the Writer exhibits a lustful fascination with Tye.

Virile and confident, Tye becomes vainly "absorbed" combing his hair before a mirror. He notes, "Well, I ain't paid to make a bad appearance at work."\textsuperscript{57} He knows people find him handsome and capitalizes on his ability to attract others' sexual interest. Tye revels in the attractiveness and allure of his body. In his underwear or perhaps even

\textsuperscript{56}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 405-06.
\textsuperscript{57}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 108.
naked, Tye rubs his crotch in front of Jane and the Writer while making a sexual remark. Although this action embarrasses his audience, Tye remains utterly relaxed with his exposed body; Jane places a silk robe over his shoulders, and Tye takes the opportunity to embrace her saying, "Mmm. Good. Feels good." The silk accentuates the tactile, sensuality of Tye's being and manner. While polite society as represented by Jane and the Writer shuns such public, physical displays, Tye celebrates the sensual at every opportunity. However, after the Writer's departure from their room, we learn that Tye openly rubbed his groin intentionally as he wanted Jane to notice the Writer's reaction. Proud of the power of his body, Tye wants to expose the fact that men desire him. Nevertheless, he asserts a homophobic stance, often using the word "faggot" as an expression of his contempt for those who are gay, or who are suspect, such as artists. His arrogance permits him to retain a sense of superiority.

Although ostensibly straight, the lure of money allows him to market his body to those whom he professes to despise. Arriving home drunk and nearly incapable of walking, Tye confesses to the Writer that he has allowed a man to perform oral sex on him for a payment:

TYE: Once I—passed out on—Bourbon Street—late night—in a dark doorway—woke up—this guy, was

58 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 29-30.
59 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 33.
60 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 31.
takin' liberties with me and I don't go for that stuff—
WRITER: I don't take advantages of that kind, I am—going back downstairs, if you're comfortable now . . .
TYE: I said to this guy, 'Okay, if you wanto blow me, you can pay me one hunnerd dollars—before, not after.'

Later in this scene, Nightingale (the dying gay artist who shares his room with the Writer) mistakes Tye for the Writer, and makes a sexual advance. Tye storms out to the room exclaiming, "Both of you git this straight. No goddam faggot messes with me, never! For less'n a hundred dollars!" Both moments demonstrate that despite Tye's homophobia and protestations, he is sexually available to other men for a payment.

Tye remains the rare example in Williams' canon of an onstage hypermasculine character openly acknowledging same gender sexuality. His characterization not only suggests that sexual identity is unstable, but also, perhaps more significantly, that a male can be the object of desire for both women and other men. In Tye, Williams aligns homosexual desire directly to the hypermasculine, alpha stud rather than consigning it to the sensitive, misunderstood, artistic boy. Nevertheless, Tye remains firmly anchored to Jane as sexual partner; thus,

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61 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 42.
62 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 45.
63 Williams implies some of his other studs (notably Bill in Small Craft Warnings) might be available to other men.
64 They make love at the conclusion of scene four. Williams neatly defuses the homoerotic qualities so obvious in all that has gone
heterosexual desire continues to dominate, although Williams undermines its power.

Poorly educated as evidenced by his dialogue, Tye's body remains his greatest asset. As Signorile's research indicates, desirability makes disenfranchised males feel empowered. Tye gains the upper hand when offering himself to men for one hundred dollars—a large sum of money in 1938. In short, Tye's body gives him power over people with superior educational and social backgrounds. Of course, Tye also uses his physical attributes as a weapon against both women and gay men.

Jane meets Tye haphazardly and rapidly installs him in her apartment, indulging her desires for him. She recounts their meeting:

We met by chance on Royal Street when a deluge of rain backed me into a doorway. Didn't know you were there behind me until you put your hand on my hip and I turned to say, "Stop that!" but didn't because you were something I'd never encountered before—faintly innocent—boy's eyes. Smiling. Said to myself, "Why not, with nothing to lose!" Of course you pleasure me, Tye!—I'd been alone so long . . . [She touches his throat with trembling fingers. He leans sensually back against her. She runs her hand down his chest.] Silk on silk is—lovely . . . regardless of the danger.65

Jane's lines demonstrate the duality of her desire for the masculine. She acknowledges that she lusts for him, perhaps even loves him, but simultaneously recognizes his

before, and returns Tye to the hypermasculine icon of female desire. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 47.
65Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 34.
potential threat to her well-being. As the play progresses, Jane tolerates Tye's drunkenness, drug use, sponging, and infidelities less and less. Finally, she packs Tye's belongings and attempts to kick him out of her room. Tye does not leave willingly. Unable to dissuade Jane in her plans, Tye resorts to physical force and rapes her. The Writer realizes violence is occurring in his neighbors' room, but Mrs. Wire confuses the sound of the rape with the sounds of physical passion. Acknowledging our culture's tendency to blame the victims of rape for the crime, Williams highlights how the violence of rape is often interpreted as overzealous love-making. Indeed, we are uncertain how to interpret the scene until later when Jane states she did not want to have sex with Tye.

TYE. Christ, what are you crying about. Didn't I just give you one helluva Sunday afternoon ball, and you're cryin' about it like your mother died.
JANE. You forced me, you little pig, you did, you forced me.
TYE. You wanted it.
JANE. I didn't.

The rape does not shatter Jane's mind like Stanley's rape of Blanche, but it undermines her resolve to remove Tye from her room. She resigns herself to his domination. Tye will stay because Jane's remaining short life with an attractive, drug-addled, grifting rapist is preferable to a death alone. Thus, even after its most violent expression,
the masculine object retains centrality. Although Tye represents violence, destruction, and marginalization, Jane clings to him—death's representative. Tye makes the connection between death and desiring women explicit in a story he relates to Jane.

Tye explains that the headliner for the strip club where he is employed, known simply as the Champagne Girl, is dead. She was murdered by "The Man—no other name known by." 69 The Champagne Girl was murdered because she refused to continue to have sex with The Man, so he turned his three, black dogs on her and they devoured her. 70 The Champagne Girl's death is reminiscent of Sebastian's. Both murders result from masculine desire fulfilled or denied, but in Vieux Carré, Williams identifies the killer without the overlay of character personality. The Man is murderer. Man destroys and kills when one impends his desire.

In Vieux Carré, Williams labels the male as doom, and Tye directs his greatest violence toward women. But the play also privileges homosexual desire like few of the playwright's dramas. While Tye comes near to physical violence against the Writer and Nightingale, he never fulfills this threat. Nevertheless, Tye fosters negative changes in the Writer who grows more callous and eventually rejects Nightingale. The gay men reflect the cycle of life: The young Writer's career just begins, along with

69 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 97.
70 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 98.
his awakening sexuality, while Nightingale's life nears an end. Both men enjoy sex, but for different reasons. For the Writer, desire represents the unfolding of his personality and discovery of the world. For Nightingale, sexual contacts help him defy disease and his approaching death. They make apt roommates.

The Writer has experienced only one gay encounter and believes he loved this paratrooper of his one-night-stand.\(^{71}\) In tenderly seducing the Writer, Nightingale promises sex will "help" him get over the disappointing romance and his sense of isolation: "You are alone in the world, and I am, too."\(^{72}\) Though the liaison between the two never approaches love, the humanity in what they share sharply contrasts with the volatile relationship between Jane and Tye. As artists, Nightingale and the Writer are not examples of the Williams' stud, but his victims. The Writer's interest in Tye promotes detrimental changes.

Throwing off his robe, Nightingale pleads for the young man's attention:

NIGHTINGALE. Hold me! Please, please hold me.
WRITER. I'm afraid I'm tired, I need to sleep and . . . I don't want to catch your cold.
[Slowly with dignity, Nightingale rises from the cot and puts his silk robe on.]
NIGHTINGALE. And I don't want to catch yours, which is a cold in the heart, that's a hell of a lot more fatal to a boy with literary pretensions.\(^{73}\)

\(^{71}\text{Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 21 and 25.}\)
\(^{72}\text{Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 25.}\)
\(^{73}\text{Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 50.}\)
As Nightingale notes, the once shy and hesitant Writer has become cold and uncaring. The Writer's disinterest in Nightingale could be attributed to his infatuation with Tye, which has shifted his attention from a man who has shown him concern and affection to the stud who shows him only blatant contempt and offers himself physically for hire through monetary payment alone. Though not overtly violent, the Writer transforms toward insensitivity and selfishness due to the influence of the hypermasculine. Masculine desire affects Nightingale more harshly.

Dying from tuberculosis, Nightingale loses his job, and Mrs. Wire removes him from her boarding house and places him in a charity hospital to die. Mrs. Wire's motivation for this action is ostensibly Nightingale's unemployment and illness, but she is also concerned that his actions threaten her life and reputation. She declares, "He's called me a fuckin' ole witch, yes, because I stop him from bringin' pickups in here at midnight that might stick a knife in the heart of anyone in the buildin' after they done it to him." Mrs. Wire thus acknowledges that Nightingale's indulgence of desire for the male threatens the order and safety of the house as fully as any contagious disease. She fears the violence Nightingale's desire might unleash upon them all. Indeed, early in the

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74 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 72.
75 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 73.
play, Nightingale mistakes Tye for the Writer and tries to seduce him. The threat of violence hovers over the scene:

NIGHTINGALE'S VOICE. I thought that I was visiting a friend.
TYE'S VOICE. 'Sth that how you visit a friend, unzippin' his pants an' pullin' out his dick?
NIGHTINGALE'S VOICE. I assure you it was a mistake of—identity . . .
TYE [becoming visible on the side of the bed in the writer's cubicle]. This ain't my room. Where is my ole lady? Hey, hey, Jane!76

Jane's appearance in the hall during this exchange perhaps prevents Tye's anger from progressing from verbal abuse to physical violence.77 Nightingale innocently believed he was sexually engaging the Writer, his sometimes willing, temporary partner, but Tye viewed it as an attack. Set in motion by Nightingale's desire for the male, the incident isolates the two homosexuals even among the collection of misfits inhabiting the boarding house.

Nightingale's departure is not unlike Blanche's from the Kowalski home. He carefully collects family heirlooms and prepares himself for "a public appearance" by combing his hair and applying makeup.78 Just as Blanche is attended by two state employed health care workers, Nightingale is finally carried out of the boarding house on a stretcher by

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76Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 45.
77In the short story, "In Memory of an Aristocrat," Carl earns money through attacking gay men and robbing them, but Williams offers too little about the character for analysis. See Tennessee Williams, Tennessee Williams Collected Stories (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 82-83. To his credit, Tye apparently remains docile as long as he receives payment for sex.
78Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 91-92.
hospital interns.\textsuperscript{79} Like Blanche, Nightingale becomes marginalized, placed in the care of the state as one no longer socially functional.\textsuperscript{80} In \textit{Vieux Carré}, Williams demonstrates that the desire for the masculine can be as destructive for men as for women.

Nightingale's fate seems mild when compared to Sebastian's in \textit{Suddenly Last Summer}. In Williams' "Gothic melodrama,\textsuperscript{81} the typical male stud, as well as his gay victim, remains off the stage, but the on stage characters review the destruction wrought by the hypermasculine. \textit{Suddenly Last Summer} centers on Catharine Holly's fate, but before discussing her, I will examine Sebastian. Like his beautiful cousin, Sebastian became the victim of masculine desire.

Williams suggests that Sebastian was youthful and fit. Judging by photographs that Mrs. Venable shows to Dr.

\textsuperscript{79}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 102.
\textsuperscript{80}The linkage between women and gay men in Williams' works reflects a similar dynamic in current gender roles. Signorile notes that with the discovery of AIDS, "In much of the public's eyes—and certainly in the eyes of many gay men—it was the submissive 'feminine' role in homosexual sex that led to disease. Being healthy was now associated with taking the 'manly' role in sex, the top." Masculinity became limited to the penetrater in both gay and straight sex. The vessels for the penis (gay male "bottoms" and women) are often regarded as diseased, unworthy, and inferior (See \textit{Life Outside}, 67). Gay men and women are linked further as the cult of masculinity and the beauty myth act in much the same way (See \textit{Life Outside}, xxv). We have returned to an era when Williams' studs are the only acceptable model for masculine desire. Soft, poetic boys such as Allan Grey would be ostracized by the gay community today, just as surely as they were shunned by the culture at large when \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire} premiered. Williams' icons of masculine desire remain powerfully active.
Cukrowicz, Sebastian seemed almost ageless. The pictures were taken twenty years apart, and the doctor must guess which is older by the aging of the photographic paper rather than its subject. Mrs. Venable claims that Sebastian had the "character to refuse to grow old," and that he observed a Spartan diet, "One cocktail before dinner, not two, four, six—a single lean chop and lime juice on a salad in restaurants famed for rich dishes." Sebastian evokes an aura of the vampiric in his youthful appearance and bird-like eating habits, and this impression intensifies when we learn of his proclivities and delights.

Sebastian's mother describes him as, "a snob about personal charm in people, he insisted upon good looks in people . . . he always had a little entourage of the beautiful and the talented and the young!" Furthermore, Mrs. Venable claims that Sebastian's attitude toward life had a grandeur and scope not seen since the "great Renaissance princes," which is exactly how she remembers him and how she wishes him to be remembered—regal, unique, and worthy of adoration. Though her son died at forty, Mrs. Venable claims he was chaste and led a celibate life. According to his mother, then, Sebastian was ageless and timeless, a saint-like, spiritual creature, who worshipped

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83 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 360.
both culture and beauty like a modern Renaissance man,
forever denying bodily hungers of all types; however,
Catharine reveals the darker side of Sebastian's
personality, which diametrically opposes her aunt's vision
of the man.

According to Catharine, Sebastian's appreciation of
personal charm, youth, and beauty in those surrounding him
possessed a distinctly visceral taint:

Fed up with dark ones, famished for light ones:
that's how he talked about people, as if they
were—items on a menu.—"That one's delicious-
looking, that one is appetizing," or "that one is
not appetizing"—I think because he was really
nearly half-starved from living on pills and
salads . . . .87

Her memories are of a man not only famished for
nutritional food, but for the fulfillment of homosexual
desires as well. Traveling for the first time without his
mother's scrutiny, and perhaps tired of sublimating his
forbidden appetites, Sebastian (according to Catharine)
ceased writing his poem, "wasn't young any more," and
changed his habits from cruising in the evening to the
afternoon.88 Like a vampire exposed to sunshine,
Sebastian's youth seemed to vanish, and his physical
desires for men became fatally destructive as he pursued
the street hustlers in the light of day. The young men on
the streets of Cabeza de Lobo that Catharine procured for
Sebastian, as Violet had done in all the summers before,

87Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 375.
turned on their benefactor, murdering him and devouring pieces of his body. As a wealthy, educated man, Sebastian had been the alpha male, but his exploitation of disadvantaged, desperate young men brought a sudden reversal to this role. Both exploiter and exploited, Sebastian used the boys to satiate his sexual desire and, in turn, he became food for them in a feast of frenzied rage. Sebastian was simultaneously the perpetrator and victim of masculine desire.

Similarly, the young men with "those gorging fierce little empty black mouths" were simultaneously Sebastian's icons of desire and his bringers of death.\textsuperscript{89} Perhaps justified in their rage, they remain the most savage, frightening examples of the destructive power of masculinity in Williams' work. The primitive, ritualistic violence of these young men on the streets of a foreign city represent the dark suppressed side of Stanley or Tye, as well as the murderous impulses unleashed by Oliver Winemiller in "One Arm," discussed later. In Williams' works, men who desire other men often meet with death, while women often go mad, left to die in isolation.

The threat of madness hovers around Catharine in Suddenly Last Summer, and she will be punished for revealing Sebastian's longings rather than for indulging her own desires. Although the adversaries in the play are

\textsuperscript{89}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 422.
women, Mrs. Venable acts as a male surrogate and brandishes male power icons such as cigarettes and alcohol, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Violet must continue the duplicity of the masculine cult that killed her son in order for him to live on untainted in memory. Catharine's story of Sebastian's death is unacceptable, because she reveals her cousin sought sexual gratification from males; Violet must silence her niece by labeling her insane and having her lobotomized under the pretense of providing her with the best available mental health care.

The concluding line of the play highlights the possibility that Catherine's story of seduction and cannibalism is accurate; her fate, confinement in Lion's View to "cut this hideous story out of her brain," compels Williams' audience to confront the operation as an inhuman act meant to stifle the truth. We are forced to acknowledge that her tale (like Blanche's revelation of the rape) is being violently suppressed. Ironically, Catherine is not punished for her own desire of the male, but for acknowledging that her cousin indulged such appetites.

90 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 423.
91 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 423.
92 Jacqueline O'Connor sees the suppression of the truth as the key issue in both plays rather than the forces of male domination. See Dramatizing Dementia: Madness in the Plays of Tennessee Williams (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997) 65.
While Dr. Cukrowicz inspires physical desire in Catherine, he ultimately acts more as her champion and protector than a sexual object. Holding the doctor tightly against her body, Catharine pleads:

Let me! Let! Let me! Let me, let me, oh, let me... [She crushes her mouth to his violently. He tries to disengage himself. She presses her lips to his fiercely, clutching his body against her. Her brother George enters.] Please hold me! I've been so lonely. It's lonelier than death, if I've gone mad, it's lonelier than death!  

Dr. Cukrowicz functions not unlike the doctor in A Streetcar Named Desire. Both are physicians who offer healing to the women that gravitate to them rather than act as objects of passion. They may be physically alluring, but their intellectual capabilities and promised chivalric rescue of the desperate heroines form the basis of their appeal. Both offer a final escape once the women have been broken by hypermasculine power. The doctor is the only character to whom Catharine can turn for help. Violet clearly wants her niece confined to an institution for the rest of her life and will stop at nothing to achieve this goal. The nurse attending Catharine is a paid servant under Mrs. Venable's control, and Mrs. Holly and her son have abandoned Catharine to her fate in hopes of expediting access to the one-hundred thousand dollars left the family in Sebastian's will. The Hollys fear Violet will contest

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Sebastian's bequest, delaying their access to the money.\textsuperscript{94} Catharine becomes another sacrifice to Sebastian's masculine desire, acted upon rather than active. A sexual scandal drove Catharine to Europe with Sebastian in the first place.

Resisting male domination propelled Catharine toward her current predicament. Like Blanche's confrontation with Allan during the Varsouviana at Moon Lake, Catharine's downfall began on a dance floor at a Mardi Gras ball when she confronted a young man who had betrayed her. Mrs. Venable would have us believe that the incident was Catharine's fault, and that she created a "scandalous scene,"\textsuperscript{95} but her niece tells a different version of the events.

Arriving at the ball with a date who rapidly becomes drunk, Catharine decided to leave alone when she was stopped and offered a ride by another man. She accepts the invitation, but he does not take her home immediately: "We stopped near the Duelling Oaks at the end of Esplanade Street. . . . Stopped!—I said, 'What for?'—He didn't answer, just struck a match in the car to light a cigarette in the car and I looked at him in the car and I knew 'what for'!"\textsuperscript{96} Though Catharine does not explain exactly what occurred between them, she implies that she was sexually

\textsuperscript{94}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 381.
\textsuperscript{95}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 391-392.
\textsuperscript{96}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 398.
attacked. After the incident, her escort reports that his wife is pregnant, and they had "better forget" the drive to Duelling Oaks. Unwilling to do so, Catharine returns to the ballroom, beats the man in the face and chest, and creates the scandal that motivates Sebastian to take her to Europe for the summer.97

This incident was traumatic enough that it caused Catharine to objectify herself, reporting details in her journal as though they were events happening in another woman's life. She says that her feelings became like those one has in dreams, and states, "Suddenly last winter I began to write my journal in the third person."98 Later, Catharine illustrates her point more vividly:

CATHARINE. If you don't believe me, read my journal of Paris!—"She woke up at daybreak this morning, had her coffee and dressed and took a brief walk—"

DOCTOR. Who did?

CATHARINE. She did. I did—99

Caught in circumstances not of her own making, Catharine is branded as a hysterical woman disappointed by an affair with a married man. Rather than remain silent, she confronted her attacker, ostracizing herself from New Orleans' society. The incident marks how masculine forces pushed her into decline. Ironically, traveling to Europe was supposed to rescue her from male domination, but she

witnesses its most violent expression in her cousin's murder.

Catharine, devastated by the young man's attack, became distanced from herself. Perceptually, her existence was no longer her own, and she lived as though she was someone else. Her condition was a direct result of heterosexual desire. Leaving New Orleans with Sebastian was meant to provide an escape from the influences of masculinity, but resulted in Catharine's total subservience to them. As sole witness to Sebastian's being devoured by the objects of his desire, Catharine becomes the final sacrifice to gay masculine desire in her pending lobotomy. Masculine desire's lure, object, mask, and victim, Catherine's ultimate fate is perhaps the most horrifying of all of Williams' female characters. One imagines Blanche could eventually recover her sanity, but Catharine's future offers no hope. Written about in hospital reports in the third person, Catharine will lose her individuality and become a case study at Lion's View. She claims madness is lonelier than death, implying she would prefer the latter; but, of course, Catharine gets no choice.

Gay men and women often suffer violent consequences in desiring the male in Williams' plays. As Catharine's fate

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100 Williams once stated that Blanche would "win" and emerge from the asylum renewed: "She will enjoy her time in the bin. She will seduce one or two of the more comely young doctors. Then she will be let free to open an attractive boutique in the French Quarter ...." See Gore Vidal, Palimpsest: A Memoir (New York: Random House, 1995) 156.
demonstrates, merely witnessing homosexual behavior can bring doom. Nevertheless, in the short story "One Arm," the male body remains the site of destruction while ultimately providing salvation. Unlike the female characters who consistently meet ruin through the male, Oliver Winemiller's gay desires provide redemption. By the end of "One Arm," Oliver triumphs, but his victory remains that of an ancient tragic hero.

Like his treatment of Stanley and Tye, Williams grounds Oliver in heterosexuality. Although a New Orleans' prostitute when the story opens, from exposition we learn about Oliver's teenage affair with a married woman. After an automobile accident caused the loss of his arm and livelihood, Oliver was forced into hustling. Though sex with other men was "foreign" to Oliver, "the shock that it gave him was slight. The loss of his arm had apparently dulled his senses." 101 Since Williams started "One Arm" in 1942, nearly three decades before the gay civil rights movement, it is not surprising that he provided Oliver with a "normal" sexual history. Williams shaped Oliver as heterosexual for maximum appeal; but, as Signorile's study suggests, the charm of the "straight," masculine persona cuts across traditional sexual identity boundaries.

Oliver's typical customer resides in the French Quarter where he worked "a certain corner of Canal Street

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101 Williams, *Collected Stories*, 186.
and one of those streets that dive narrowly into the ancient part of the city."\textsuperscript{102} Again, Williams associates the Vieux Carré with sexual license and amorality. Set in New Orleans in the winter of 1939, the piece centers on Oliver's descent from Arkansas field hand to awaiting execution for the brutal murder of a trick. While on death row, Oliver receives numerous letters from various pick ups throughout the country. In them, these men reveal how meaningful their experiences with Oliver had been. The narrator reports that, "The great blond youth who had been a boxer until he had lost an arm had stood as a planet among the moons of their longing, fixed in his orbit while they circled about him."\textsuperscript{103} Imbued with an almost mythical physical beauty, Oliver comes to realize his emotional debt to these anonymous, faceless men, and he longs to reclaim his life just as he faces death. He evolves from a young man emotionally deadened by his male-to-male sexual experiences into viewing these affairs as a saving grace. Once merely an object of desire, Oliver finds desire finally awakened within himself.

Contacts from his former clients inspire Oliver to respond in a letter:

\begin{quote}
I picked up strangers in every city I went to. I had experience with them which only meant money to me and a place to shack up for the night and liquor and food. I never thought it could mean very much to them. Now all of these letters like
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{\textit{102}}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 184.  
\textsuperscript{\textit{103}}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 187.
yours have proven it did. I meant something very important to hundreds of people whose faces and names had slipped clean out of my mind as soon as I left them. I feel as if I had run up a debt of some kind. Not money but feelings. I treated some of them badly. Went off without even so much as saying goodbye in spite of all their generosity to me and even took things which hadn't been given to me. I cannot imagine how some of these men could forgive me. If I had known then, I mean when I was outside [prison], that such true feeling could even be found in strangers, I mean of the kind that I picked up for a living, I guess I might have felt there was more to live for.\textsuperscript{104}

In Oliver's letter, Williams provides the reader with another version of the whore with a heart of gold, but decidedly twists that time worn tale by giving those feelings to a male hustler. Perhaps for the first time in his life, Oliver expresses feelings for other human beings. More significantly, homosexual intercourse with virtual strangers allowed him to realize the human vitality gained in contact with others. One could view Oliver's discovery as his salvation. His remembered sexual contacts with anonymous men gives him a sense of worth. In short, masculine desire rescues him from a meaningless existence.

Of course, Oliver's discovery comes too late, "Too late, this resurrection."\textsuperscript{105} Nevertheless, in the remaining days before his execution, Oliver attempts to salvage some of the joy of human contact as expressed in his tricks' letters. He finds masturbation provides only the shadow of the feelings he attempts to revive. In his final hours, he

\textsuperscript{104}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 190-91.
\textsuperscript{105}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 192.
tenderly tries to seduce a young minister sent to his cell to offer spiritual comfort, but the inexperienced churchman flees his charge in fear of his own desires as much as of Oliver. Unfulfilled in his quest for renewed contact with another man, Oliver is strapped into the electric chair and executed with his collection of letters clasped between his thighs. Object and victim of masculine desire, Oliver inspires awe even lying on the autopsy table:

The men who performed the dissection were somewhat abashed by the body under their knives. It seemed intended for some more august purpose, to stand in a gallery of antique sculpture, touched only by light through stillness and contemplation, for it had the nobility of some broken Apollo that no one was likely to carve so purely again.106

Even in death he remains a sexual object, the ideal male form, but Oliver can no longer be caressed by a stranger's hand. Instead, he passes into myth like some Greek demi-god. He lived and died by the male body.

In Williams' New Orleans' texts, the masculine delights in its position as object of desire. Like Oliver, the attention commanded by Stanley and Tye springs from the desirability of their physical forms. Sexual attractiveness makes all three powerful icons of masculine desire. All working-class men with little chance for advancement through career, education, or even good fortune, their greatest asset is physical beauty. The men toy with their desirability, utilize their assets, and

106Williams, Collected Stories, 198.

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their desires will not be denied. They are the frontline troops in the cult of masculinity, but their appealing physiques also conceal a violent nature.

If the masculine agenda encounters resistance, marginalization, rape, murder, and madness may and often do result. Blanche goes mad. Sebastian is brutally murdered. Catharine is to be mutilated. Oliver is executed. Jane is made servant to the masculine as she awaits death. Nightingale becomes marginalized in a state hospital. Only the Writer escapes to further indulge his desire for the male.

The male as object of desire resides at the center of Williams' world. He provokes fascination and reaps destruction; New Orleans is his playground, and carnival merely the apex of his continual reign. Scantily clad, bedecked in feathers, and exposing himself for cheap, plastic beads at Mardi Gras, the masculine reveals his vanity and dominance. The hypermasculine becomes inescapable both in New Orleans and in Williams' depictions of the city. However, alcohol and drug use often provide the illusion of sanctuary, a temporary escape from the forces of masculine desire. For Williams' characters, drugs often act as shields as they grapple with desire and its accompanying losses. Substance use constitutes another major motif in Williams' works and remains integral to life in New Orleans.
Chapter Five—
"Set down on the steps and have a cigarette with me.":¹ Drugs in the City Care Forgot

In Williams' works, as in Chekhov's, characters often resort to cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs as compensation for unfulfilled desires and dreams. Characters' drug habits reflect their psychological make up, adding to their complexity as individuals. Self-medication often indicates rebellion and sometimes promotes creativity. In addition, drugs act symbolically to enhance Williams' themes, frequently behaving as masculine markers that indicate male power or the dominance of a hypermasculine character. As noted in the last chapter, desire for the masculine unleashes violence against women and gay male characters, and drug use creates a similar dynamic. Although drugs are sought for escape or deliverance, their use often results in debilitation. New Orleans itself retains a special association with drugs, remaining both celebrated and infamous for its bacchanalian atmosphere of liquor and other narcotics. Williams appreciated the hedonistic ambiance that pervades life in the French Quarter. As a smoker, drinker, and hard drug user, Williams' own experiences with intoxicants provide a context for his works.

By the early 1950s, Williams' smoked "more than two packages of cigarettes daily," but documentation as to when

he began this habit remains elusive.\(^2\) A photograph that appears to have been taken in the late 1930s or early 1940s shows him smoking as he works over his typewriter.\(^3\) In his production notes to Vieux Carré, Williams states the Writer (who smokes) is autobiographical,\(^4\) and the play takes place when Williams was twenty-seven years old. In The Glass Menagerie, also informed by Williams' life, Amanda chastises her twenty-something son for smoking too much.\(^5\) Thus, it seems likely the playwright smoked cigarettes prior to his initial trip to New Orleans, and he transfers this personal habit to many of his characters.

Nicotine was a widely used and socially acceptable drug during most of Williams' life, and cigarette smoking often foreshadows a character's movement into the realm of desire, drugs, and New Orleans. Less frequently, cigarettes indicate a character's progression toward a more fulfilled existence as they are able to master the phallicism residing in the activity. Further, a character's smoking marks his or her movement toward more powerful intoxicates like alcohol or sex, which not only mimics the general trend of actual drug users but hints to

\(^4\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 4.
\(^5\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 147.
the complexities of substance abuse. The short story, "The Yellow Bird," illustrates this progression.

The story served as "partial basis" for Summer and Smoke (1948) and The Eccentricities of a Nightingale (1951). In it, Alma Tutwiler acts as an alter ego for Williams and her experiences parallels his; both benefit from their time in New Orleans. At thirty, Alma rebels against her puritanical, preacher father, because the old man chases away any possible suitors through a barrage of probing questions. The first sign of Alma's resistance manifests itself through her cigarette smoking, a habit that she initially conceals but which becomes more blatant as her dependence progresses. Aware of her daughter's habit, Alma's mother attempts to shield her wayward child from the preacher's wrath. More than once the minister has threatened to throw Alma out of the house if she "gets to smoking," but Mrs. Tutwiler worries that such an action will drive their daughter "into a good-time house."

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6Cynthia S. Pomerieau, Barbara A. Berman, Ellen R. Gritz, Judith L. Marks, and Susan Goeters, "Why Women Smoke," Addictive Behaviors in Women, ed., Ronald R. Watson, Drug and Alcohol Abuse Rev. 5 (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 1994) 49. In both sexes, smoking is part of a "polydrug use/abuse" pattern. The authors identify tobacco as a "gateway drug . . . for subsequent involvement with other legal and illegal drugs."

7Tennessee Williams, Tennessee Williams Collected Stories (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 611. Of course, Williams changed Alma's last name to Winemiller for the plays. It is interesting that she inherits Oliver's last name from "One Arm." Williams claimed he preferred The Eccentricities of a Nightingale. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 2, 7.

8Williams, Collected Stories, 235.
Though perhaps comic in tone today, Mrs. Tutwiler’s concerns should be taken seriously, as they reflect the social mores of the time. Smoking among women “began with those who got paid for staging their sexuality: the actress, the Gypsy, the whore. Such a woman violates traditional roles by defiantly, actively giving herself pleasure instead of passively receiving it.” Smoking acts as a sign of revolt against tradition. Unsatisfied with the duties of a submissive, self-sacrificing daughter, Alma resists, and cigarettes mark her rejection of the old order. Smoking does perhaps lead her to prostitution but not into a barren existence; thereby, Williams seems to suggest that one may find fulfillment through resisting authority and following one’s desires.

Inevitably, Mr. Tutwiler discovers that Alma indeed smokes, and he slaps her across the face for the habit. Promptly, Alma returns the slap, declaring she will no longer tolerate parental interference. Almost immediately, she begins to date men, dance, drink, and stay out until the early hours of the morning. Her hometown of Hobbs, Arkansas, rapidly becomes too confining. Taking the family car one evening, Alma drives to New Orleans, vowing never to return to her parents’ home.

The reader anticipates that Mrs. Tutwiler’s worst fears for Alma will be realized in the French Quarter, but

Williams reverses these expectations. In New Orleans, Alma continues to pick up men who provide her with "gifts," but she remains unscathed by the life she has chosen. The city does not seduce Alma into overindulgence, and she remains moderate in her habits: "In fact she seemed to prosper on her new life. It apparently did not have a dissipating effect on her. She took pretty good care of herself so that it wouldn't, eating well and drinking just enough to be happy."\(^{10}\) As time passes, she gives birth to a healthy son whom she names for her favorite lover, John. The boy possesses fantastical powers apparently inherited from his mother's ancestor, a Salem witch who possessed an imbued bird that gives the story its title. In adulthood, the son provides Alma with wealth and comfort for the rest of her life. At her death, John erects a monument to his mother, who left her fortune to "The Home of Reckless Spenders."\(^{11}\) The story reveals that Alma's rebellion propelled her in a positive direction. Smoking was the first link in a chain of events that allowed her to escape her parents' control, find sexual fulfillment, and establish a life for herself on her own terms.

Like Alma Tutwiler, the Writer's smoking in *Vieux Carré* becomes a catalyst for self-discovery and productivity. Offered a light by Nightingale, the Writer declines, "I won't smoke it now, I'll save it till morning.  

\(^{10}\) Williams, *Collected Stories*, 237.  
\(^{11}\) Williams, *Collected Stories*, 239.
I like a cigarette when I sit down to work."12 As this line indicates, the Writer regularly smokes and it propels him in his work. Unlike most nicotine addicts forced to feed their cravings immediately, the Writer chooses to save the cigarette to enjoy while working. Though the causal progression remains less clear than with Alma, the Writer's smoking unlocks his creative potential, and they are both moderate in their habits. The Writer and Alma also behave moderately in their sexual desires and use of other drugs, indicating their stages in life. Cigarettes act as signs of rebellion for Alma and the Writer, but the characters demonstrate discipline and self-control in their drug use.

For many of Williams' characters, however, cigarettes become a symptom of their entanglement within greater drug dependencies and a complex of desire and violence. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche's nicotine habit not only identifies her as rebellious against traditional gender roles, but also hints to greater drug abuse problems. Like Alma, Blanche (until recently) made her own living and set the parameters of her sexual encounters, but these positive attributes have been increasingly undermined. Blanche's smoking now hints to her need for escape, a compensation for her losses as she seeks solace in other drugs and physical desire. In addition, Blanche uses cigarettes as a seduction strategy, while they simultaneously mark her

12Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 20.
victimization by the masculine. Her first flirtation with Stanley occurs through the blue haze of cigarette smoke.

As Stella waits for her on the front porch, Blanche finishes dressing for the evening and asks Stanley's assistance in buttoning her gown:

BLANCHE. Many thanks! Now the buttons!
STANLEY. I can't do nothing with them.
BLANCHE. You men with your big clumsy fingers.
May I have a drag on your cig?
STANLEY. Have one for yourself.
BLANCHE. Why, thanks! . . . It looks like my trunk has exploded.\textsuperscript{13}

The phallic implications in the moment are obvious as Blanche flirts with Stanley in an effort to defuse his hostility, confirmed by her belongings thrown about the apartment. Visually, the cigarette smoke suggests the smoldering feud between Blanche and Stanley that shortly explodes into open warfare.

Blanche frequently smokes when an object of her desire is nearby. She requests a light from the newspaper boy, and her first exchange with Mitch occurs over a cigarette.\textsuperscript{14} In the initial meeting with Mitch, Williams links the phallicism of the cigarette directly to death, thereby foreshadowing the courtship and break-up of the couple. As the carcinogenic deliverer of death and symbol of masculinity, cigarettes suggest Blanche's destruction through the acts of men.

\textsuperscript{13}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 277.
\textsuperscript{14}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 337
In the midst of the poker night party, Mitch meets Blanche while making his way through the bedroom to use the bathroom. Using the same tactic she had adopted earlier with Stanley, Blanche requests a "cig" from Mitch. She asks what brand he smokes, and Mitch replies, "Luckies." The cigarette trademark aptly labels the feelings that Blanche and Mitch experience; they both hope to "get lucky" in mutual companionship and promised sexual intimacy.

Blanche notices Mitch's silver cigarette case and reads the inscription: "'And if God choose, / I shall but love thee better—after—death!'" The death imagery intensifies when Mitch reveals that the case was given to him by a girl who has since died. The exchange demonstrates how desire for the male and cigarettes become linked to death. Cigarettes possess a duality like that of Williams' male sex objects. They act as markers of masculine desirability and imply male power, while masking potential violence as death-bringers. Smoking works as a sign of freedom and personal fulfillment, while being a cancer-causing agent. Such a duality continues in later works.

In Vieux Carré, cigarettes continue to suggest desire for the male, along with death and dying. The Writer's ultimate rescue from the boarding house comes from a smoker; Sky provides the Writer with a ride to California,

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15 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 297.
16 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 298.
and they discuss their upcoming adventure as Sky rolls "a cigarette with obvious practice." As his name implies, Sky opens new horizons for the struggling writer.

Sky functions both as a knight to the rescue and a masculine icon, and his habit enhances his status as a sexual object much like the hypermasculine characters. As already noted, Stanley smokes, as does Tye. For the Writer, Sky stands in for Tye (as the rhyme of their names suggests), and his cigarette habit intensifies his desirability as the sign of the supermale. However, Sky and Tye use cigarettes only once during the course of the play, and the audience associates smoking more with the Writer and Nightingale. As already discussed, smoking symbolizes the Writer's youthful adventure of self-discovery, but it unmistakably suggests death for Nightingale. This juxtaposition makes sense, for as the Writer begins his career, Nightingale's life and his productivity as an artist near an end.

Like Blanche, Nightingale smokes in moments of unease or sexual tension. He smokes as he begins his long initial seduction of the Writer (who enjoys a cigarette himself after they have had sex), and after he mistakenly gropes Tye thinking he was the Writer. Generally, Nightingale's smoking is accompanied by a cough which is not symptomatic

17 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 78.
18 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 83.
19 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 16, 26, and 46.

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of lung cancer but of tuberculosis. Williams describes Nightingale's condition graphically: "[A] fiendish, racking cough. He is hacking and spitting up bloody phlegm."\textsuperscript{20} Despite the continuing linkage between smoking and sexual attraction in \textit{Vieux Carré}, Nightingale's horrifying condition causes us to associate cigarettes most strongly with decay and death. His nagging cough foregrounds the lethal properties of smoking. Even though the masculine does not literally cause Nightingale's death, the male's symbol will hasten his demise.

\textit{Suddenly Last Summer} also foregrounds the connection between smoking and destruction. In this play, cigarettes provide valuable insights into character; Catharine smokes as compensation for her deadening isolation, while Violet wields cigarettes as a masculine totem. George's habit (the lone male smoker of the play) marks him as an outsider without power, much like Blanche or Nightingale.\textsuperscript{21} Like his sister, George stands apart from the family hierarchy, remaining dependent on his aunt's tolerance as he was on Sebastian's before her. As a bearer of phallic power, Violet becomes the play's most significant smoker. When she begins to smoke, Williams carefully highlights the moment;\textsuperscript{22} the lighting of Violet's cigarette requires an

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{20}{Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 16.}
\footnotetext{21}{Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 3, 405.}
\footnotetext{22}{Natural elements on stage such as water or fire attract special audience attention. See Bert O. States, "The Dog on the Stage: Theater as Phenomenon," \textit{New Literary History} 14 (1983): 378.}
\end{footnotes}
unusually large flame which symbolically enhances her power and calls attention to her dominance of the other characters.23

In her private meeting with the Doctor early in the play, Mrs. Venable requests that he get her cigarettes and a holder. The Doctor obliges her:

DOCTOR. I don't have matches.
MRS. VENABLE. I think there's a table-lighter on the table.
DOCTOR. Yes, there is. [He lights it, it flames up high.] My Lord, what a torch!
MRS. VENABLE [with a sudden, sweet smile]. "So shines a good deed in a naughty world," Doctor—Sugar... . . .24

His lack of matches reveals the Doctor's impotence in his confrontation with Violet; he must bend to her will or be cast aside. The wild flaring of the lighter indicates Mrs. Venable's potential for destruction and her absolute power, and the ignition of the phallic object becomes a metaphor for the violence that may be unleashed through desire for the masculine. Mrs. Venable protects Sebastian's reputation at any cost, including the destruction of her niece's mind. Violet's "temperamental" lighter hints at the destructive power of the male.25 Later

23Fire and smoke are traditional symbols of feminine mystical powers. See Elizabeth Ettorre, Women and Substance Use (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 107. Violet's use of fire in conjunction with the cigarette creates enormous symbolic power as she masters both feminine and masculine strengths.
25In A Streetcar Named Desire, the young collector has trouble igniting his lighter and Blanche notes it is "temperamental." This makes for an interesting contrast that intensifies the trends in Suddenly Last Summer. Williams' studs master fire, but the powerless males cannot. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 337.
in the play, a cigarette becomes an actual weapon, doing physical harm.

Catharine's attacker stopped the car to smoke at Duelling Oaks just before he molested her. She asked why he stopped, and he claimed for a smoke, but obviously the sexual encounter motivated it. Thus, the phallic cigarette becomes the excuse for penetration. Initiated by her attacker into this system where cigarettes act as symbols of masculine sexuality and power, Catharine attempts to participate in it. Like her aunt, Catharine borrows the phallicism of the cigarette and tries to wield its metaphoric force.

Desperate for a cigarette when she arrives at the house, Catharine quickly snatches one from a table box. Her caretaker, Sister Felicity, immediately demands that she put it out, and they begin a lengthy confrontation over it. The Sister finally threatens to recommend that Catharine be placed in the violent ward:

CATHARINE [overlapping]. I'm not being violent, Sister.
SISTER [overlapping]. Give me that cigarette, I'm holding my hand out for it!
CATHARINE. All right, take it, here, take it! [She thrusts the lighted end of the cigarette into the palm of the Sister's hand. The Sister cries out and sucks her burned hand.]
SISTER. You burned me with it!
CATHARINE. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.
SISTER [shocked, hurt]. You deliberately burned me!
CATHARINE [overlapping]. You said give it to you and so I gave it to you.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{26}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 3, 372.
Victim of the masculine herself, Catharine uses the cigarette to inflict pain on an innocent party, attempting to evoke its phallic power for her own purposes, but she is forced to relinquish it. Later in the play, she persuades the Doctor to allow her to smoke again. Halfway through her lengthy explanation about what happened to Sebastian at Cabeza de Lobo, she drops her cigarette on the floor; thus, the phallic force that resides in smoking, slips through Catharine's fingers and she becomes completely powerless.

Williams often uses cigarettes to foreshadow desire for the male and his eventual, inevitable violent domination. Cigarettes become an extension of the masculine, often working as a sign that a character slips deeper into its grasp. Moreover, the characters who smoke demonstrate other vices, and cigarettes are often the least significant of their addictions. While cigarette use tends to indicate a character's attempt to participate in masculine power, a character's alcohol use often suggests the struggle to shield against male domination and repression. Both imply the male and the desire for him, but the freedom that smoking sometimes provides is absent with alcohol. Liquor indicates a character's deeper entanglement within the violent aspects of the masculine and becomes a strategy for surviving the onslaught. Since

\textsuperscript{27}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 414.
all Williams' male sexual icons drink, alcohol remains a sign of their desirability, and it also triggers their most ruthless behaviors. Again, Williams' personal association with alcohol provides a background for his works.

Though Williams drank before arriving in New Orleans, alcohol consumption did not become habitual for him until after his first visit to the city.28 Similarly, in Vieux Carré the Writer remains an inexperienced drinker, noting early in the action that he does not "care much for liquor." 29 Nevertheless, after his desire has been awakened by Tye and his casual relationship with Nightingale becomes increasingly empty, the Writer shares a drink with his landlady. Mrs. Wire notes, "One drink has made you drunk, boy. Go up to bed." 30 Here alcohol compensates for the lack of a satisfactory sexual outlet.

However, for a light drinker like the Writer, booze can act as prelude to physical fulfillment. During Nightingale's lengthy seduction of the Writer, he encourages his young roommate to discuss his first sexual experience and offers him some white port.31 The Writer declines the drink, but shyly reveals that his first sexual encounter happened under the influence of alcohol.

28 At seventeen, he had his first drink ("a green crème de menthe") and he implies it initiated five days of seasickness. See Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (1975; New York: Bantam Books, 1976) 25.
29 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 23.
30 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 66.
31 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 22.
WRITER. . . . I told him that I . . . loved . . . him. I'd been drinking.
NIGHTINGALE. Love can happen like that. For one night only.
WRITER. He said, he laughed and said, "Forget it. I'm flying out tomorrow for training base." 32

Even for a sexually naive, novice drinker like the Writer, alcohol rapidly becomes a substitute for his unrequited deeper feelings, such as love. During his evening with the paratrooper, alcohol functioned as prologue to sex, relaxing the Writer's inhibitions and allowing him to indulge forbidden desires. It propelled the Writer to the sexual act, and then made him mistrust what he felt for his partner. He discovers that alcohol removes barriers, absolving him of accountability for his actions and feelings. This pattern will be repeated frequently by many of Williams' characters.

The scene between the Writer and Nightingale concludes with a sexual encounter. Importantly, the Writer now refuses a drink. Nightingale has tender feelings for the Writer, which are not reciprocated by the younger man; therefore, Nightingale attempts to evoke memories of the Writer's first love to enhance the present moment. As he pulls back the sheets and crawls into bed with the Writer, Nightingale whispers: "Lie back and imagine the paratrooper." 33 Alcohol becomes a sign of Nightingale's deeper feelings for the Writer while the younger man's

32 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 25.
33 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 26
disinterest in imbibing shows he has little interest in the 
old painter. Nightingale's alcohol use hints to his 
attempt to regain lost desire and escape the reality of a 
lonely death. His pattern is common to other characters; 
Mrs. Wire's use of the drug further illustrates this 
tendency.

We see Mrs. Wire drink only once, but her reflections 
on alcohol might stand for many of the drinking characters. 
She drinks to compensate for her aching loneliness. She 
and the Writer have just returned from their evening in the 
night court, where Mrs. Wire realized that none of her 
tenants would support her false story about who injured the 
photographer and his guests. She has been issued a fine 
because she had no corroborating witnesses.

WRITER. I don't think I ever saw you drink 
before, Mrs. Wire.
MRS. WIRE. I only touch this bottle, which also 
belonged to the late Mr. Wire before he descended 
to hell between two crooked lawyers, I touch it 
only when forced to by such a shocking experience 
as I had tonight, the discovery that I was 
completely alone in the world, a solitary ole 
woman cared for by no one. You know, I heard 
some doctor say on the radio that people die of 
loneliness, specially at my age. They do. Die 
of it, it kills 'em. Oh, that's not the cause 
that's put on the death warrant, but that's the 
true cause."34

Mrs. Wire's despair has little to do with mourning her 
dead husband, for whom she clearly bears only contempt. 
She feels abandoned by her tenants and utterly alone. Her 
drinking signals her isolation and foreshadows the madness

34Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 64-65.
which overtakes her late in the play when she retreats to an Oedipal memory that confuses the Writer for her long dead son.\textsuperscript{35} Mrs. Wire briefly rouses from her insane babbling: "It all seemed so real. —I even remember lovemaking . . . "\textsuperscript{36}

Like Nightingale, Mrs. Wire finds herself in the last phases of the desire/death complex. She may not be the regular drinker that Nightingale represents, but alcohol marks them both as characters outdistanced by time and unable to fulfill desire except in memory. Virtually all that remains for them is a sedative, such as alcohol. A similar pattern holds true for Jane, but her drinking begins the moment she receives the news that she is dying. Just as Blanche drinks most heavily once desire has metaphorically died when Mitch abandons her, Jane retreats to liquor when she learns of her impending literal death—the end of all desire.

As Tye sleeps sprawled on the bed, and Jane works on her fashion designs, the Writer delivers their mail to the room. Opening a letter, Jane lets out a soft gasp and almost immediately asks the young man to fix her a drink. Within an exchange of eight lines, she requests another. The letter is from the Ochsner clinic, and though Jane claims it regards a "critically ill" relative, it is bad

\textsuperscript{35}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 106.
\textsuperscript{36}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 107.
news about her health.\textsuperscript{37} Alcohol becomes the buffer between Jane and death. This connection between women, alcohol, and death intensifies through the course of the play, culminating with Tye’s vivid tale of the Champagne Girl, as discussed in the last chapter.

Torn apart by dogs, the Champagne Girl is discussed only because of the details of her grisly demise; she is denied even a proper name. Champagne bluntly evokes the image of death, not a peaceful departure, but a horrific, agonizing mutilation within the jaws of carnivores. The story of her death encapsulates the entire complex of desire for the male, symbolized by alcohol. Spirits prove to be an ineffective shield against the hypermasculine.

As the Writer departs the boarding house for adventure in the West with Sky, the last image of Jane links alcohol to lost desire and death. Hesitating to go, the Writer asks:

\begin{quote}
WRITER. Can't I do something for you?
JANE. Pour me three fingers of bourbon. [She has returned to the table. He pours the shot.]
Now hurry, hurry. I know that Tye will be back early tonight.
WRITER. Yes, of course he will . . . [He crosses from the studio light.]
JANE. [smiling somewhat bitterly] Naturally, yes, how could I possibly doubt it. With tamales and vino . . . \textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Clearly, Tye will not return, and the moment marks the end of Jane’s desire. The three fingers of bourbon becomes

\textsuperscript{37}Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 52-54.
\textsuperscript{38}Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 115.
her solace as she awaits death, yet she remains self-deluded in her hope that her lover will return with food and wine. Drinking alone without the object of desire forecasts loss, loneliness, and death.

Even for infrequent drinkers such as the Writer, alcohol offers only temporary sexual fulfillment, while fostering doubt, insecurity, and longing. For the other drinkers in Vieux Carré, alcohol use evokes imagery of loneliness, madness, and death. These trends gather strength when one recalls that light drinkers experience less violent ends than those who imbibe regularly. Like the Champagne Girl, losing one's whole identity to alcohol equates to a violent and bloody end. Despite the collection of drinkers at various stages of dissipation offered by this play, alcohol as metaphor for death and misplaced desire remains most powerfully interwoven in A Streetcar Named Desire.

While it is debatable whether Nightingale or Jane are alcoholic, one can hardly question Blanche DuBois' alcoholism. In the opening moments of the play, she scurries about her sister's home in a frenzied search for liquor.39 Like her promiscuity, Blanche's drinking stems from her guilt for her part in Allan Grey's suicide. Destruction of the utmost object of desire and love implies an excessive use of alcohol in a desperate bid to out-
distance oneself from that loss, and Blanche's tactic mirrors that of her creator. Williams, a moderate drinker early in his career, abused alcohol after he became an established playwright. His greatest period of drug and alcohol abuse coincides with the death of his long term lover, Frank Merlo (1921-1963).

The great love of Williams' life, Merlo's death had a profound impact on the playwright. A decade after the death, he acknowledged, "As long as Frank was well, I was happy. He had a gift for creating a life and, when he ceased to be alive, I couldn't create a life for myself. So I went into a seven-year depression." Coinciding with this depression, Williams' use of alcohol and drugs increased to the point that by 1969 he was institutionalized for treatment of mental disorder and substance abuse. Linking loneliness to substance abuse, Williams noted in a 1970 interview:

I've always found it necessary to have one person, at least one, very close to me. It's awful when the person dies. I've had that experience. At the age of fifty-eight, which is my age, it's natural to have had that experience. And then you start building a new world. . . . Or else you drink yourself blind or something like that. Or retreat into some false world of liquor, pills, or drugs, or what have you.

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While males tend to drink to relieve stress, female alcohol use often is an attempt to mediate "their intimate partnerships with men." See Ettorre, *Women and Substance Use*, 36.


The playwright's connection between the loss of the object of desire and substance abuse in his own life might serve as an eloquent and fitting subtext for Blanche DuBois. She reflects her creator in her retreat from Allan's death through alcohol. Liquor becomes the ineffectual substitute for desire.

Nonetheless, alcohol seems to offer Blanche some therapeutic benefits; it quiets her nervousness. She probably began this pattern many years earlier as self-defense against responsibility for her husband's death and the burdens of keeping Belle Reve afloat. While her dash for a drink the moment she arrives at Stella's home provides evidence of her alcoholism, it also demonstrates her desperation to unwind after her strategic retreat from Mississippi. She flees from the collapse of her reputation as well as financial ruin. Alcohol compensates for her insolvency, allowing her immersion into fantasies as a woman of culture and wealth surrounded by admiring beaux.

In the opening scene, she not only sneaks a drink, but manages another once Stella arrives:

BLANCHE. Oh, this [whiskey] buzzes right through me and feels so good!
STELLA. Won't you have another?
BLANCHE. No, one's my limit.44

In the exchange, Blanche maintains the pretense that she wants a drink for relaxation after a long day of travel. Here alcohol appears to serve a medicinal

44Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 254.
function, but Blanche remains unable to continue this stance for long and requests another drink when she realizes the cramped accommodations she finds herself in. The instant she learns her bed rests on the other side of the wall from the Kowalskis' with only a curtained doorway between them, she requests "just one little tiny nip more."\(^{45}\) In this moment, Williams initiates the association between alcohol and desire.

Thoughts of Stella and Stanley making love on the other side of the portieres causes Blanche to request another drink. Within a few more lines she expresses this concern directly, "But there's no door between the two rooms, and Stanley—will it be decent?"\(^{46}\) Alcohol acts as Blanche's replacement for desire. She tends to drink most when fulfillment of desire appears eminent or when the object of her desire is lost. Though ultimately an unsatisfactory strategy, this trend reveals itself most clearly through Blanche's scenes with Mitch.

Blanche admits she has had too much to drink when she meets Mitch, her primary object of desire within the play's action.\(^{47}\) Thereafter, the relationship between them remains associated with alcohol. When Stanley indicates he knows about Blanche's disreputable behavior in Laurel, Blanche asks Stella for a shot in her Coke.\(^{48}\) At first, this

\(^{45}\)Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 255.
\(^{46}\)Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 256.
\(^{47}\)Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 299.
\(^{48}\)Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 332.
drinking appears to function as a simple relaxant after her brother-in-law's threat, but the drink rapidly stands in for her hopes about her future with Mitch. As Blanche holds the shot, Stella pours Coke in the glass causing it to foam over the top and onto Blanche's "pretty white skirt." Blanche screams and attributes her overreaction to nervousness about her relationship with Mitch, admitting that she wants him. Stella tries to reassure her sister and reveals that she is aware of Blanche's drinking habits:

STELLA [kissing Blanche impulsively]. It will happen!
BLANCHE [doubtfully]. It will?
STELLA. It will! [She goes across into the kitchen, looking back at Blanche.] It will, honey, it will. . . . But don't take another drink!  

Stella pleads with her sister to stay in control, knowing overindulgence may frighten away Mitch. Nonetheless, for Blanche, drinking and getting a man go hand-in-hand. The tactic is repeated over and over. When the newspaper boy arrives to collect, Blanche offers him a drink. When Blanche and Mitch return from their date at the amusement park, she invites him in for a nightcap. Speaking in French (which he does not understand), Blanche asks Mitch if he would like to go to bed with her. Not waiting for his response, she immediately reports that she

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49 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 334.
50 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 335-336.
51 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 337.
52 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 343.
has "found some liquor!" When Mitch arrives unexpectedly after skipping Blanche's birthday party, she suggests some alcohol. Every meeting with an object of desire provokes the consumption of spirits. This has been Blanche's pattern since her youth and central to memories of Allan Grey.

As Blanche prepares to tell Mitch the story of her dead husband, she must have another drink. With glass in hand, she recounts her love and loss of Allan Grey. After discovering Allan with another man, Blanche retreated into denial:

Afterward we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk and laughing all the way. We danced the Varsouviana! Suddenly in the middle of the dance the boy I had married broke away from me and ran out of the casino. A few moments later—a shot!

Allan's suicide occurred when both he and Blanche were "very drunk." In addition to being Blanche's ultimate sexual object, Allan also functioned as the object of the anonymous older man's desire. Thus, the suicide at Moon Lake becomes a complex of desire cutting across sexual orientation, alcohol, and death. Like cigarettes, alcohol seems to promise fulfillment of desires, but can bring disappointment and even death. The pattern of alcohol used

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53 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 344.
54 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 380.
55 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 354.
56 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 355.
as substitute for the missing male object repeats itself with Eunice.

After accusing Steve of cheating on her, and fighting with him violently, Eunice leaves the apartment to get the police but goes for a drink instead. Shortly thereafter, the Hubbells reconcile, returning to the apartment together "in a tight embrace." Blanche and Eunice tend to seek solace in the bottle when their men disappoint or remain unavailable to them. The Hubbells' rapid reconciliation leaves little chance for the violence to escalate or for the substance abuse to become extreme, mirroring the tendency for light drinking to cause mild conflict while heavy drinking results in violence. Through alcohol, women and gay males hope to join with the masculine, but when the hypermasculine males consume spirits, it allows their worst qualities free reign.

For Williams' studs, alcohol becomes the catalyst of their worst behaviors. At the same time, it can make them more alluring. Ironically, women hope to find partners when drinking, while men's alcohol use often makes them unworthy of the interest. This dynamic is reflected in the Kowalskis' most serious fight.

After Stanley heaves the radio out the window, Stella retaliates, "Drunk—drunk—animal thing, you! [She rushes through to the poker table] All of you—please go home! If

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57 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 326-327
58 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 330.
any of you have one spark of decency in you—"  

Stanley beats Stella, and the women retreat to Eunice's apartment. Stanley is so drunk that his poker buddies put him under the shower to revive him, and only then does he realize he has attacked his wife. This explosive violence concludes with the most sensual make-up sex scene of the American stage. The episode marks a rare example of desire and alcohol mixing in the hypermasculine character to produce a happy outcome.

When Mitch consumes a lot of alcohol, he takes on hypermasculine characteristics. As Blanche drinks alone after her disappointing birthday party, Mitch suddenly arrives late. When Mitch confronts Blanche, Williams notes, "It is obvious that he has had a few drinks on the way over." The scene builds to Mitch's near rape of Blanche, which demonstrates the potential violence unleashed by alcohol. Furthermore, Mitch's dialogue associates liquor with Stanley. In effect, Mitch links alcohol to the male's destructive power, acknowledging Stanley's position as hypermasculine icon.

Declining Blanche's offer of a drink, Mitch snaps, "I don't want Stan's liquor." Though for Blanche alcohol still implies desire fulfilled, Mitch makes it the sign of Stanley's dominance, reconfirming its lethal properties.

59 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 302.
60 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 379.
61 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 380.
Drinking is the way the poker buddies have bonded. Homoeroticism tints their parties: the boisterous physicality of the competitive card game and their massive consumption of beer and whiskey offer images of primal male potency finding release through interactions and confrontations. Once Stanley's reports about Blanche have been proved true, Mitch must abandon her to demonstrate his loyalty to his friend. Mitch relinquishes his power, transferring alcohol as an image of omnipresent masculinity directly to Stanley.

As the play draws to its climax, Williams intensifies the connection between Stanley and alcohol, making it the sign of hypermasculinity; thereby, exacerbating Blanche's defeat. Alcohol comes to mark the hypermasculine icon alone; whereas, earlier in the play, it implied him as the object of desire. Now as sole bearer of his symbol, Stanley's power is almost absolute; resisting him has been difficult, but it soon becomes impossible.

Blanche drinks as she packs her trunk and revels in memories of past suitors. Stanley arrives home from the hospital, and he "had a few drinks on the way and has brought some quart beer bottles home with him." Thus, both the adversaries are drunk, but Stanley offers an unexpected olive branch.

63 Stella reports the four men "went through two cases" during the poker night, or twelve beers each. See Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 314.
64 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 391.
The abundant references to alcohol make Stanley's dialogue worth quoting at length. His speech not only highlights his power, but indicates how he will reclaim the strength that Blanche has been co-opting all summer. The prevalence of alcohol imagery alerts us to the play's climax and Blanche's ultimate defeat. As he changes clothes, Stanley "amiably" offers the following story:

This is all I'm going to undress right now. [He rips the sack off a quart beer bottle] Seen a bottle-opener? . . . . I used to have a cousin who could open a beer bottle with his teeth. [Pounding the bottle cap on the corner of table] That was his only accomplishment, all he could do—he was just a human bottle-opener. And then one time, at a wedding party, he broke his front teeth off! After that he was so ashamed of himself he used t' sneak out of the house when company came . . . [The bottle cap pops off and a geyser of foam shoots up. Stanley laughs happily, holding up the bottle over his head.] Ha-ha! Rain from heaven! [He extends the bottle toward her] Shall we bury the hatchet and make it a loving-cup? Huh?65

The tale about Stanley's cousin encapsulates the metaphorical properties of alcohol. Reduced to a conduit for the flow of beer, the male becomes enslaved by his signifier. The cousin's only talent, his single noteworthy characteristic, is his ability to open a beer bottle with his mouth. Slave to the phallicism obvious in a beer bottle, the cousin becomes victim of the masculine power residing in the object and must hide his head in shame once he has been disfigured by its strength. Like Mitch, the

65Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 394-395.
cousin becomes subservient to the primary male and rightful bearer of alcohol.

When Stanley finally manages to open the bottle and "a geyser of foam shoots up," we think of the male orgasm mirrored by the release of tension in Stanley's relaxed laughter as he celebrates the approaching birth of his child. In the post-orgasmic docility symbolized by the shooting beer foam, Stanley offers Blanche her single chance of escape in proposing the toast. Blanche declines Stanley's conciliatory posture and fabricates the tale that Huntleigh has invited her on a cruise, but her lame strategy re-ignites Stanley's anger.

As the scene builds toward a violent conclusion, Stanley lists his complaints against Blanche, including his disgust with her for drinking his alcohol: "Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say —Ha!—Ha! Do you hear me? Ha—ha—ha!" 66 The consumption of Stanley's alcohol marks Blanche as a pretender to his rule and domain, wielding the masculine power object. She attempts to retain this control by brandishing a broken liquor bottle to protect herself as his anger increases.

Unfortunately, this action seems to incense him more:

STANLEY. What did you do that for?
BLANCHE. So I could twist the broken end in your face!
STANLEY. I bet you would do that!
BLANCHE. I would! I will if you—

66 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 398.
STANLEY. Oh! So you want some roughhouse! All right, let's have some roughhouse! [He springs toward her, overturning the table. She cries out and strikes at him with the bottle top but he catches her wrist.] Tiger—tiger! Drop the bottle-top! Drop it! We've had this date with each other from the beginning! [She moans. The bottle-top falls.] 67

Blanche's effort to use the masculine force contained in the liquor bottle fails, and she becomes the victim of male violence as Stanley rapes her. Her drinking days have ended and the days of madness begin. Like Catharine when she drops her cigarette, the symbol of masculine power has slipped through Blanche's grasp, and she no longer brandishes its force to use as her own. Without any of the male totems of strength, the results of masculine domination are all that remain.

In the final scene, booze predictably returns to its place among the men sitting around the table. "The atmosphere of the kitchen is now the same raw, lurid one of the disastrous poker night." 68 As her sister bathes in preparation for her departure, Stella reports that Blanche "asked for a drink," but we do not know if she means alcohol and it is never brought. 69 Blanche does not get her final drink before her confinement, but she eats a grape—the source of wine. 70 In the absence of alcohol,

67 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 402.
68 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 403.
69 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 404.
70 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 410.
cigarettes, or hard drugs, Blanche stands alone without a shield.

Though no male character drinks, alcohol continues to indicate masculine power in Suddenly Last Summer. As guardian and bearer of masculine domination, Mrs. Venable is the sole alcohol consumer in the play. Just as cigarettes mark her as the authority among impotent males and sacrificial females, alcohol indicates Violet's absolute power. \(^71\) Williams emphasizes the regularity of her drinking to highlight her supremacy.

As Catharine arrives at the house, Violet notes, "I'm not ready to face her. I have to have my five o'clock cocktail first, to fortify me." \(^72\) She accents the importance of this ritual at the conclusion of the monologue: "You [Doctor] may stay in the garden if you wish to or run out of the garden if you wish to or go in this way if you wish to or do anything that you wish to but I'm going to have my five o'clock daiquiri, frozen!—before I face her." \(^73\) Violet's rather hysterical tone indicates the significant metaphoric properties residing in alcohol. She must have her drink for a boost of masculine strength before facing her greatest nemesis. As a woman, she cannot

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\(^71\)Like smoke and fire, women who drink spirits increase their magical powers. Goddess cults where women assumed traditionally masculine roles often included the drinking of wine in their rituals. See Moira Plant, Women and Alcohol: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives (London: Free Association Books, 1997) 34.

\(^72\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 368.

\(^73\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 369.
possess the long term powers inherent in alcohol like a male drinker using the drug that is rightfully his; Violet must consume spirits regularly to maintain her advantage.

Aware of the regularity of Violet's drinking habit, the Holly family avoid interrupting it. Catharine notes, "There goes the Waring Mixer, Aunt Violet's about to have her five o'clock daiquiri, you could set a watch by it!"\(^{74}\) Knowing the ritual, Mrs. Holly takes the opportunity to steal some private moments with her children and plan their tactics for handling Violet. She urges Catharine not to repeat her tale of Sebastian's death.\(^{75}\)

Her daiquiri prepared, Violet returns to consume the restorative in the Hollys' presence. Mrs. Venable safeguards the liquor supply almost as fiercely as her son's reputation, guarding alcohol's implied metaphoric properties for her own use. Rather than inviting her relatives to join her in a drink, she offers a pale, relatively powerless substitute. The tactic further highlights alcohol as a power site and emphasizes Violet's absolute control over all the other characters:

MRS. VENABLE. Now, then. I'll have my frozen daiquiri, now. . . . Do any of you want coffee?
GEORGE. I'd like a chocolate malt.
MRS. HOLLY. Gawge!
MRS. VENABLE. This isn't a drugstore.

Coffee is no match for the masculine power residing in alcohol, and Violet seems to acknowledge this implication

\(^{74}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 373.
\(^{75}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 379.
by denying them the fortitude it offers. The Hollys are ineffectual and offering them coffee marks them as such. George's request for a chocolate malt diminishes his power even further, making him an infantile boy begging the indulgence of his rich and powerful aunt. Predictably, they are served nothing. Violet's daiquiri is highlighted, a fantastic potion that gives her strength and marks her as despot.

Unlike Blanche, Violet manipulates the masculine power totems of cigarettes and alcohol without challenge. Unusual among Williams' female characters, Violet uses the accoutrements of the masculine, successfully inflicting violence on the people who oppose her goals. Her strength stems in part from her position within New Orleans' society. The play's Garden District setting makes it unusual in Williams' canon and suggests that the commonplace hegemony becomes invalid. Independently wealthy, Violet acts in Sebastian's stead, borrowing his traditional powers for her own goals.

The rare appearance of hard drugs in Williams' works tends to repeat the pattern established by nicotine and alcohol, but illegal drugs (and only Tye uses them) explode gender barriers. As the country became more tolerant of homosexuality in the last decade of Williams' life, he created a character who acts directly as desire object for both genders. Such a character demanded association with
even stronger drugs. Illicit drugs such as heroin indicates the height of hypermasculinity and the utter victimization by its forces. Further, hard drugs symbolize a desperate attempt to maintain mental balance. Williams' own experiences reflect this last characteristic.

In the late 1960s during the worst of his depression, Williams was most concerned with retaining his supply of prescription medications. He recounted his initial institutionalization in the following way, "The first thing they did was take away my pills, which I had to have. And alcohol. The last thing I remember is struggling to get my pills back. After that, I must have become unconscious." Williams was most desperate to hold onto his pills, as though they were the last line of defense in his struggle against depression. These drugs became his final shield against madness and the loss of his personal, masculine desire object. In a different time and place, Blanche would be a perfect candidate for dependence on hard drugs, but her painkillers remain mild, over-the-counter medications such as bromo. In the later plays, prescription and illegal drugs are highlighted as the ultimate male totems.

As we have already seen in Suddenly Last Summer, Violet represents the patriarchal order now that Sebastian

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77Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 319.
is deceased. This system must be sustained by medication. While characters like Blanche resort to painkillers as another attempt to mute the effects of the masculine hegemony, those wielding the force of this power use drugs in order to perpetuate their control. Catharine reports that as the band of boys grew more agitated, Sebastian "kept touching his face and his throat with a white silk handkerchief and popping little white pills in his mouth, and I knew he was having a bad time with his heart and was frightened about it . . ."78 Not only did the pills preserve Sebastian's life through his heart palpitations, but they acted as a marker representing his dominance. As victim and perpetrator of masculine violence, Sebastian's drug use serves the dual purpose of protection against and symbol of that power. As the situation with the street hustlers slipped out of his control, he swallowed more and more of the pills in an effort to maintain rule. Common analgesics were insufficient for Sebastian as he represented both victim and propagator of male desire. His mother's use of medications simply identifies her as authoritarian.

We have fewer specifics about the drugs Violet uses. Like Sebastian, she must fortify herself with medicine before facing conflict. In the opening scene, she takes some unspecified medications and comments, "Isn't it kind

of the drugstore to keep me alive!" The drugs serve a medicinal purpose while simultaneously bolstering her strength for the coming confrontation with Catharine. Violet takes her medicine before her daily daiquiri, and the two act together as a powerful potion in her fight to silence her niece. Drugs take on a more complicated significance with Catharine as she is forced to ingest them.

Catharine arrives in Sebastian's garden drug-free, but yearns for the soothing effects of her medicine:

SISTER. Did you have any medication before you went out?
CATHARINE. No. I didn't have any. Will you give me some, Sister?
SISTER [almost gently]. I can't. I wasn't told to. However, I think the doctor will give you something.80

The exchange clearly aligns drugs to the masculine as the Sister is powerless to administer them without the guidance of the doctor. The Sister's gentle response to her charge implies that Catharine seeks the comfort and tranquillity offered by the medication before she faces the woman who hopes to institutionalize her forever. Ironically, drugs seem to offer Catharine an escape, but they accelerate her victimization as she becomes virtually powerless under their influence.

79 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 357.
80 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 373.
As Mrs. Holly and George attempt to persuade Catharine to lie about the circumstances surrounding Sebastian's death, she protests:

Oh, yes, but if they give me an injection—I won't have any choice but to tell exactly what happened in Cabeza de Lobo last summer. Don't you see? I won't have any choice but to tell the truth. It makes you tell the truth because it shuts something off that might make you able not to and everything comes out, decent or not decent, you have no control, but always, always the truth!81

The injection acts as an additional masculine control over Catharine, forcing her to recount the story without regard to self-preservation. Though she seemed to long for the calming effects of the drug earlier, here Catharine realizes the danger she faces under its influence. Administered by Dr. Sugar, who has become her aunt's lackey, the phallic needle symbolizes Catharine's further rape by Violet—the bearer of male power. A rape propels Catharine to join Sebastian in traveling Europe, and she becomes the victim of rape once again in the guise of an injection forcing her to relinquish self-control and submit to the forces of masculinity. Like the male object, drugs simultaneously attract and repel Catharine.

After the injection, Catharine admits total passivity and responds to the doctor's questions without resistance.82 While under the hypnotic effect of the drug, she drops her cigarette, giving into complete dominance and

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82 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 402.
victimization. The only female character using hard drugs in the New Orleans' plays, Catharine becomes totally subsumed by the masculine complex symbolized by the injection.

In *Vieux Carré*, Williams presents a male character who uses illegal drugs. Tye exemplifies the worst characteristics of the masculine, and his hard drug habits accentuate his position as primary object of desire, while implying he destroys everyone around him. Tye smokes marijuana at least twice during the play, but the audience might easily mistake this for cigarette smoking as dialogue does not highlight it until very late in the action.\(^{83}\) Thus, Tye's pot smoking mirrors the symbolic meaning of cigarettes as already discussed, but his addiction to heroin gives him a unique status among Williams' male characters.\(^{84}\)

While Tye sleeps off the effects of the previous evening, Jane notices needle marks on his arm. After she wakes him with a slap from a towel, Tye threatens Jane with violence:

> TYE. Some men would beat a chick up for less'n that, y'know.
> JANE. All right, get out of bed and beat me up, but get up.
> TYE [stroking a promontory beneath the bed sheet]. —Can't you see I am up?\(^{85}\)

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\(^{83}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 91, 102, and 105.

\(^{84}\)I am assuming Tye is addicted to heroin; Williams never specifies what drug Tye injects.

\(^{85}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 79.
The exchange demonstrates the significance of Williams providing Tye with a hard drug habit. His heroin use marks him as quick to anger and retaliate, and he threatens physical violence merely over being rudely awakened. No sooner has he threatened to beat Jane, then he implies he wants a sexual encounter as he is sporting an erection. Within three lines, Williams illustrates the dichotomy of his males who are ever ready for violence and sex.

Tye represents the apex of the male as sexual object in Williams' canon. Unlike Stanley, he remains single and has no passionate love such as Stella to curb his natural impulses toward violence and promiscuity. He uses not only cigarettes and alcohol (like Stanley), but marijuana and heroin as well, marking him as the epitome of hypermasculinity. Further, when one recalls Tye has sex with other men for money, he explodes across sexual identity boundaries as object of both heterosexual and homosexual desires. Tye's use of illegal substances helps place him at the pinnacle of masculine desirability. Marked by the phallic needle, Tye becomes the ultimate sexual token—a commodity for anyone with enough cash and a willingness to risk physical assault.

In both its legal and illegal incarnations, substance abuse indicates the masculine and/or a desire to participate in it. Drugs act as a marker for the absent male and unfulfilled desire. They imply the male and
become his power symbol. Occasionally, women, such as Violet, appropriate masculine signifiers and utilize them to their own advantage, but, generally, smoking, alcohol, and other drugs act as a substitution for participation within the male desire/power complex. The greater a character's drug dependency or use, the greater their entanglement within the system as supermale or victim.

Williams' descent into drug abuse heightened with the death of Frank Merlo. Like many of his characters, the loss of his primary object of desire caused him to replace that fulfillment with that which it symbolized. Nevertheless, drugs remain only one compensation for lost desire. Throughout his life, Williams remained first and foremost an artist. Through depression and lost love, his work remained paramount, the creation of art uppermost in his mind. In turn, art and artists became a major preoccupation in his works.
Chapter Six--
"Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then!":1 Art and Artists as a Sanctuary from Squalor

Williams appreciated the lively arts community he discovered in New Orleans and these arts figure prominently in his works. Famed for its range of dining possibilities, from the haute cuisine of Antoine's to the street food of the Lucky Dog stands, New Orleans also offers an equally extensive range of the arts, including opera, symphony, jazz, theatre, and an outstanding museum. Jackson Square leaps to mind as a center for the popular arts in the city, serving as a metaphor for artistic expression with its food vendors, street performers, and painters at work with their latest creations on display, attached to the wrought iron fence that surrounds the park. Tapping into these characteristics of the New Orleans environment, Williams uses the arts symbolically within his own works.

This chapter discusses Williams' focus on arts and artists. In the first half, I analyze art through general categories: Food establishes New Orleans' atmosphere and class structures, while frequently symbolizing sexual desire. Some would argue cooking is not an art form; however, for many New Orleanians, dining out has been a "popular pastime" since the mid-nineteenth century.2

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New Orleans, food remains standard entertainment. Music also evokes the city's milieu, yet musicians suggest an escape from its sometimes debilitating dynamic. With visual artists, Williams (himself a painter) critiques class issues, and he places antique dealers on equal footing with souvenir peddlers. He implies that neither create art, but rather merchandise others' creative endeavors, and he hints to the dangers of commodifying art. On the other hand, his painters expose the tension between established and unknown artists: he favors the latter, pleading with us to heed their perspectives. Finally, writers dominate the New Orleans of Williams' works. He shows how writers often dominate other characters' attention and become the ultimate shapers of the city.

In the second half of the chapter, I discuss the unique status Williams grants artists. Mirroring the city's reverence for art as evidenced by the numerous galleries on Royal Street, Williams suggests that artists serve an important role in our culture, but that their position remains precarious, not unlike the artists working day-to-day and hand-to-mouth in Jackson Square. He links art to desire, and sex sometimes acts as the motivation and inspiration for characters' aesthetic creations. Not surprisingly, some characters live their lives as though they were works of art, and the playwright implies our greatest human potential lies in emulating artists. Art
becomes the highest ideal, even outdistancing religion and philosophy. As shamanistic figures, artists represent the only true aristocracy in American culture, and Williams advocates special tolerance of them. He aligns artists with salvation, redemption, and immortality, and offers characters who worship them in appreciation of these mystical qualities. Nevertheless, as potential saviors, artists suffer from alienation and isolation, and other characters mistrust them. Often viewed as the other by male characters, artists remain sexually suspect and their works suffer condemnation. Like transgressive desire, male characters often ostracize artists as a threat to their dominance. Williams' own experience as an artist suggests many of the characteristics he associates with art and artists in his works.

By the age of twelve, Williams knew he would be a writer and devotion to the craft remained his central goal and purpose in life. 3 Few matters could distract him from his work. Like his alter ego, Tom, in The Glass Menagerie, Williams had firmly established his writing routine by 1932 when he worked in the shoe warehouse:

   Instilled in Tom during those trying times was a discipline, an incredible capacity for work, that remained undiminished throughout most of his life. It was an application, a dedication, to his writing that staggered often younger, certainly healthier, friends and associates. He


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would write, oblivious to his surroundings or to anyone even in the same room. ⁴

As the passage indicates, Williams' single-minded dedication to writing obscured his attention to life's other concerns. Often he focused solely on the act of creation, neglecting human contacts and even his own health, getting little sleep and subsisting on black coffee and cigarettes without much food. ⁵ Ultimately, writing was all that mattered to Williams, as Donald Windham's comments demonstrate: "His conviction that the best you could create out of yourself in the way of a work of art was a more important goal than any of the conventionally respected aims in life was daily visible in his improvident and dedicated existence." ⁶ For Williams, writing became more important than family, lovers, friends, and his general well-being. His obsessive work pattern continued through his life, sustained even when public interest in his new work dimmed.⁷ His drive to create suggests an isolated man in flight from something, submerged in the escape of creation. In comparing Williams to the Absurdists, Beate Hein Bennett notes their shared ambiguity toward the cultures around them. Separation from society allows artistic critique of the human condition, but

⁴Leverich, Tom, 135.
⁵Edwina Dakin Williams, and Lucy Freeman, Remember Me to Tom (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963) 64-65.
provokes suspicion and condemnation. "... Despite the empathetic suffering and joy, the artist has lost social intimacy and often bemoans the loss."\(^8\)

Perhaps mediating their isolation, artists have frequently gathered in neighborhoods associated with the arts, and the French Quarter remains such a haven. Williams gravitated to New Orleans and many of his most creative characters seek sanctuary there too. Then and now, the city "attracts writers, and writers in turn have shaped New Orleans' sense of self."\(^9\)

Promoted as "a wildlife sanctuary for artists for more the 200 years," the French Quarter's literary heritage encompasses many writers.\(^10\) Among them are Faulkner, Whitman, Cable, King, Saxon, John Kennedy Toole, Kate Chopin, Anne Rice, and indeed many others. In addition to her writings, Rice further associates herself with the city by presenting excursions that feature locations related to her works that use the Crescent City as setting. Unlike Williams, whose own tourist concession began after his death, Rice profits directly from her books' New Orleans connection. As a living author, she also exemplifies the continuing interest in artists associated with the city.

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As we have seen, when Williams first visited New Orleans, he sought out writers, but quickly came to appreciate the other art forms fostered there. Just as writers frequently appear in Williams’ works, so do painters, photographers, gourmands, and collectors of antiques and souvenirs. Such characters reflect New Orleans’ connection to many of these arts, and Williams noticed it during his initial stay.

In a letter home in 1939, the struggling playwright enthusiastically described the aesthetic qualities of the Vieux Carré:

The Quarter is alive with antique and curio shops where some really artistic stuff is on sale, relics of Creole homes that have gone to the block. I was invited to dinner by some people who own a large antique store. Their home is a regular treasure chest of precious objects. Food is amazingly cheap. I get breakfast at the French market for a dime. Lunch and dinner amount to about fifty cents at a good cafeteria near Canal Street. And the cooking is the best I’ve encountered away from home. Raw oysters, twenty cents a dozen! Shrimp, crab, lobster and all kinds of fish ... .

The court-yards are full of palms, vines and flowering poinsettia, many with fountains and wells, and all with grill-work, balconies, and little winding stairs. It is heaven for painters and you see them working everywhere.11

In rapid succession, he mentions three qualities for which New Orleans remains famous: antiques, cuisine, and painters. His word choices (artistic, treasure, precious, amazingly cheap, best) describe a virtual paradise, and he implies that he can think of no better place to create art.

The passage emphasizes not only these special wonders of

11Leverich, Tom, 280.
the city, but suggests that the environment inspires artists in their work. He hints at the multifaceted nature of New Orleans' art scene, observing that wonderful foods can be inexpensively bought, and that antiques range from costly objects to mere curiosities. This early letter foreshadows the importance of all types of art as a motif in his works.

Williams often mentions famous New Orleans restaurants in his works, and cuisine sometimes functions as an artistic impression. This device not only helps establish atmosphere, but evokes the city directly in a well-traveled audience. My first visit to New Orleans as a child included a trip to Antoine's and the experience lives vividly in my memory. I ate a delicious crab soufflé too rich for me to finish, and my little sister had some sort of fried poultry (she labeled it "peanut chicken") that did not appeal to her. Observing her unhappiness, a couple of businessmen at the next table asked the waiter to ladle juices from their cherries' jubilee onto our tablecloth. We watched in fascination as the alcohol burned away in a blue flame leaving only a small, red stain on the white linen, but nothing singed. Our sense of smell (closely

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12 Vieux Carré contains references to Galatoire's, Antoine's, Arnaud's, Commander's Palace and Plantation House. See Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 17. Commander's Palace and Arnaud's are also mentioned in *The Mutilated* (see Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 7, 89, and 125), and the narrator of "In Memory of an Aristocrat" waits tables at Court of the Two Sisters. See Tennessee Williams, *Tennessee Williams Collected Stories* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985) 82.
related to taste) evokes our strongest recollections. Similarly, Williams summons strong associations for his audience when he alludes to food. Of course, as noted above, New Orleans' culinary offerings span a wide range, from fine dining experiences at places such as Antoine's to quick meals from street vendors. In A Streetcar Named Desire, Williams captures this diversity.

Food imagery dominates the early scenes of Williams' masterpiece. It marks Stanley as a barbarian and fixes the Kowalskis and their friends in the lower class. Food appears in the opening tableau as Stan tosses his wife a package of meat just before rushing off to bowl. Eager to join him, Stella exchanges a few words with Eunice, who notes, "Tell Steve to get him a poor boy's sandwich 'cause nothing's left here." Immediately, Williams enables us to perceive his characters' working class status and their enjoyment of simple pleasures. Steve's poor boy classifies them all, and Williams' highlights the contrast between Blanche and the Kowalskis further with food images in the next scene.

Treating her sister as an honored guest, Stella informs her husband about the women's night out:

STEELA. I'm taking Blanche to Galatoire's for supper and then to a show, because it's your poker night.
STANLEY. How about my supper, huh? I'm not going to no Galatoire's for supper!

13Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 244-245.
STELLA. I put you a cold plate on ice.
STANLEY. Well, isn't that just dandy!\textsuperscript{14}

Here food becomes the site of early tensions between Stanley and Blanche. Just as the French Quarter and the Garden District represent class divisions in New Orleans, Stanley and Blanche's varied dining experiences further the discord between them, highlighting the wide differences in their social backgrounds. Stella's choice of Galatoire's for dinner out with Blanche represents her attempt to cater to her sister's "refined" tastes. Meanwhile, for Stanley, Galatoire's represents high class, old New Orleans; a place he rejects as surely as Galatoire's clientele would reject him.

Stella lavishes special attention on Blanche, while Stanley gets the cold plate on ice. The frigid imagery accentuates Stanley's feelings of neglect and isolation, as he suffers through a meal of cold cuts. For the second time, Williams identifies Stanley as meat-eater, and he drives home the point during the birthday party when Stan eats a pork chop with his fingers.\textsuperscript{15} The playwright depicts his male protagonist as a carnivore, too poor and uncouth for a night out at Galatoire's, but fit for the street vendors whose cries we hear during the play.

As scene two ends with the sisters headed toward Galatoire's, a tamale vendor shouts, "Red-hot!"\textsuperscript{16} Of

\textsuperscript{14}Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 269.
\textsuperscript{15}Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 371.
\textsuperscript{16}Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 285.
course, the vendor's cries evoke the city's milieu, but might be interpreted from a psychological perspective as well. Juxtaposed against the ice imagery from earlier in the scene, the hot tamales foreshadow Stanley's building anger and frustration while simultaneously being a food he would consume. In addition, the tamale might be viewed as a phallic object thanks to its shape and sharp spiciness. Fast, cheap, and convenient, the tamales (like cigarettes or alcohol) become totems for the masculine and mirror the male orgasm.\textsuperscript{17} Williams links meats to the masculine, and tamales become markers of the male.\textsuperscript{18} Not surprisingly, when characters eat, the activity often acts as a metaphoric substitute for sexual intercourse. Gumbo, a familiar New Orleans' dish, takes on just such symbolic properties in \textit{Vieux Carré}.

Williams builds an entire scene around Mrs. Wire's preparation of gumbo. The scene not only highlights the meal as local cuisine and metaphor for the diversity of New Orleans, but symbolically suggests the sexual energy pervasive in the Quarter. The dish stands in for the males

\textsuperscript{17}For a discussion of food as politicized symbols of masculine oppression see Elizabeth Ettorre, \textit{Women and Substance Use} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 112-116.
\textsuperscript{18}In \textit{Vieux Carré}, Tye says he will be home early with tamales and wine. Thus, the primary male sex object promises an early return bearing two totems of the masculine. It is unlikely Tye will ever come back to Jane, and so the male carries away even the masculine substitutes. See Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 111. Further, a tamale vendor cries, "Re-ed ho-ot" in \textit{Auto-Da-Fé}. His voice accentuates Eloi's discussion of the "indecent" and likely homoerotic pictures. See, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 6, 142-144.
absent from the lives of Wire, Mary Maude, and Miss Carrie. The action, dialogue, and Tye's late entrance link the consumption of gumbo to heterosexuality.

Williams compares Wire's gumbo pot to the witches' cauldron in Macbeth; the landlady makes her stew late one night, claiming she eats at "irregular hours." Like a witch's brew, the smell of her midnight snack casts a spell, soon attracting Mary Maude and Miss Carrie. As the gumbo warms, the two destitute women slyly try to fill their saucepan without Wire's consent. During this action, Mary reveals that her presumably dead husband spent great sums of their money on a secret mistress. As the women hover about the gumbo pot, their conversation centers on neglectful men whose sexual attention remained elsewhere. Thus, through the conversation, males become associated with the food.

Startled by Wire and too hungry to wait, Miss Carrie scalds her mouth eating the gumbo before it cools. Moments after she burns herself, Tye enters, and solidifies the connection between males and eating. The scene demonstrates a dangerous quality about gumbo mirrored by Williams' male characters. Though Carrie burns her mouth, she had to satisfy her hunger. Likewise, the women miss men in their lives despite negative experiences, and, like the hot gumbo, Tye later becomes violent, harming his

19 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 35-36.
20 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 40.
sexual partner. Thereby, Williams uses eating as a metaphor for sex, and this dynamic becomes even clearer in the short story, "In Memory of an Aristocrat."

An artist who prostitutes herself to make ends meet, Irene befriends the story's male narrator and his buddy, Carl, occasionally sleeping with the latter. During a visit to Irene's cramped apartment, she and her lover have a fight, but after sending the narrator into the adjoining room, they rapidly reconcile by making love. Within easy earshot, the narrator devours a pot of stew while listening to the couple's frenzied activities:

All that time I was eating out of the stew and I was so distracted by the noise that I forgot to notice how much of the stuff I was eating. When I looked down at last, the noise on the bed having now subsided a little, the pot of stew was almost entirely exhausted.21

The narrator's rapid, almost automatic consumption of the stew reflects the pace of the couple's intense, noisy sexual union. Eating ravenously, his action clearly becomes a substitute for the sex he hears in the next room, and just as the couple have exhausted themselves, the narrator has completely depleted the stew. Though never directly stated, the narrator is probably gay as he reflects characteristics of Williams' life, much like the

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21Williams, Collected Stories, 87.
Writer in Vieux Carré. He eats the stew wishing he was consumed (like Irene) in sex with Carl. The meaty stew stands in for the absent male while implying sex.

Though Williams uses food as a symbol almost as frequently as alcohol, any further analysis of the imagery would carry us too far afield. The device assists the playwright in creating character traits; Williams evokes famous New Orleans' restaurants to create atmosphere, and he suggests that the city promotes an indulgence of all bodily hungers, food as well as sex and drugs. His character's diets help establish their social standings, personalities, and allegiances; they reveal themselves through what they eat, whether a fine meal at Galatoire's, a pot of gumbo, or a tamale from a street vendor. Williams uses the art of cookery to create the setting of New Orleans, and he calls on music for similar effects.

22The narrator mirrors Williams' life as both worked in a French Quarter restaurant, and travel to California with "a fellow named Parrott." See Williams, Collected Stories, 82, and 95.
23The fact that Blanche and Stella eat so little is worth examining. In addition, Blanche is often associated with fruits and sweets (See Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 280, 358, 375-376, 404, 409-410). The poker players eat watermelon and talk about ordering chop suey (See Theatre, vol. 1, 286-287). Stanley demeans Mitch by associating him with sugar (See Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 288), and this marker of ineffectual males continues in Suddenly Last Summer with Dr. Sugar. Sebastian refers to men "like items on a menu" (See Theatre, vol. 3, 375). In Vieux Carré, Mary Maude and Miss Carrie bring home steak Diane and chicken bonne femme that they have retrieved from garbage pails (See Theatre, vol. 8, 13-14). In The Mutilated, Celeste eats the popcorn garland from the Christmas tree and consumes a cookie even after discovering a dead cockroach in the tin (See Theatre, vol. 7, 94, and 125). Oysters are emphasized in "In Memory of an Aristocrat," and food acts "like a powerful drug" in "The Angel in the Alcove (See Collected Stories, 82, and 126).
The playwright frequently establishes New Orleans' atmosphere through music; an art form long identified with the city. New Orleans became a major center for opera in the nineteenth century, and many call it the birthplace of jazz. Today, it still hosts numerous music celebrations, such as the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Williams recognized the important role music plays in the city's life, integrating it into his plays. In the opening scene of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he describes the musical sounds required:

> A corresponding air is evoked by the music of Negro entertainers at a barroom around the corner. In this part of New Orleans you are practically always just around the corner, or a few doors down the street, from a tinny piano being played with the infatuated fluency of brown fingers. This "Blue Piano" expresses the spirit of the life which goes on here.

His stage directions indicate that music becomes central to establishing the rhythm and tenor of life in New Orleans. Calling for the "Blue Piano" seven times during the play, the tune behaves almost like a character, and constantly reminds the audience of a pathos and exuberance pulsing through the French Quarter. The "Blue Piano" that represents New Orleans in the play, contrasts sharply with the soft, haunting musical themes representing Blanche.

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26 Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 1, 243, 261, 269, 284, 324, 339, and 419.
Used as an expressionistic device, the "Varsouviana" polka music Blanche hears evokes memories of the night Allan died and becomes her main musical theme. The other characters do not hear this music, but the audience gains insight into Blanche's mind each time it plays. Haunting her when Mitch visits unannounced, Blanche reveals how the tune consumes her focus: "I forgive you because it's such a relief to see you. You've stopped that polka tune that I had caught in my head. Have you ever had anything caught in your head?"\(^{27}\) Blanche becomes possessed by memories through the "Varsouviana," and it pops back into her head again later in this scene:

Blanche.  The "Varsouviana"! The polka tune they were playing when Allan— Wait! [A distant revolver shot is heard. Blanche seems relieved.] There now, the shot! It always stops after that. [The polka music dies out again.] Yes, now it's stopped.\(^{28}\)

In addition to these two moments, Williams calls for the "Varsouviana" seven more times;\(^{29}\) therefore, Blanche's musical theme competes with New Orleans' "Blue piano" on almost equal footing. Williams thus intensifies the conflict between his heroine and the city through music. He furthers this trend by associating Blanche with other music that heightens Stanley's frustration with her, such as in scene three. Returning from Galatoire's, Blanche plays the radio while Stella uses the bathroom. The sound

\(^{27}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 380.
\(^{28}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 381.
\(^{29}\)Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 268, 355, 376, 388, 406, 411, and 414.
of a rhumba immediately provokes Stanley's anger, and he soon turns off the radio.\textsuperscript{30} The scene continues with the first meeting between Blanche and Mitch, and she turns on the radio again, moving to the tempo of a waltz. For the second time, Blanche's music sparks Stanley's fury and a fight ignites as he throws the radio out the window, symbolically evicting his sister-in-law.\textsuperscript{31} Her attempt to alter the atmosphere with music emanating from a receiver fails, and Stanley's music (the sounds coming from the Quarter) dominates the balance of the scene.

Just before Stanley emerges from his forced shower, "The Negro entertainers in the bar around the corner play 'Paper Doll' slow and blue."\textsuperscript{32} The tune not only reestablishes Stanley's rule as accentuated by the regular music of the Quarter, but highlights his bellowing for Stella, Stanley's paper doll whose return from the Hubbell apartment (without Blanche) brings normalcy. The "moans" of a clarinet precede Stella's reunion with Stanley in sexual passion.\textsuperscript{33} The scene illustrates how Williams used music to symbolize the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, foreshadowing Stanley's final triumph.

Except for the continuing refrain of the "Varsouviana," Williams tends to emphasize the sound of New Orleans' music as the play nears conclusion. We hear

\textsuperscript{30}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 295.
\textsuperscript{31}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 302.
\textsuperscript{32}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 305.
\textsuperscript{33}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 307.

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nearby black entertainers just after Stanley destructively clears away his dishes during the birthday party.\textsuperscript{34} "The hot trumpet and drums from the Four Deuces sound loudly" as Stanley rapes Blanche.\textsuperscript{35} The music emanating from the Quarter links Stanley with the city and intensifies New Orleans' transformation into a site of doom. With Blanche removed to the institution, and Stella weeping in Stanley's arms, Williams notes the final music cue: "The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the 'Blue Piano' and the muted trumpet" (sic).\textsuperscript{36} The music announces Blanche's final defeat and the ascendency of New Orleans' Stanley.

In \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}, Williams employs the music of New Orleans to bolster Stanley's triumph over Blanche. The multi-racial, hot jazz sounds of the city mark a sharp contrast to Blanche's memories of an old-fashioned waltz. The music of the Quarter identifies New Orleans as a post World War Two city with little use for the aristocratic Miss DuBois possessed by tunes from a bygone era.

But if the sounds of New Orleans intensify Blanche's alienation and suggest her defeat, musicians represent survival for the Writer in \textit{Vieux Carré}. Williams

\textsuperscript{34} Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 371.
\textsuperscript{36} Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 419.
associates the far West with optimism in Vieux Carré, and notes from Sky's clarinet entice the Writer toward this brighter future. Although Sky presents himself as a jazz musician, he never demonstrates much interest in plying his profession in New Orleans. In contrast to the brassy trumpets that announce New Orleans' masculine domination in A Streetcar Named Desire, Sky carefully points out the distinction of his instrument after playing some "entrance music": "It's not a horn, kid, horns are brass. A clarinet's a woodwind instrument, not a horn." Sky's woodwind labels him an outsider, who offers rescue rather than the destruction suggested by the city's horns. Furthermore, as illustrated by Stella's return from the Hubbells' in A Streetcar Named Desire, clarinet music also suggests sexuality, in this instance homosexuality. Not only does Sky provide an avenue of escape for the Writer, but his musical instrument symbolizes a potential new sexual partner. His sexuality awakened in New Orleans, the Writer grows increasingly dissatisfied by his automatic, loveless liaison with Nightingale; Sky may provide something more meaningful.

To announce their departure from the city, Sky plans to signal the Writer with music: "Just keep your window open. I'll blow my clarinet in the courtyard." Unlike

37Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 70.
38Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 76.
39Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 78.
the conclusion of *A Streetcar Named Desire* where New Orleans reasserts itself through the "Blue piano" and trumpet, *Vieux Carré* concludes with the call of Sky's clarinet. The music in the former becomes an affirmation of the city's shaping power, while the latter's musical conclusion implies something better awaits outside the city. Williams' use of music reflects the different styles present in New Orleans, from the blues which often connotes lost love; to sassy, explosive jazz that suggests exuberant sensuousness; to mellow, seductive clarinets that imply freedom and fulfillment. He concludes *Vieux Carré* with an effect that evokes these varied musical styles, suggesting that New Orleans embodies all of the moods which different musical sounds encourage.

As the Writer prepares to leave the boarding house and answer Sky's call, he opens the door, but "is forced back a few steps by a cacophony of sound: the waiting storm of his future—mechanical racking cries of pain and pleasure, snatches of song." 40 Blanche remained trapped in the past by the "Varsouviana," and Williams suggests the Writer's future holds a similar haunting. For the Writer, music simultaneously promises a new beginning, and evokes apparitions of New Orleans. One cannot escape the city's soundtrack.

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40 Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 8, 116.
Music offers both positive and negative outcomes for those moved by its power, while souvenirs and antiques symbolize loss or a condemned, privileged decadence. Souvenirs and antiques appear only sporadically in Williams' works despite their prominence in the city. In addition, such artifacts possess only a tenuous connection to what we generally regard as the arts, and Williams asserts this point. He implies a contempt for antique dealers and souvenir merchants; they gain from others' creative efforts without creating anything.

Antique shops in the French Quarter "equal the finest of London, Paris and New York;" however, the neighborhood also encompasses hundreds of retailers offering souvenirs, such as dried alligator heads, refrigerator magnets, voodoo dolls, and ceramic Mardi Gras masks. In Williams' plays, the occasional souvenir acts in a symbolic way to heighten his central themes. Two examples from A Streetcar Named Desire support this point. Returning from their date at an "amusement park on Lake Pontchartrain," Mitch carries "a plaster statuette of Mae West, the sort of prize won at shooting galleries and carnival games of chance."  

42Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 340. A Raggedy Andy doll was used in the original production. See Brenda Murphy, Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) illustration six after 96. In addition, the Mae West statue does not appear in John Erman's television production, but can be seen in Kazan's film in the background during much of scenes one and two, and appears in the most recent television version sitting on a shelf with household linens in the Kowalski apartment.
of voluptuousness, sexual freedom, and the double entendre, the West statue symbolizes heterosexual desire. It metaphorically summarizes the entire scene as Blanche and Mitch move from serious dating to what amounts to an engagement, promising sexual fulfillment for them both. Conversely, the "gaudy tin flowers that lower-class Mexicans display at funerals," offered by the vendor later in the play, forecasts the demise of Blanche and Mitch's relationship. Immobile, artificial, and colorful, these flowers for the dead represent vibrant life now embalmed. Again, Williams captures the heart of the scene through a prop that marks the metaphoric death of Blanche's relationship to Mitch.

The small, inexpensive items we buy on a vacation serve to remind us of the experience, and Williams uses souvenirs to a similar end. The props illuminate and support his themes, reminding us that his characters seek sexual fulfillment as means of escaping the passage of time and their inevitable deaths. His depiction of antique dealers reveals that their wares not only symbolize desire but establish sites of sexual exchange.

In Auto-Da-Fé, Eloi discovers an apparently pornographic picture of "two naked figures" addressed to "one of those—opulent—antique dealers on—Royal," sent by a nineteen year old "university student" whom Eloi

43Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 387.
confronts. Thus, Williams associates antique dealers with not only art objects, but a sordid interest in young flesh. Through furtive mailings, the respectable and renowned antique shop owners of Royal Street conceal an unacknowledged fascination with the sexual desire more generally ascribed to Bourbon Street. Williams suggests the veneer of wealth and cultural significance often associated with antiques conceals a sexual decadence akin to some royal courts in European history.

The connection between antiques and sexuality becomes even clearer in Vieux Carré. Describing the night he was seduced by a male guest at a New Year's Eve party hosted by "older men, antique dealers," the Writer professes confusion:

    WRITER. He grinned, and hollered to come down; he took me into the lower apartment. It was vacant, the others still on the gallery, you see I . . . couldn't understand his presence among the . . .
    NIGHTINGALE. Screaming old faggots at that antique dealer's. Well, they're rich and they buy boys, but that's a scene that you haven't learned yet.

Though some queer critics might regard this passage as an expression of Williams' homophobia, the exchange condemns the sexual hypocrisy of the middle class. The dealers trade not only in antiquities, but purchase young men for sex and add to an ever expanding collection of brief encounters with hustlers. The younger men become

44Williams, Theatre, vol. 6, 144-146.
commodified like any other souvenir from New Orleans. Williams described the hero of "One Arm" as like ancient Greek statuary, precisely representing the sort of rare find these dealers seek in their business and sexual lives. Nightingale disapproves of the shop owners' effeminacy, but their exploitation of the young men fuels his anger.

Williams indicates that retailers such as the antique dealers make a sham of art. They peddle merchandise created by others. The art objects they sell act as desire totems (like those of any souvenir shop owner on Bourbon), but they take their profits to buy sexual partners. Creating nothing and fulfilling only themselves, antique dealers become merchants masquerading as artists, and Williams exposes their hypocrisy. Though hypocritical and a practitioner of clandestine sexual behavior much like the antique dealers, the Photographer working out of Mrs. Wire's basement finds an advocate in Nightingale who defends him on artistic grounds.

The Writer's lengthy description of the Photographer's contrasting styles provides a summary of artists' precarious place in society. Metaphorically, New Orleans' two most famous neighborhoods assist him in demonstrating the frequent disparity between the popular and high arts:

46Market forces have a tendency to corrupt art, assimilating it into the mainstream, and controlling it "within the existing social system." See Carol Becker, ZONES OF CONTENTION: ESSAYS ON ART, INSTITUTIONS, GENDER, AND ANXIETY (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 33-34.
The basement of the building had been leased by Mrs. Wire to a fashionable youngish photographer, one T. Hamilton Biggs, a very effete man he was, who had somehow acquired a perfect Oxford accent in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He made a good living in New Orleans out of artfully lighted photos of debutantes and society matrons in the Garden District, but for his personal amusement—he also photographed, more realistically, some of the many young drifters to be found along the streets of the Vieux Carré.47

The Photographer represents the disparate qualities of New Orleans well, gaining legitimacy through his Garden District portraits while simultaneously creating works of an erotic nature. With his put-on English accent, the Photographer cultivates Garden District clients earning a respectable living in making them look alluring, while indulging a more private, homoerotic interest in making pictures of hustlers. With subjects ranging from debutantes to drifters, the Photographer makes money and notoriety. One imagines pictures of young men like Bruce Weber does today, but 1930's propriety would not allow such works a prominent place on Garden District coffee tables.

The Photographer's career indicates that the Quarter fosters art without a market, while the Garden District provides an artist income for unchallenging, conventional works.

Disgusted that the Photographer conducts "orgies" underneath her kitchen, Mrs. Wire boils water and pours it onto the floor. It seeps through cracks and burns people.

47 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 55.
in the studio below. Awakened by the ensuing commotion, Nightingale immediately comes to the Photographer's defense. Though one imagines Nightingale hardly disapproves of the Photographer's realistic photos of drifters, he chooses to defend him through social standing and his mainstream pictures:

NIGHTINGALE. The photographer downstairs belongs to the Chateau family, one of the finest and most important families in the Garden District.

MRS. WIRE. Oh, do you write the social register now?

NIGHTINGALE. I know he is New Orleans's most prominent society photographer!

MRS. WIRE. I know he's the city's most notorious pervert and is occupying space in my building!

Wire disapproves of the Photographer's drifter pictures, branding him a pervert. Even though one of the Photographer's guests "was the nephew of the District Attorney," Wire remains unimpressed and calls him a "filthy-morphodite." Her malapropism for hermaphrodite further accentuates his dual nature; he operates not only between the Garden District and the Quarter, but blurs gender boundaries as well. Wire cannot tolerate such a duality, asserting the feminine energy of the Garden District over the male sensibility dominant in the Quarter.

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48 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 55-56.
49 Photographs tend be viewed as less incendiary than other art forms as they are not unique and are more likely to be viewed as part of the mainstream. See Lynda Nead, "The Female Nude: Pornography, Art, and Sexuality," Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate, eds., Lynne Segal, and Mary McIntosh (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993) 286.
50 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 59.
51 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 61.
surrounding her boarding house. To her, the Photographer's renderings of drifters destroy any hint of respectability he may gain through his bloodline. With Wire's reaction to the photographer, Williams shows how branding artists as perverted allows one to dismiss them.\textsuperscript{52}

Rather than supporting him on artistic grounds, Nightingale becomes an advocate for the Photographer through an appeal to lineage. Logically, such an argument should work with Wire. Defending an artist's right to free expression would be fruitless with a moralist such as Wire, but Nightingale's tactic is more interesting in what it tells us about him. As a painter himself, Nightingale has been reduced to, "Doing portraits in pastel of the tourist clientele," and he regards this as a "prostitution" of his talents.\textsuperscript{53} Later when Wire evicts Nightingale, the fallen painter resorts to his own family name as a final means of salvation. He announces to his landlady that he is a "Rossignol! of the Baton Rouge Rossignols," but the argument remains just as ineffective as his defense of the Photographer through his peerage.\textsuperscript{54}

Though the Photographer's situation is similar to the antique dealers who hire young men, here Nightingale supports the accused through social standing whereas before

\textsuperscript{52}Wire's reaction is similar to Jesse Helms' attack on Robert Mapplethorpe's photography, and shows how Williams' concerns about art remain very active today.
\textsuperscript{53}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 17.
\textsuperscript{54}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 8, 76.
he derided them for it. Thus, Williams suggests that artists deserve special consideration and tolerance while merchants do not; furthermore, one should vigorously defend artists' freedom of expression through any means. He hints that even without a respected family name, artists have a unique social position.

Williams' interest in artists' rights as opposed to society at large gains even greater focus in the short story, "In Memory of an Aristocrat." A painter and the aristocrat of the title, Irene "packed all her paintings and shipped them down to New Orleans where she heard an artist could subsist on practically nothing."55 Sex provides inspiration for her work, and she sees "abstract designs" when making love.56 In addition, she worked as an art model in New York City, and her body continues to inspire creativity; it reminds the narrator of "a phrase from a poem."57 Thus, Williams makes Irene a complicated character who simultaneously represents an artist and an artist's inspiration. While often regarded as a procreative act, Irene's heterosexual unions do not make biological offspring, but foster art objects. She is creator and creation, maker and made, and these attributes

55Williams, Collected Stories, 88.
56Williams, Collected Stories, 86.
57Williams, Collected Stories, 84-85.
hint to her ultimate defeat by established New Orleanian artists.58

Despite Irene's low social status, the narrator regards her as an aristocrat. By that he means: "There is only one true aristocracy . . . and that is the aristocracy of passionate souls!"59 Clearly, Williams here imbues the artistic personality with a special status. Class, wealth, and family name may have much to do with social station, but a passionate and artistic soul elevates one beyond such superficial signs of rank; nonetheless, Irene seeks validation for her work from the New Orleans arts establishment. Her drive for civic recognition demonstrates how the public, often failing to appreciate unconventional art, can act as destroyers of talent.

Irene's paintings feature socioeconomic themes such as street people, pregnant women, and labor strikes, but her depictions went beyond mere realism. "There was one that was quite indecent but powerful as hell: a policeman nude except for his cap and his badge, beating a woman striker with a club while his sex organ stood in complete erection."60 She enters these paintings in an annual spring

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58Irene's characterization is loaded with metaphoric meaning. As sex inspires her to create, she directly links desire and art. Allen Weiss notes, "The uniqueness of a lover's discourse, like the singularity of an artwork, places it beyond all truth value. It is thus ultimately defenseless, without power or logic." See Perverse Desire and the Ambiguous Icon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 71.
59Williams, Collected Stories, 86.
60Williams, Collected Stories, 88.
display organized "by a select private group of the more successful painters," and the works are rapidly rejected.\textsuperscript{61} Dismissed as "some Quarter Rat who paints disgusting pictures," Irene becomes angry, a "human tornado."\textsuperscript{62} She attacks the contest judges, the prize-winning paintings, and makes a general ruin of the gallery reception "society crowd . . . standing around with little demitasse cups and frosted cakes."\textsuperscript{63} Arrested but rapidly released, Irene abandons her French Quarter studio. Though the narrator loses track of Irene, his tale ends implying she has given up painting.\textsuperscript{64}

"In Memory of an Aristocrat" stresses two points about artists and the Crescent City. First, Williams depicts New Orleans as a city that nurtures artistic freedom, but at the same time rejects a free, open-minded market. The ruling arbiters of taste remain the "society crowd" who refuse to recognize the value of non-traditional art forms.\textsuperscript{65} Second, Williams employs painters to plead for greater societal tolerance of all artists. One could say

\textsuperscript{61}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 90-92.
\textsuperscript{62}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 94.
\textsuperscript{63}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 92. Williams returns to the image of a madwoman in an art gallery in \textit{Suddenly Last Summer}. Mrs. Venable likens Catharine to a vandal with a hatchet in a gallery destroying what Sebastian and she constructed. See Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 3, 363.
\textsuperscript{64}Williams, \textit{Collected Stories}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{65}Historically, we have associated the visual arts with the primitive, illiterate, and feminine, and images often evoke fear or suggest lies. See W. J. T. Mitchell, "Going Too Far with the Sister Arts," \textit{Space, Time, Image, Sign: Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts}, ed., James A. W. Heffernan (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1987) 4-6.
that Irene's story becomes Williams' fate; his indignation about public rejection of Irene's bold, unconventional works corresponds to the critical rejection of many of Williams' own writings that transgressed traditional taboos. Williams indicates that the most challenging or controversial works often become repressed and censored by the establishment.

Williams' passionate critique of societal attitudes toward painters might further be explained by the fact that he painted. His own painting techniques mirror the expressionistic and impressionistic qualities he sometimes evokes in his plays. Richard Leavitt notes that Williams' canvases depict: "a free, full-flowing style in light pastel colors. He paints in symbols, both real and unreal, frequently dealing with religious or allegorical subjects."66 Leavitt's comments might readily be

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66Richard F. Leavitt, ed., The World of Tennessee Williams (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1978) color plate after 64 depicting a work entitled The Faith of Gatsby's Last Summer. Another color reproduction appears on the paper book cover of the hard bound edition of Williams' last collection of poems (Androgyne, Mon Amour), but these two examples are the only full color renderings I have located on the mass market. Also see Dotson Rader, Tennessee: Cry of the Heart (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1985) illustrations between 230 and 231 for a small black and white reproduction of another painting. I saw approximately ten of Williams' paintings exhibited at the Historic New Orleans Collection in March 1995. His color range was not limited to pastels as Leavitt's description suggests, but included vivid reds and blues. In one or two of the paintings, Williams used violent lines that indicated anger and mutilation. These works were more akin to Williams' characterization of Irene's paintings. In addition, on March 26, 1999, William Plumley presented slide reproductions at the Literary Festival of more Williams' paintings. The majority of these works were male figure studies using vivid colors in a primitive style reminiscent of some works by Gauguin.
transferred to many of Williams' dramas; in *A Streetcar Named Desire* he cites a Van Gogh painting to establish the atmosphere for the poker night:

> There is a picture of Van Gogh's of a billiard-parlor at night. The kitchen now suggests that sort of lurid nocturnal brilliance, the raw colors of childhood's spectrum. Over the yellow linoleum of the kitchen table hangs an electric bulb with a vivid green glass shade.67

While Williams' demands were not incorporated into the original production design,68 his description demonstrates the significance of painterly styles in his conceptualization of the play. Williams was acutely aware of movements within all of the arts, heeding other artistic visions. Certainly, several literary figures influenced his own texts.

Anton Chekhov, Hart Crane, and D. H. Lawrence remain widely documented as Williams' chief literary inspirations.69 He consistently invoked their names as significant to his own writing. In 1981, Williams exclaimed: "What writers influenced me as a young man? Chekhov! As a dramatist? Chekhov! As a story writer? Chekhov! D. H. Lawrence, too, for his spirit, of course, for his understanding of sexuality, of life in general

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67Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 1, 286.
68Alice Griffin identifies the painting as *All Night Cafe*. See *Understanding Tennessee Williams* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995) 72.
too. "70 In awe of Crane, the playwright hoped to be buried at sea as near to the poet's remains as possible.71 Not surprisingly, Williams transferred his adoration for these and other writers into his own works.

Shocked by the cramped, seedy qualities of her sister's home, Blanche creatively reinvents the apartment as something Poe might have imagined.

BLANCHE. What are you doing in a place like this?
STELLA. Now, Blanche—
BLANCHE. Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical, I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I—Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!—could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir! [She laughs.]
STELLA. No, honey, those are the L & N tracks.72

Blanche fashions an artistic vision for her surroundings by citing a line from Poe's poem "Ulalume."73 Her literary allusion reinforces her illusions of respectability and grandeur while protecting her from the realities of life in New Orleans. In short, art helps Blanche mediate reality. In turn, she becomes an artist asserting her vision as superior to the world around her.

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72 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 252.
Perhaps, like Poe (and Williams), Blanche believes the artist possesses a sacred role in society,\textsuperscript{74} and literary figures act as guides for her. She invokes Poe's name again later along with Hawthorne and Whitman.\textsuperscript{75} Reading the inscription on Mitch's cigarette case, Blanche notes the source as her "favorite sonnet by Mrs. Browning!"\textsuperscript{76} In mentioning such writers, Blanche not only shows her intelligence and grasp of our literary heritage, but also demonstrates that writers assist her in creating a happier reality of romance, undying love, and poetic language.

Blanche gets aggravated when others fail to appreciate the value of literature, mentioning the frustration of teaching "a bunch of booby-soxers and drugstore Romeos" literature when their genuine focus resides in the "discovery of love."\textsuperscript{77} Thereby, Williams entangles writers with heterosexuality,\textsuperscript{78} and Blanche also draws on literature as courtship strategy. In referring to great American Romantic writers, Blanche hints to the sensuality and ideal love she hopes Mitch can provide. Her discussion of young love ends, and the couple dance under the light of the newly installed paper lantern. The music, lighting, and

\textsuperscript{75}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 302.
\textsuperscript{76}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 297.
\textsuperscript{77}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 302.
\textsuperscript{78}He repeats this tactic in \textit{Lord Byron's Love Letter} in featuring a heroine who enjoyed a sexual affair with an important poet.
literary references all recall Blanche's deepest love, Allan Grey—a poet himself.

Blanche memorializes her husband in the tradition of Romantic poetry. Stella reports that Allan wrote poetry and that Blanche "worshipped the ground he walked on!".79 Allan's poems remain Blanche's most treasured possession, and she becomes hysterical when Stanley manhandles them.80 For Blanche, they are artifacts of intense feelings, and she idealizes the poems as much as their writer. Grey's poems become the site of ideal love, death, and lamentation, but he was not a New Orleanian. With the exception of Whitman, the writers Blanche calls forth have little connection to New Orleans, and this suggests the ideals they represent remain unattainable in the city. The city inspires literature,81 but does not provide a setting where literary ideals (such as romantic and requited love) flourish.

This pattern repeats in Suddenly Last Summer. Like Blanche's exaltation of Allan's letters, Violet treats Sebastian's poetry like holy relics. Williams describes Mrs. Venable lifting a volume for the Doctor to inspect: "Its gold leaf and lettering catch the afternoon sun. It

79 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 364.
80 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 282.

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says Poem of Summer. Her face suddenly has a different look, the look of a visionary, an exalted religieuse."82 Violet's physical appearance alters as the work provokes a state of calm wonderment. Blanche felt Stanley's handling of Allan's letters defiled them, and she threatened to burn them.83 Similarly, Violet alone handles the volume, showing it to the Doctor but not offering to let him examine it. Her gentle, reverent manner suggests the work embodies a mysterious, healing property too rare to share.

Williams draws Sebastian like a later incarnation of Allan Grey. Both were homosexual and the primary women in their lives revere memories of them. Violet's acknowledgment that Sebastian remained an "unknown" poet "outside a small coterie of friends" might easily be said of Grey.84 Though examples of their works are used as props, no one provides readings. Neither found publishers, nor does Williams indicate they sought publication, although Sebastian printed his own volumes "on an eighteenth-century hand press at his—atelier in the French Quarter."85 Thus, social status becomes the greatest difference between the two dead poets. When viewed solely as writers, Williams' suggests these characters' works were too rarefied for popular audiences. They remain unseen, unattainable ideals possessing a mystical hold over the

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82 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 353.
83 Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 282.
84 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 351.
85 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 353.
women who guard their words. *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Suddenly Last Summer* present characters haunted by writers, while *Vieux Carré* offers a writer haunted by New Orleans.

As already mentioned, Williams notes that the Writer in *Vieux Carré* represents an earlier incarnation of himself. The Writer acts simultaneously as character and creator; an amalgamation of the young, struggling Tom and the famous, wealthy Tennessee. Sometimes privy to authorial insight and sometimes manipulated by the force of plot, the Writer has written the play we see, while remaining a character within it. He is the autobiographical creation of himself, looking back to the beginning of his life when his future renown was unknown. Allan and Sebastian have spent their artistic potential, but the Writer's lies ahead. As opposed to the director or the actor as dominant artist, *Vieux Carré* highlights the theatre as a writer's craft. In this late work, Williams demonstrates that writers remain the penultimate artists of New Orleans, and he becomes the grand master of this technique.

Unlike the poets of the earlier plays, the Writer does compose in New Orleans, and finds the city conducive to his creative process. Inspired by the local color, he writes diligently in the city, working "the longest I'd ever worked in my life, nearly all that Sunday." 86 In addition,

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86 *Williams, Theatre*, vol. 8, 95.

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he wins enthusiastic support; Nightingale becomes "completely convinced" the Writer has "a future in the—literary—profession." Nevertheless, though encouraged by a "personal signed note" from an editor, his work "doesn't quite make it" and he fails to find a publisher. Thus, New Orleans becomes an inspirational writer's workplace, but fails to create a marketplace, reflecting the fate of provocative painters' works, such as Irene's. In 1938, New Orleans stifled the circulation of the Writer's work, but memories of the city inspire him to create Vieux Carré; New Orleans' influence on the Writer/Williams reaches across the decades. In short, his life becomes an art object, a trend reflected by many other characters.

Sebastian's life remained art in process. Catharine states that her cousin wanted to complete an image "he had of himself," while Violet repeatedly likens her son's life to art. Mrs. Venable compares her son's outlook to "the great Renaissance princes," suggesting not only privilege and class, but the mastery of humanist ideals in science, philosophy, and art. Violet participated in this singular way of life: "My son, Sebastian, and I constructed our days, each day, we would—carve out each day of our lives like a piece of sculpture.—Yes, we left behind us a trail

87Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 66.
88Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 53.
89Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 397.
90Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 362.

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of days like a gallery of sculpture!"\textsuperscript{91} Violet once assisted her son in making life art, but now merely keeps his legacy.

Sebastian short-circuited the temporality of the day-to-day by making each a tangible sculpting. Violet's description suggests an attempt to escape the passage of time by daily making life art. Art continues after the artist's death, and Sebastian's legacy went beyond his poetry to how he lived. Violet flatly states "his life was his work because the work of a poet is the life of a poet and—vice versa."\textsuperscript{92} Thus, she elevates Sebastian's biography to art. Williams' greatest heroine cultivates a similar view.

C. W. E. Bigsby rightly observes, "Blanche turns her life into an art work."\textsuperscript{93} The stratagem echoes her philosophy for living. Just before Mitch removes the paper lantern destroying her impressionistic world, Blanche famously declares:

\begin{quote}
I don't want realism. I want magic! [Mitch laughs] Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!—Don't turn the light on!\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

For Blanche, the world of illusion remains superior to that of observable facts. Her idealistic, artistic vision

\textsuperscript{91}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 363.
\textsuperscript{92}Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 352.
\textsuperscript{94}Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 385.
makes a more acceptable reality, yet should not be viewed as psychological denial. Thomas Adler explains that for Blanche and Williams, art "possesses a moral dimension beyond the merely escapist possibilities, revealing what humankind might and should become."\footnote{Adler's thoughts recall Sebastian's emulation of the Renaissance; Blanche also seeks humanist ideals too often absent in reality. While Blanche perceives a life of art as having a higher purpose,\textsuperscript{96} Stanley believes that her illusions are deceptive.}

Stanley interprets Blanche's self-aggrandizement as a threat, further marking her as an outsider. Just as he finds her sexual habits suspicious, he mistrusts her artistic leanings.\footnote{Artists tend to be viewed as the other, "different," and "exotic." See Becker, \textit{Zones of Contention}, 32.} Stanley prides himself for spotting Blanche's fantasies early on, and demonstrates his contempt for her design for living:

\begin{quote}
Not once did you pull any wool over this boy's eyes! You come in here and sprinkle the place with powder and spray perfume and cover the light-bulb with a paper lantern, and lo and behold the place has turned into Egypt and you are the Queen of the Nile! Sitting on your throne and swilling down my liquor! I say—\textit{Ha!—Ha!} \footnote{Stanley, Theatre, vol. 1, 398.}
\end{quote}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{95}Thomas P. Adler, \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire: The Moth and the Lantern}, Twayne's Masterwork Studies 47 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990) 85.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{96}Lord Byron's \textit{Love Letter} provides another example of this dynamic, and the two women who show his letter exist as tributes to the poet's literary and biological creations.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{97}See Becker, \textit{Zones of Contention}, 32.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{98}Williams, \textit{Theatre}, vol. 1, 398.
Stanley never completely bought into Blanche's artistic renderings of her life. Paradoxically, in comparing Blanche to an Egyptian queen, Stanley borrows her tendency to embellish, but mocks her as deluded by visions of grandeur. He demonstrates that he too possesses imaginative, creative capabilities, but reasserts the dominance of his realistic worldview in the brutality of rape. Adler views the rape as having "irreparably wounded [Blanche's] powers of imagination, of art," and she remains ensnared in the harsh reality she often fled. Stanley's attack not only alters Blanche, but suggests his suspicion of creativity and those who create.

Like Stanley, Tye projects contempt for art and artists. After observing the Writer's sexual interest in him, and learning of the young man's occupational goals, Tye bluntly comments, "Faggots, they all do something artistic, all of 'em." This remark demonstrates not only Tye's homophobia, but his linkage of artists to the other. He suspects artists as he does gays and wants nothing to do with either without a sizable cash payment.

The hypermasculine energy represented by Stanley and Tye not only comes into direct opposition with forthright

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99 Adler, The Moth, 72. Though Adler cites Blanche's realization that the Doctor is not Shep Huntleigh as evidence for her grounding in reality, he fails to mention her imagination continues in the concluding scene when she fantasizes about her death at sea and exits completely unaware of Stella's calls.

100 Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 31. Later, Tye links gays and art again when he recounts the evening a drag queen picked him up.
women and gay men, but with the numerous artists who operate in the French Quarter. Violet and Blanche, however, see artists on a spiritual plane. For them, although artists remain alienated from the rest of society, they act as prophets or guides. While Stanley and Tye would remove the artists from Jackson Square, Violet and Blanche would celebrate them in the St. Louis Cathedral as martyrs of culture.

Ultimately, Sebastian hoped his poetry and life as a poet would act as a conduit to God. According to Violet, "All poets look for God, all good poets do, and they have to look harder for Him than priests do since they don't have the help of such famous guidebooks and well-organized expeditions as priests have with their scriptures and churches." After spending a "whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's nest of the schooner," Sebastian claimed he saw God. Of course, his search for the Almighty remained self-serving and not a discovery he intended to share with others. Nevertheless, Sebastian remains something of a Christ-figure to Violet.

Mrs. Venable calls her son "a creator" (Williams' emphasis), and sees his life's work continuing even after his death: "Well, here is my son's work, Doctor, here's his life going on! [She lifts a thin gilt-edged volume

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101 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 357.
102 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 357.
103 Williams, Theatre, vol. 3, 368.

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from the patio table as if elevating the Host before the altar.]"\(^{104}\) Clearly, Sebastian's name alludes to the saint; moreover, through dialogue and action, Williams explicitly links Sebastian to Christ. As if resurrected, his life goes on through his poems, offering salvation to those willing to receive his words. As Sebastian's most zealous disciple, Violet's exaltation of his creations remains unremarkable, but even Catharine hints to his god-like status, noting that he viewed himself as a "sacrifice" to a "cruel" God (Williams' emphasis).\(^ {105}\) Again, Williams evokes the image of Saint Sebastian, but Violet perceives the Christian God in Sebastian's work, while Catharine distinguishes some pagan deity that demands human flesh. We never learn if his body provided redemption for the boys who devoured him on the streets of Cabeza de Lobo.

Williams' belief that art redeems pervades all his works, and nowhere so prominently as in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche fears the sort of masculine violence that destroyed Sebastian. After witnessing Stanley's attack on Stella, Blanche likens her brother-in-law to an animal. She calls him "ape-like," a "survivor of the Stone Age,"\(^ {106}\) and she urges Stella to leave him, calling upon the spirituality of art in her argument:

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Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella—my sister—there has been some
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\(^{104}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 3, 353.
\(^{105}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 3, 397.
\(^{106}\)Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 1, 323.
progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry and music—such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!107

For Blanche, the arts set us apart from the beasts; they represent a spiritual torch that can lead the barbarians out of darkness. Among others, Adler notes the promise of art in Blanche's scheme of redemption,108 and certainly many other Williams' characters find a measure of salvation through art.109

Unfortunately, art's redemptive, regenerative characteristics consistently fail due to the entrenchment of the barbarians and the limited worldly powers of artists. Williams makes this point clear in Vieux Carré when art acts as an ineffective shield against others' callousness. As Mrs. Wire enters his room to evict Nightingale, he makes one final attempt to avoid homelessness. Williams describes the action in the following way: "He is backed into the alcove, the easel held over his head like a crucifix to exorcise a demon. A spasm of coughing wracks him. He bends double, dropping

107Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 323.
108Adler, The Moth, 46.
109In "One Arm," Oliver's writings and drawings "might have been a salvation" offering "a center of personal integration" had he discovered this artistic gift prior to committing murder. In "In Memory of an Aristocrat," Irene hopes her paintings will inspire an all encompassing, universal love (See Williams, Collected Stories, 191, and 90).
the easel, collapses to his knees, and then falls flat upon the floor." The stage directions demonstrate two things: First, Williams continues to link art to the spiritual. Here Nightingale's easel becomes a crucifix that he uses to protect himself against an angry landlady. As artist's tool and the device that begins creation, the easel symbolizes artistic potential. Second, art becomes the last refuge before ostracism and death. Nightingale's final plea, "God's got to give me time for serious work" (Williams' emphasis), might be transferred to the playwright. With the object of his greatest physical desire gone, and drugs and alcohol no longer acting as adequate substitute, Williams poured himself into writing during the final years of his life. Creation was Williams' last sanctuary, as it was for Blanche, Sebastian, and Nightingale.

Williams believed that art can save us from a hostile world, offering enlightenment and promoting tolerance for others. The primal motivation of his works was converting the barbarians to civilization, challenging the Stanleys to be more like the Blanches. He implies we are individually responsible to develop an appreciation for art, and that we must attempt to create. As it does for Blanche, art remains Williams' flag, promoting compassion, spirituality, and inspiration. Not surprisingly, his own work encouraged

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110Williams, Theatre, vol. 8, 74-75.
other artists' creative efforts; almost from the moment it appeared on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire* became the wellspring for paintings, drawings, plays, film, television, ballet, opera, and even furniture.\(^{111}\)

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\(^{111}\)Commissioned in 1948, Thomas Hart Benton's *The Poker Night* may be the first work inspired by *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The painting recreates several elements from scene three of the original Broadway production, including Mitch's budding interest in Blanche as the latter preens before a mirror and Stanley's building resentment. Benton's work generated controversy almost immediately and Jessica Tandy felt it tended to emphasize Stanley's more naturalistic worldview. Though professing admiration for the painter, she complained that the work perpetuated audience expectations of "a sexy, salacious play" (See Leavitt, *World*, 76-77). Tandy made a valid point. In the painting, one sees Blanche's nipples through a clinging, blue negligee. If Tandy's breasts were so obviously displayed in the original production (which seems unlikely), the distance between the actors and the audience in the theatre counteracted an emphasis on them. Benton's recreation of the scene allows a tighter focus on the characters and amounts to a reshaping of the play. Though associated with the first production of Williams' play, Benton's painting becomes an original artwork drawing inspiration from Williams' art, but making its own artistic statement through an entirely different medium. Many other examples of this phenomenon exist.


Edward Albee refers to it twice in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and Woody Allen spoofs it in *Sleeper* with him playing Blanche to Diane Keaton's Stanley by way of Marlon Brando. Many television series have cited Williams' masterpiece in recent years, from brief references (*Frasier*, *Seinfeld*, *Will & Grace*, *3rd Rock From the Sun*, *Thirtysomething*) to entire programs centered on it (*The Simpsons*). Valerie Bettis choreographed a ballet based on *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1952. See Roger Boxill, *Tennessee Williams, Modern Dramatists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 76. André Previn adapted the play into an opera that opened in San Francisco during September of 1998. Finally, the play inspired Shiro Kuramata to create the "Miss Blanche Chair" (1988). Selling for about seventeen thousand dollars,
As a literary artist, Williams' works reflect an "eclecticism with which he examines and utilizes both dramatic techniques and techniques gleaned from other arts."\(^{112}\) We have seen that Williams used painting, music, and other writers' texts in his own works, and he also borrowed methods from motion picture making in the crafting of his plays. Of obvious technical and thematic significance in *The Glass Menagerie*, the playwright's use of cinematic approaches has long been analyzed.\(^{113}\) Though films as a motif figure less prominently in Williams' New Orleans works,\(^{114}\) the celluloid versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* exert a unique influence on our concept of the city. The three film and television adaptations of Williams' masterpiece have disseminated his version of New Orleans to successive generations of Americans.

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Kuramata's acrylic work "embedded with artificial roses and aluminum was inspired by a corsage worn by Vivien Leigh in *A Streetcar Named Desire*" (See "Object of Desire: Miss Blanche Chair," *House & Garden* Nov. 1997: 46). As indicated by the description, the chair transfers Blanche to some future time and place. No doubt, other examples exist.

\(^{112}\)Bennett, "Williams and European Drama," 429.


\(^{114}\)Stella finds pleasure in movies, and she and Stanley are at a "midnight prevue" when Blanche and Mitch return from their date at Lake Pontchartrain. See Williams, *Theatre*, vol. 1, 314, and 349.
Chapter Seven--
"Oh, well, it's his pleasure, like mine is movies":¹ The Film and Television Adaptations of A Streetcar Named Desire; New Orleans in Mass Culture

Williams realized that film's wide availability provided his largest potential audience and would allow coming generations greater access to his works.² Indeed, to the general public, Blanche DuBois is not the theatrical incarnation of Jessica Tandy, but the film and television depictions of Vivien Leigh or Ann-Margret or Jessica Lange. Any discussion of Williams' popular appeal requires a focus on the film and television adaptations of A Streetcar Named Desire, because they not only propagate the most widely held notions of Williams' favorite city, but simultaneously tend to reshape New Orleans, diminishing its complexity.

Perhaps, in part, because film and television cultivate the broadest possible audience, the celluloid adaptations of A Streetcar Named Desire present New Orleans in brief snapshots, reducing the city's complicated characteristics for the sake of clarity and expediency. While in the play, New Orleans behaves more as a character, the city largely retreats to the background for film and television. No doubt, the camera's constricting gaze compounds the city's suppression. New Orleans remains more

significant in the original 1951 motion picture than in the 1995 television version.

Furthermore, New Orleans may be increasingly taken for granted in the cinema because of the growth in mass communication during the last half of this century. As discussed in the last chapter, if popular television programs such as The Simpsons or Will & Grace can regularly make reference to A Streetcar Named Desire, it demonstrates the play has become part of our national consciousness. Similarly, New Orleans no longer represents an exotic, unknowable location, having become familiar to the mass audience through a plethora of magazine articles, videos, films, television programs, and travelogues that feature it. Chief among these numerous representations of New Orleans are the three film and television adaptations of A Streetcar Named Desire that presently exist. Of course, the three adaptations are not uniform in their re-creations of the Crescent City. They, in fact, present what amounts to three different cities, because of the varying emphasis placed upon the New Orleans setting in each version.

In Elia Kazan's 1951 film, the city becomes a black and white setting for a melodramatic morality tale. This version polarizes Williams' themes, and its representation of the city reflects these binaries, contrasting light and shadow, freedom and claustrophobia, and the feminine and masculine. Kazan presents a world of harsh contrasts where
good and evil remain as identifiable as day and night. In effect, Kazan condemns New Orleans (along with Stanley) as a city overpowered by masculine heterosexual desire and violence and where women become objects.

In contrast to the 1951 and Glenn Jordan's 1995 version, director John Erman's 1984 television production opens up the play, reflecting New Orleans through local sights, people, and activities. Resisting simple moralist statements, Erman's color adaptation forces the audience to grapple more with the play's complexity and presents the city as a vibrant metropolis. Unlike Kazan's production, Erman creates a cityscape balanced precariously between the philosophies espoused by Blanche and Stanley. Erman's city favors neither protagonist, but encompasses both their views, retaining Williams' theatrical intent.

Finally, Jordan's 1995 version remains most faithful to Williams' dialogue, while simultaneously relegating New Orleans to relative insignificance. Though admirable, Jordan's fidelity to the theatrical script tends to erase New Orleans perhaps because he favors the theatrical realism Williams evokes, but neglects to utilize the impressionistic and expressionistic qualities (such as music or painterly styles) the playwright used to suggest New Orleans. As a result, Jordan's rendition makes the city generic; it could be almost any urban space.
Probably still the most widely known of the film and television versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Elia Kazan's 1951 adaptation stifles the colorful, elaborate New Orleans of the stage play. The famous director regarded the play's New Orleans setting as relatively unimportant to the story.\(^3\) Paradoxically, his film makes New Orleans a powerful, shaping presence, and reinscribes the city as masculine. As a male environment, Kazan's rendition of New Orleans acts to reinforce Stanley's perspective, but submerges Williams' complex themes in the process. Censorship and the attitude of America's mainstream, movie-going public during the 1950s help account for Kazan's simplification. Film audiences were more accustomed to melodrama, and the Hollywood hegemony feared they would not support a motion picture faithful to Williams' stage play.

In the early fifties, "American films were almost exclusively safe family entertainments";\(^4\) thus, it is not surprising that Hollywood attempted to eliminate elements such as sexuality (both homo and hetero), "harsh" language (such as the word damn), and rape from Williams' play. The Code for the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) demanded that films of the time should "be structured by the central principle of nineteenth-century melodrama:

evil was to be punished and good rewarded . . . " The film's creative team grudgingly conceded to most of the cuts demanded by Joseph Breen (the administrator of the Code for MPAA), but Williams and Kazan insisted that the rape remain integral and not be censored. The 1948 movie Johnny Belinda set a precedent in depicting a rape victim; therefore, Breen relented and allowed the sequence to remain in Kazan's film "provided that Stanley was appropriately punished for the transgression." At the film's conclusion, Stella leaves her husband, thus penalizing him for the rape, but strongly altering the intent of Williams' play.

Stanley's ostracism coupled with Kazan's goal in filming the play hints to the cause of New Orleans' reshaping. According to Kim Hunter, Kazan wanted to direct the film version because, "He felt that in the play, he had given too much emphasis to Stanley rather than Blanche." Ultimately, the director's success in muting Stanley's prominence becomes impossible to judge, but his film still favors Kowalski when one considers New Orleans' depiction. Even the blurb from the film's original poster reproduced

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7Yacowar, Williams and Film, 22
8Phillips, The Films, 82.
on the 1994 video rerelease of Kazan's restored version hints to the masculine characterization of New Orleans. It reads: "... When she got there she met the brute Stan, and the side of New Orleans she hardly knew existed ... Blanche, who wanted so much to stay a lady...." The poster condemns the city as much as Stanley. It emphasizes a hidden, hedonistic quality of New Orleans known only to residents and labels it masculine. It equates brutality with New Orleans, and this factor coupled with the black and white photography tips the balance away from Blanche. The original poster highlights the prominence of male desire and violence as discussed in previous chapters. Hollywood censorship demanded Stanley's punishment, and Kazan accomplished this requirement while pointing to New Orleans as an accomplice.

The film's opening credits appear over a still shot providing a full exterior view of the Kowalskis' building with the blare of horns from the soundtrack. Immediately, the appearance of the two-story structure with winding staircase and wrought iron work fixes the city for the viewer. Shrouded in darkness and shadows, the building suggests mystery, menace, and doom, which gains strength through the music. Recalling the trumpets Williams requests in the play, brassy horns announce the city underscored by the sound of a pulsing piano in the lower register. In effect, Stanley's town proclaims lustful
desire and hints to a lurking threat with the repetition of the low piano chords. If the architecture was not enough, the music localizes the setting as the French Quarter, and its omnipresence reminds us of a walk along the neighborhood's streets.

As the music fades, a train pulls into the New Orleans' station seen from a high aerial perspective as steam billows from the engine stack into the nighttime sky. Cutting to a street viewpoint, the regular sound of the steam engine gets interrupted by traffic noises—cars rushing by, squeaky brakes, people talking. The sound effects create an energetic, hyperactive New Orleans; it resembles any number of Northern, industrial cities to match the Yankee incarnation of Stanley. In this sequence and during the following few minutes of his film, Kazan establishes the black of night, the white of a wedding party, and the explosiveness of steam as his major cinematic devices to evoke New Orleans.

In addition, Kazan focuses on heterosexual desire, masculine violence, drugs, and music as analyzed in earlier chapters of this work. The street traffic gives way to a shot of the station platform area. Just after a bride and her wedding party rush along enthusiastically, Blanche (Vivien Leigh) emerges from a cloud of steam emitted from a manhole cover. A handsome, young sailor apparently on
leave in the port city, whistles a tune to himself,\(^{10}\) and assists Blanche onto the streetcar after it pulls near the station. Kazan highlights Williams' central image for New Orleans in providing several seconds of film that feature the streetcar with its name illuminated against the night and its interior brightly lighted.

The city's harassment of women begins as Blanche makes her way to her sister's home. Cutting to the French Quarter, Blanche crosses an intersection as exuberant jazz plays. Nuns hurriedly escort six girls across the street, and the children wear white outfits with veils as though dressed for their first communion. On the other side of the street, Blanche passes a man carrying a dead chicken by its legs, ready for plucking. She next encounters an embracing couple leaning against a wall gazing into each other's eyes, and a drunk man passed-out on top of a garbage can with his legs akimbo.\(^{11}\) Nearing the entrance of a bar, a fight breaks out, and Blanche veers into the street. A car horn honks and two sailors ride along on bicycles as Blanche crosses into the comfort of her sister's courtyard.

In the opening sequence, Kazan makes the city a place of threatening darkness and night dominated by the male. Bustling with activity, the city comes to life at night, 

\(^{10}\)He whistles "Somebody Love Me." See Yacowar, Williams and Film, 19.

\(^{11}\)All four of these pedestrians are African-American. While this deserves analysis, I will leave that to the reader.
evidenced by the noisy streets, hot jazz, and bar fights. All suggest masculine energy. The male extras tend to move casually, and this body language suggests mastery of the environment around them. On the other hand, the women's more frenzied, rapid movements imply fear and suggest they lack power in such a place. Women dodge away from fights or scurry out of a car's path as if they might be run down should they lack self-discipline and vigilance. Though Blanche is actually lost, the sequence illustrates other characters lost in alcohol and desire and death, with the chicken suggesting the foreboding of some voodoo ritual.

New Orleans' darkness tries to contain the light associated with Miss DuBois. Blanche's initial appearance connects her to marriage, as though she is to become the unwitting bride to some brutal, harsh suitor represented by the city. She appears, just after the wedding party, in a lightly pigmented blouse and airy veil. Virginal in appearance and as newcomer to the city, Blanche boards the streetcar Desire and is carried into the heart of New Orleans. Once in the Vieux Carré, the children in white and wearing veils reminiscent of flower girls accentuate Blanche's status as bride.

The juxtaposition of black and white gains further emphasis through time of day, and scenes occurring in the day or night not only intensify the plot conflict, but highlight the melodramatic qualities of Kazan's New

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Orleans. Tracking the time of day during the eleven major scenes reveals an overarching trend valuable in interpreting the film. Kazan's use of black and white shows the tension between the city of night (as revealed in the opening sequence) and the city of day (not fully explored until the concluding scene).

As already indicated, scene one occurs at night. Scene two happens near sunset as the sisters depart for dinner; three is the poker night. Among the brightest scenes, four depicts the happy morning after Stanley and Stella's passionate reconciliation. Five is set in late afternoon moving toward evening, darkened further by a passing thunderstorm. Scene six occurs at night near Lake Pontchartrain, and seven is set in the afternoon. Eight, nine, and ten all have nighttime settings, while the final scene (depicting Blanche's daytime departure for the asylum) remains the most consistently bright. On the whole, this progression metaphorically shows Blanche's struggle against Stanley and his masculine, alien city. The masculine darkness increasingly dominates as the movie unfolds until the tables turn at the conclusion and feminine power wins out during a bright day, mirroring the city itself where daylight activities such as artists painting in Jackson Square give over to more hedonistic nightly pursuits such as bar hopping. Kazan's day and night imagery encapsulates the city, and the film's black
and white photography enhances this dynamic within each scene.

While virtually all the scenes show the significance of black and white imagery in highlighting the struggle between Stanley and Blanche, analyzing one scene suffices to prove the point. During the trunk scene when Stanley (Marlon Brando) tries to determine what happened to Belle Reve, Kazan films Blanche against light, less complicated backgrounds, and Stanley against dark ones with intricate, twisted forms that mimic the shadowy wrought iron of the Quarter featured in the opening. As the pair hover about the trunk, stronger light falls across Blanche's face, while Stanley keeps his back to the light source, remaining more in shadow. In close-ups of each character, Kazan intensifies the contrast. Blanche cradles a white, fox piece seductively under her chin, which strengthens the reflection of light around her. A solo shot of Stanley makes him look even darker, with black shadows from a motionless electric fan looming ominously over his shoulder. Occasionally, the light around Blanche dims when she crosses into the shadow of Stanley's body. This photography foreshadows Stanley's gradual overpowering of Blanche that culminates in the rape, implying that the New Orleans' darkness he represents will overwhelm her.

As the trunk scene continues, the afternoon sunlight fades and long shadows from the home's architectural
features fall across the room. The darkness that marks the city's element begins to conquer day and with it, Stanley's strength intensifies. Angered by Blanche's flirtatious chatter, Stanley yells, "So how 'bout cutting the re-bop!" Responding to her husband's shouting, Stella (Kim Hunter) rushes in and clicks on the overhead light, flooding the room with illumination. By the conclusion of the scene, night has fallen, and the sisters venture into the darkness that marks the city. A policeman patrols the street and a couple of teenage boys run along as the women go into the Quarter. A hot dog vendor comes into view crying, "Red Hot!"

Kazan's use of light and shadow clearly aligns the former to the feminine and the latter to the masculine. As Stanley's anger builds, the room becomes progressively darker. When he becomes most threatening, Stella metaphorically reestablishes feminine control of the house by switching on the light. In the renewed brightness, Stanley's mood rapidly mellows, and although his conflict with Blanche continues, he controls his anger. Ironically, Blanche rejects the feminine power of light and finds the dark "comforting" and attractive. Her preference for darkness foreshadows her victimization.

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12Stanley colonizes this tactic at the top of the rape scene. As Blanche finishes her fantasy monologue about a moon light swim at the old rock quarry, Stanley clicks on the overhead light and floods the room with illumination. His bringing of the light offers Blanche false optimism.
In addition to establishing the contrasts between shadow and light in the opening sequence, Kazan also introduces steam as a symbol when Blanche first appears from a cloud of it. Williams associated vapor or clouds with New Orleans' atmosphere; those familiar with Louisiana summers can attest to frequent rains sometimes followed by brutal sunshine which creates a mist that rises off roads and walkways as the water evaporates. Many critics have noted the connection between Blanche and bathing, and water acts as her symbol. The darkness of Kazan's New Orleans dissipates Blanche's feminine energy, and steam indicates a similar dynamic, because water turns to steam when heated. Thereby, steam and similar conditions such as fog act as metaphors for Blanche's containment by the city, while water remains the source of feminine power and modifies Stanley's behavior; water announces his defeat and Blanche's triumph at the film's conclusion. Steam, heat, and water form a complicated sign that simultaneously suggests Blanche and Stanley's transformation like some chemical reaction created by the crucible of New Orleans.

Kazan intensifies Williams' association between Blanche and water by setting scene six at Lake

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Pontchartrain. Against a vista of the placid New Orleans' waterway stretching back to the horizon, Blanche reveals what happened to her husband at Moon Lake Casino. Verbally and visually the sequence stresses water imagery, but just as water symbolizes Blanche, the steam created from it metaphorically demonstrates how Stanley (and by extension, the city) mediates her presence. They blow off steam in response to her. Kazan continues to accent the imagery, using it, for example, when the city becomes a site of death in Blanche's eyes.

When Mitch (Karl Malden) ends his relationship with Blanche, a thick fog covers the ground during the flower vendor's second appearance. Hearing the vendor's calls, Blanche goes to the door and her expression changes from confusion to fear. Photographed at a distance and dwarfed by buildings, the flower vendor appears like an apparition from the Quarter's dark recesses. Shadows fall across the deserted streets, and the vendor wanders toward the house through the fog, a mystical, threatening presence. Blanche shuts the door, attempting to keep the specter at bay.

In the fog created by water evaporating in the humid, New Orleans night, the city reveals itself as bringer of chaos, threatening to overwhelm Blanche and foreshadowing her insanity at the film's conclusion. The city that once seemed to offer sanctuary, transforms into a hopeless image of impending doom.
Ultimately, Blanche comes to view the city's ominous fog as synonymous with death due to the appearance of the flower vendor. It repulses her just as she rejects the city. Her break with Mitch complete, Blanche wildly rushes about the apartment slamming all the shutters closed, literally trying to block out the hostile city, just as she shut the door against the flower vendor.

Ironically, water remains the source of the steam and fog that shapes Blanche, and it becomes the single environmental source in Kazan's filmic New Orleans that mediates Stanley's behavior, causing him to modify his actions as though in symbolic response to Blanche's influence on his household. During the poker night after Stanley attacks Stella, his buddies place him under the shower. The water curtails his violent drunkenness, and he breaks into tears of desolation when he realizes Stella has left.  

Pacified by the shower, Stanley's monstrous rage and physical power have been subsumed by the shock of the water; he staggers to the telephone and calls upstairs for Stella.  

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15 Kazan emphatically links Stanley to New Orleans and it is interesting that both Kowalski and the city have a similar relationship to water. Water reigns in New Orleans. The city's very existence relies on an intricate system of canals and locks to hold back the waters of the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. Water constantly threatens to reshape the city and this effect plays out with Stanley.

16 This scene demonstrates Williams' insistence upon creating a complex and human Stanley rather than merely a villainous Stanley. It is the only scene in which Stanley, the violent master of the household, becomes a frightened victim of the rage he has unleashed.
courtyard and shouts for his wife. Eunice argues with him and yells, "I hope they haul you in and turn the fire hose on you like they done the last time. You stinker!" The camera cuts to Stanley as he begins the famous, repeated howls of his wife's name. The courtyard's bone dry fountain appears in the background. After Stella's sexually charged descent of the stairs, Stanley falls to his knees at her feet begging forgiveness.

In her argument, Eunice reveals Stanley's pattern of past abuse when she hopes he will be arrested "like they done the last time." Her remarks about the fire hose not only foreshadow the concluding scene, but suggest that water has corrected Stanley's earlier bouts of excessively aggressive behavior. Calling Stanley a stinker implies he is like garbage, which evokes the repugnant, sickly-sweet smell of decay that pervades the streets of the Quarter. As Stanley and Stella reunite, we see the parched courtyard fountain behind Stanley. The dry fountain suggests how New Orleans' very survival demands the containment of water much like the city attempts to control the feminine, just as Stanley must dominate Blanche or lose Stella. Here heterosexual desire controls Stella just as masculine violence later reigns in Blanche, but the water, hose, and

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on others. He reverts from tyrannical accuser and abuser to supplicant, pleading for Stella. We see and hear the shower still running in the background during the interior shots of this sequence. 17Much of this sequence was cut from the film's original theatrical release.

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garbage imagery foregrounded in this scene reappears at the film's conclusion reshaping Stanley once again. Water along with light and dark coalesces for the altered conclusion of Kazan's picture.

As the rape scene ends, trumpets blaring Stanley's apparent conquest of Blanche continue into the transition for the final scene. Although we do not see its source, water forcefully gushes onto the pavement near a gutter as a push broom collects the soupy mesh of garbage along the curb. The camera pans up to show a wooden garbage wagon stacked with aluminum trash cans and debris. Immediately, the camera cuts to a close-up of a white bassinet covered in mosquito netting, and Eunice draws back the fabric to reveal the Kowalski baby. These few seconds of film capture a typical New Orleans street scene while retaining important symbolism.

Anyone who has strolled through the French Quarter early in the morning can attest to the common sight of shopkeepers hosing off the sidewalks in front of their establishments. Each night the streets get littered with cups, papers, wrappings, and cigarette butts left by carefree revelers, and every sunrise brings another cleaning. The ritualistic process mirrors the tension between day and night that Kazan emphasizes in the film. Symbolically, the pressure of the water clearly mimics male
orgasm creating a logical segue from the previous scene.\textsuperscript{18} The imagery seems to suggest that water propels garbage off the street just as Stanley has dispatched Blanche to madness; however, the sequence conceals a more subtle metaphor that prepares us for the film's conclusion. As the hose is not visible, the water remains Blanche's marker and not ultimately a phallic signal of Stanley's triumph. Like the water pushing garbage to the gutter, Blanche (despite her broken mind) soon sweeps Stanley away from his wife and friends. In the final scene, the tables turn. The violence, desire, and alcohol of the previous evening are washed clean, and the masculine city of night gives over to feminine resolve during the light of day. With the altered ending, the city becomes a site of mothers and children.

The film's final scene retains the play's dialogue about the unwashed grapes and Blanche's reference to the cathedral bells being the only clean thing in the Quarter, thus intensifying the street washing imagery that introduces the segment. Though the poker players have gathered, it is a sunny, New Orleans afternoon—five by the church chimes. When Blanche initially starts to leave the apartment, she sees the Doctor and withdraws back into the house. Stella becomes panicky and pleads, "Don't let them hurt her." Stanley snarls, "Shut up." The exchange is not

\textsuperscript{18}Looking back, Kazan found the street cleaner's hose "a little too obvious." See Phillips, \textit{The Films}, 84.
in the play. After Stanley tears down the paper lantern, Blanche becomes hysterical, and the Nurse wrestles her to the floor. In a sequence also absent from the play, Mitch springs up saying, "You done this to her. You—" and punches Stanley. Pulled off by the other men, Mitch continues, "You did this to her." Breaking into tears and collapsing, he concludes, "He did this to her." Clearly, the men have accepted Blanche's story as true. Steve and Pablo stare at Stanley during several moments of silence. Finally, Stanley speaks, "What you lookin' at? I never once touched her." His eyes dart away from their gaze.

After Blanche recites her famous exit line, she and the Doctor cross from the bedroom into the front room. Steve and Pablo look at the floor, the latter's hand on Mitch's shoulder who stares after Blanche in disbelief. Stella follows after her sister, and Stanley emerges from a courtyard shadow saying, "Come on honey." Stella responds with fierce anger in her eyes, "Don't you touch me. Don't you ever touch me again." In a black sedan, Blanche is driven away from the house, and Stella goes to get her baby. From inside, Stanley starts calling for her and Stella says (to herself and the baby), "I'm not going back in there again. Not this time. I'm never going back. Never." With her baby cradled in her arms, Stella runs upstairs to the Hubbell apartment as Stanley bellows her name.
The film's additional dialogue and action condemn Stanley. In the play, only Mitch's behavior suggests he believes Stanley raped Blanche. Here Mitch states this belief while Steve and Pablo convey the same through their silent glares. Additionally, telling Stella to be quiet reveals a callousness in Stanley absent from the play. She rebuffs his half-hearted attempt to embrace her, and he quickly backs down and returns inside. This uncharacteristic passivity acts like an admission of guilt. He can offer no further defense. In the film, Stella ignores his calls and flatly states she will never return to him. The altered dialogue utterly isolates Stanley.

Stanley's crime literally gets exposed in the light of day. His ostracism demonstrates that the city of light conquers the city of dark. Though at a high price, Blanche succeeds in getting Stella to leave her husband. Opening and closing with shots of the newborn baby, the scene suggests a new sort of male has come into New Orleans. A child reared by a mother who refuses to accept lies or abuse or violence even if such an independence means giving up an attractive, sexually satisfying man. The city transforms from a haven for males to a place of mothers and children.

19 The play concludes as the poker game continues and suggests that life now returns to normal for the Kowalskis and friends. The film offers no suggestion that the game resumes inside.

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Although many critics feel the original conclusion remains embedded in Kazan's film,\textsuperscript{20} Hollywood censorship continues to lead the mass audience to this less complicated and morally justifiable resolution. In Kazan's film version, Williams' play is diminished to melodrama.\textsuperscript{21} Its rendition of New Orleans makes the city a site of simplistic moral choices where good and evil proves easily identifiable. Darkness may conceal male heterosexual desire and violence, but the light finally overpowers and controls it.

While Kazan's production ultimately condemns Stanley and paints New Orleans as a harsh, brutal city; Erman's version expiates such moralistic aspects of the city, depicting New Orleans as a lush, tropical garden that fosters life in all its variety. Oscar Brownstein notes that Stanley and Stella might be viewed as a modern Adam and Eve "in a state of nature,"\textsuperscript{22} and Erman's adaptation capitalizes on this characterization. In the 1984 television production, Blanche remains simply out of step with New Orleans' style rather than the incarnation of some hostile alien. Instead of a Northerner, Stanley is Southern in Erman's version;\textsuperscript{23} thus, he represents an

\textsuperscript{21}Barton Palmer says Hollywood has tended to do this to all the film versions of Williams' plays. See Palmer, "Hollywood in Crisis," 230.  
\textsuperscript{23}Some critics complain that only Blanche and the newspaper collector sounded Southern in the original film amidst a sea of New York
earthy, innate New Orleanian dynamic and rejects Blanche, in part, due to her inability to openly acknowledge sensuality. Erman's New Orleans becomes a primal garden of steamy exuberance.

Like the biodiversity of a tropical rain forest, New Orleans' characteristics and its inhabitants (as we have seen in the previous chapters) reflect a variety of types. Erman foregrounds this multiplicity in his production—a strategy akin to the Literary Festival. Erman's opening sequence announces the multi-layered quality of New Orleans as opposed to Kazan's bleak, threatening treatment. The early sections of the 1984 production were filmed on location, and this suggests the importance of the actual city to Erman's concept. Though both directors used the screenplay written by Williams and adapted by Oscar Saul, Erman evokes the geography of the actual city, in contrast to Kazan's studio incarnation of mythological city streets.

As the opening credits roll, we see the St. Charles streetcar (re-christened Desire for the production) as it makes the bend at Carrollton and eases through the Garden District on a bright, sunny afternoon. Underneath the sustained shot we hear the clanging streetcar bell as a


Erman restores Blanche's Allan Grey monologue, the rape, and the original ending that was removed from Kazan's film. Williams sold the rights for the remake just months before his death and Ann-Margret signed on to play Blanche only a day before he died. See Nancy Griffin, "A Fine Madness," *Life* Mar. 1984: 75.
melodic piano begins to play, shortly joined by a lazy saxophone, interspersed by notes from a banjo. Inside the streetcar, Blanche (Ann-Margret) applies makeup, and we see vintage cars and the grand homes of the neighborhood in the background.

While Kazan used a foreboding shot of the French Quarter, Erman anchors us to the more genteel neighborhood of old New Orleans. The Garden District homes imply a city of traditional values and propriety, while the music evokes a relaxed, pleasant mood. In sharp contrast to Kazan, Erman's New Orleans remains controlled, androgynous, and non-threatening. As Blanche crosses into the Quarter from Esplanade Avenue, Erman's depiction of the Vieux Carré reflects a similar sense of balance while simultaneously suggesting the hedonistic qualities of the neighborhood.

From a high angle view we see the distinctive architecture of the French Quarter as Blanche walks along a sidewalk. Two sailors with female companions cross the street in the foreground as Blanche moves deeper into the neighborhood. In the next shot, night has fallen and we see Blanche at street level moving casually past a bar. The relaxed laughter of a woman fills the air. A middle-aged woman walks unescorted, and a man tips his hat to

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25Anyone familiar with New Orleans realizes this journey is impossible. One assumes Erman cuts from St. Charles to Esplanade as both are boulevards with vegetation in the pedestrian areas between the roads.
Blanche who soon encounters the flower vendor as she continues her trek.

In the next cut, the noise of people gives way to the exuberant jazz of a funeral procession, and we see a woman sipping a beer as she leans against a gallery railing. Sailors dance along with the funeral procession of African-Americans carrying instruments, open umbrellas, and torches. The neon sign of the Four Deuces appears in the foreground as the mourners continue up a narrow side street. Blanche pauses at the corner doorway of the Four Deuces where a voluptuous woman stands smoking at one side, and a dark, handsome man leans against the other side. A vendor repeatedly cries, "Red Hot!" Erman's camera sustains the perspective as the male looks steadily and intensely at Blanche before she crosses to her sister's home. Blanche remains unaware of his gaze.

The prominence of the flower vendor and funeral procession in the sequence foreshadows death, but Erman does not load these images with foreboding. He exposes the unique way in which New Orleanians confront death. As the jazz funeral illustrates, some New Orleans' residents celebrate the life of the deceased through street parties rather than emulating the tearful, sober mourning process typical of most of the country. Death loses prominence in Erman's New Orleans becoming simply another aspect of the
city rather than the unknown, encompassing darkness symbolized in Kazan's version.

Whereas Kazan depicted the city masquerading in masculine intimidation, Erman's New Orleans does not maliciously harass or frighten women. The female characters in the opening sequence move along the streets with the same ease as the men. Though Blanche is lost and becomes increasingly agitated, she is not forced to scurry away from bar brawls, drunks, or unwanted advances. As in Kazan's version, sailors figure prominently in the opening sequence, but the male desire they symbolize finds balance in Erman's sequence. He acknowledges male and female heterosexual desire in the twin figures before the Four Deuces. While the male's gaze objectifies Blanche, he remains passive and does not approach her. We do not see the object of the woman's gaze as she scans the street crowd, but the combined image suggests equity between the sexual desire of men and women in New Orleans.

In addition to featuring the Garden District and French Quarter, Erman carries the action of the film to other nearby locations. Following the 1951 screenplay, scene six takes Lake Pontchartrain as setting. The scene opens as Blanche and Mitch cross a footbridge over a canal. A couple row a boat along the waterway as strings of colored lights and tall palm trees appear in the background. Carriages await passengers in the foreground.
as Blanche and Mitch enter a pier restaurant. They take a table in the crowded venue as the scene continues, but Erman cuts to the couple riding in a horse drawn carriage for Blanche's central monologue. In a sustained shot before the dialogue continues, we see the massive live oaks of City Park\(^2\) overhanging the roadway as Blanche and Mitch ride along in the humid Louisiana night. The clomp of horse hooves fills the silence. In his reconfiguration of the scene, Erman blends the geography of New Orleans into the story.

Kazan's version emphasizes the symbolism of lake. Free from the confinement and claustrophobia of Stanley's home, Blanche expresses her vulnerability and guilt against the backdrop of the metaphoric Lake Pontchartrain, which evokes the image of Moon Lake Casino. Erman, however, mutes the symbolism Kazan foregrounded (though it certainly remains), making the scene more realistically the actual New Orleans environment. He stresses the city as specific place rather than metaphor.

In addition to shooting on location, Erman depicts a realistic New Orleans through his street extras. After the poker party, Erman's version introduces scene four with a street scene in the Quarter, which reflects the varied racial and ethnic population of New Orleans. He enhances the street activity with vendors selling corn and hot dogs.

\(^{26}\)City Park is the location of Duelling Oak where Catharine was attacked in *Suddenly Last Summer.*
Both foods evoke a traditional image of the Vieux Carré. However, Erman's most striking reference to local color lingers in the suggestion of famous French Quarter eccentrics. The transitional shot opens with a woman dressed in an evening gown, wearing long, white gloves, roller skating along the street, and brightly greeting those she passes. With this figure, the director implies any number of actual, even legendary, French Quarter "characters," such as Ruthie the Duck Girl.

A denizen of the Quarter since at least the mid-1960s,27 Ruthie carries a stuffed, toy duck with her in treks through the neighborhood. As recently as 1996, Ruthie continued her ritualistic activities, for I encountered her in front of Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop.28 Treated with deference and respect by the locals, Ruthie has become part of the cityscape and hints to the eccentricity and sheer madness the city tolerates and even fosters. In showing such characters, Erman enhances his depiction of New Orleans as a place of genuine diversity and complexity.

Even Erman's addition of local atmospheric conditions strengthens the connection between the world of the play and the world of New Orleans. Although Williams specifies

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27Drayton Vincent, New Orleans resident from 1967-1978, personal interview, 22 Jan. 1998. Mr. Vincent suggested that another French Quarter eccentric (Becky Allen) may have occasionally roller skated through the neighborhood.
28A friend of mine saw her during the Mardi Gras celebration in 1999.
rain developing only in scene five, Erman depicts rain through most of scenes three, five, and nine. The repetition of the rainstorms not only reflects typical weather patterns of the city but also suggests its tropical lushness. Blanche's sign does not threaten to consume New Orleans with flood in the 1984 version, but creates life in the Quarter. Hearkening back to Brownstein's comparison between the Kowalskis and Adam and Eve, the rain suggests fertility and growth during the famous reunion between Stanley and Stella.

Erman stages the Kowalskis' reconciliation in a downpour. The strategy brilliantly captures the couple's desire; the rain drenches the pair, pushing the scene toward nudity as it highlights the contours of their bodies. Soaked to the skin, they entwine in a carnal clinch as Stella (Beverly D'Angelo) locks her legs around Stanley's (Treat Williams) hips, and he carries her into the apartment. The scene possesses a sexual energy as powerful as the 1951 production thanks to the effects of the water, and the Kowalskis preside over a lush garden of banana palms and other plants. Outside the front door, water lilies grow in a discarded bathtub. Though the Kowalskis' garden may not be as well manicured as some New Orleanian grounds, its tropical vegetation promoted by frequent, heavy rains recalls the actual city.
Broken by a Southern Stanley, Blanche leaves the city, and Erman features one of the Quarter's most recognizable sights at the film's conclusion. The 1984 teleplay restores the play's original ending; as Blanche departs in a black sedan, Stanley comforts his weeping wife and Eunice holds the new baby. Stanley leads Stella back into the house, and the camera settles on the three remaining poker players at the table. Steve casually instructs, "This game is seven-card stud." The camera cuts to a shot of Orleans Street just behind the cathedral which is obscured by vegetation, but provides a glimpse of the white stone Christ. The black car moves down the street and turns the corner out of view. The camera zooms to a close-up of the central spire crucifix as the bells toll three times.

Unlike Kazan's production that ended suggesting retaliation and punishment, Erman's conclusion evokes forgiveness and peace in the Christian tradition. The Christ statue and crucifix do not center on Blanche alone, but suggest blessings emanate over the whole of the Vieux Carré for all its inhabitants. As Steve's final line indicates, their way of life will return to its normal pace. The new Kowalski family reunites, assisted by the neighbors in child-rearing and social diversion. The film ends depicting New Orleans as a site of redemption. Ironically, Blanche assumed it was a haven when she arrived, suggesting that the film not only mimics life's
cyclical course, but that the city encompasses both good and evil--life in its myriad forms and defying categorization.

Erman balances his fictional New Orleans precariously within real world references. He does not paint New Orleans as a destructive, masculine force as the 1951 version does, but shows the city tolerates some eccentrics such as roller skaters in evening gowns, yet shuns others such as widowed teachers prone to illusions of grandeur. Erman's New Orleans harbors rapists, yet rejects promiscuous women. Like a tropical rain forest governed by survival of the fittest, the city favors the strong, the adaptable, and the cunning. Just as Williams observed New Orleans' happenings to enhance his plays, Erman borrows the geography of the city, local sights, and people to illustrate his production. He extends Williams' theatrical motifs to the more realistic film medium by recreating typical (though historically filtered) New Orleanian sites that one might encounter on an actual visit. Erman captures New Orleans' allusive, frenetic complexity while honoring Williams' vision.

Though markedly different, both Kazan and Erman created practical visual representations of New Orleans for their productions; however, Glenn Jordan minimizes the city for his 1995 television adaptation in what was perhaps an
attempt to highlight Williams' text. Unlike the earlier versions which excluded material from Williams' masterpiece, Jordan's adaptation retained "95 percent of the play" and he regarded his work as "the first film version of the play" (my emphasis). One admires Jordan's goal of bringing the intact stage play to a wider audience, but his production remains unexceptional perhaps due to the divergent demands of theatre and television.

As Erman's production demonstrates, television allows for rapid scene changes from one realistic location to the next, but Jordan does not take advantage of this factor. He refuses to open up his film beyond the confines of the stage script. Furthermore, though Jordan occasionally employs the devices Williams provided to capture New Orleans, they fail to resonant due to the tight focus and realism of film. In stark contrast to Kazan's hectic, bustling city, Jordan evokes a more realistic Southern pace, and his characters move slowly as one might during a steamy New Orleans' summer. Though this tempo mimics real life, it makes for an unengaging film. Enslavement to the stage play, constricted camera work, and the lethargic rhythms of the Deep South results in a television version.

29Though Jessica Lange and Alec Baldwin starred in a 1992 Broadway revival, the television version is not a recreation of that production. The stage revival was directed by Gregory Mosher, and featured Amy Madigan as Stella and Timothy Carhart as Mitch.
that might have been produced on a traditional proscenium stage but lacks the spontaneity and energy of a live production. Due to Jordan's adherence to the physical limitations of the theatre, his filmic adaptation stifles New Orleans. The teleplay's opening sequence illustrates this point.

Jordan's television version opens with a street scene, and the flower vendor appears in the foreground. Superimposed over the shot, Jordan features the playwright's name above the play's title. The vendor's early appearance immediately suggests death, thus the director initially connects the city to doom, and hints that the play itself remains some allegory of loss. A lazy piano accompanies this imagery and its tempo enhances the atmosphere of death, implying the city offers little hope. The music is not only atypical of the jazzy, blues sounds of the French Quarter, but sets the pace for the entire, low energy production. While Kazan and Erman selected music that suggests some aspect of New Orleans, Jordan's soundtrack bears scanty connection to the city. This slow, sad melody continues as the camera cuts to a gallery where a prostitute holds a highball, and tosses her last customer's hat to him on the street below. The pair's manner suggests that heterosexual desire remains as unhurried as death in New Orleans, and Jordan continues to capitalize on the realistic pace of the actual city.
Unfortunately, such realism stultifies the dramatic conflict of the play, and his production never breaks out of this meandering tempo.\textsuperscript{31}

The camera pans further down the street; the Caucasian and African-American blend of the supernumeraries hints to the city's multiculturalism, but skin color remains all that distinguishes them. Their clothing and activity possess a sameness sharply contrasting with Kazan's nuns or Erman's roller skater. The camera moves on, and we see paintings hanging on a wrought iron fence surrounding a single, small tree. One work captures our attention; it depicts sailing ships in a harbor. The image foreshadows Blanche's fantasy journey toward death at the end of the play, and the paintings evoke the typical New Orleans sight of artists' works hanging on the fence surrounding Jackson Square. Jordan's focus on the painting reaffirms Williams' connection between the city and artists, but the director does not return to this theme. Leaving this symbol, Jordan's camera introduces us to the major characters.

Glistening with sweat, Eunice appears in the courtyard, and then Stanley (Alec Baldwin\textsuperscript{32}) and Mitch (John

\textsuperscript{31}Even the poker night fight is staged at a slow, stately pace. Perhaps a drunk, Southern Stanley (although Baldwin portrays him as a Northerner) would move slowly in real life, but the tempo kills the power of the scene.

\textsuperscript{32}Casting the hairy-chested actor as Stanley enhances the menace of the character for current audiences. Today, body hair is often associated with too much sexual experience and AIDS, and is unfashionable in gay and youth subcultures. (See William Mann, "Perfect Bound," \textit{XY} Apr.-May 1997: 27). Curiously, the actors playing Stanley in the film and television versions have more body hair as time has passed. 

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Goodman) emerge from the Four Deuces as the red neon sign flashes. The sequence captures the atmospheric conditions of the steamy city, and Jordan frequently shows the characters sweating profusely throughout the production. In addition, the neon evokes the city through a typical type of sign advertising the venues on Bourbon street, and simultaneously hinting to its status as red light district. The scene continues as Stanley saunters into the courtyard, and tosses the package of meat to Stella (Diane Lane). After a brief interior shot of Stella before a mirror, the camera cuts back to the street, and the flower vendor comes into view once more. Again, Jordan emphasizes that death walks the city's streets, but as before he immediately juxtaposes it to heterosexual desire.

In a sequence that pays homage to Kazan's film, steam rises from a manhole cover, and Blanche (Jessica Lange) appears from behind the mist. She moves forward and a sailor tries to pick her up. Sailors are depicted in all three films, and suggest the city's reputation as a carefree zone where navy men can indulge their appetites. Isolated for long periods at sea, sailors on shore leave have become cultural icons of hedonistic abandon. Just as he balanced death with desire, Jordan counteracts the sailor with Southern chivalry.

After her retreat from the sailor, Blanche encounters a gentleman who tips his hat to her. This man exhibits the
Old World hospitality and friendliness of New Orleans, and combined with the sailor suggests that the city simultaneously objectifies and honors women. In addition, this pair of males reveals the tension of the Old South giving over to the New, mirroring the cultural context of the play as Blanche's rural life at Belle Reve gives way to the urban South. Blanche acknowledges the gentleman's courtesy, and ends her brief journey through the Quarter's streets at the entryway of her sister's home. The brevity of Jordan's opening sequence mimics a staged production's limitations, lacking the complexity and lushness of those created by Kazan and Erman. Furthermore, Jordan's opening sequence remains the longest sustained illustration of New Orleans in the entire 1995 television production.

As Williams' play suggests, New Orleans constitutes a site of death, desire, alcohol, and art, but Jordan fails to develop these motifs beyond introducing them in his opening sequence. At first, the prostitute with the drink, the paintings on the fence, the sailor, the courteous man, and the flower lady appear to acknowledge the city's complexity, but the images remain isolated and provide us with very little perspective on the Big Easy. Jordan keeps New Orleans at bay as though the setting becomes irrelevant, or perhaps he was concerned that cityscape

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33Jordan paints New Orleans as a friendly place with people greeting Stanley warmly as he eavesdrops on Stella and Blanche during scene four.
imagery might distract viewers from the actors or text. With a few exceptions,34 the city disappears more and more as the production progresses, until the director reduces it to two images—banana palms and generic pedestrians.

One side of the Kowalski household faces a street and the other abuts a narrow alley of shrubs. Jordan contracts the city to these elements for the majority of the film, and further constricts them within architectural features of the house such as doorways, window frames, and the courtyard opening. Reduced to a suffocating mass of banana palm leaves beyond the kitchen window or fleeting glimpses of passers-by on the sidewalk, New Orleans becomes a simple dichotomy of nature versus civilization, instinct versus thought. In short, the New Orleans of Jordan's production could be any subtropical city, and it remains a generalized locale lacking many of the special characteristics Williams' revealed in his play. The courtyard that acts as buffer between the garden and the street metaphorically demonstrates New Orleans' drift toward insignificance in Jordan's production.

We catch frequent glimpses of the Kowalskis' courtyard and gradually become aware of the odd variety of furniture it features. The assortment of pieces defies logic and

34At the beginning of scene seven, stagnant water in the courtyard fountain reminds the viewer that New Orleans was constructed on a swamp and symbolizes the "swamped" state of the Kowalskis' sex lives because Blanche is in the house. Seen through windows and doorways, Jordan uses flashing red neon signs to imply sexuality and violence as they are seen during the newspaper collector segment, just before the rape, and as Blanche is escorted away.
reflects the random aimlessness of Jordan's street extras. Exposed to the natural elements, the furnishings in the courtyard includes: a chaise lounge constructed from metal strips; an abandoned seat ripped out of an automobile; a metal shellback lawn chair; and a wooden Adirondack chair. The odd variety suggests the Kowalskis' class status, but makes little sense in other ways. For instance, an Adirondack chair seems typical of New England rather than the Crescent City, and a shellback chair would collect water in the city's frequent rains and rapidly rust. Wrought iron mesh chairs would be more likely for New Orleans.

The strange blend of courtyard furniture not only indicates Jordan's lack of attention to detail, but further divorces the play from the city. Which images are we to accept? The banana palms that suggest the South or the Adirondack chair that implies the North? As Blanche says in scene one (and Jordan retains the line in his production), "This has got nothing to do with New Orleans." The director seems to have taken Blanche's comment literally, and his version implies that New Orleans has little significance for Williams' characters, language, or themes.

Jordan's disinterest in New Orleans' milieu hints to a dynamic that has shaped the city during much of this

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Williams, Theatre, vol. 1, 253.

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century. In response to a request by the United States government, New Orleans' civic authorities officially closed Storyville (a legal red-light district) in 1917 "to curb all forms of vice" during World War One. As already noted, most city streetcars were replaced by buses in the name of efficiency during 1949. As time passed, the seedy bars, honky-tonks, and strip clubs adorning Bourbon Street gave way to souvenir shops, karaoke venues, and frozen daiquiri stands. In 1998, the Old Absinthe House (a watering hole since the nineteenth century) gave way to New Orleans' latest imbuing trend--daiquiris to go. The historical bar's exposed timbers and dirty walls plastered with moldy business cards left by countless patrons, became a glaring pit stop of glass covered, stainless steel tumblers spinning unearthly colors. Year by year, the city loses more of the unique characteristics that inspired Williams in 1938. While Jordan's adaptation marks a further step in this direction, the competing versions that Kazan and Erman made counteract New Orleans' drift toward an adult's Disney World. Despite the censorship and demonization of Stanley in Kazan's film, it remains the most widely known and influential of the motion picture and television adaptations; thereby, it preserves some of the

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complicated characteristics of New Orleans for the wider popular audience that Williams captured in his play.

Maurice Yacowar reaffirms the importance of Kazan's film, and notes that it remains "an invaluable record of a legendary production. It is also something of a landmark in American cinema. It introduced Method Acting to the mass audience and it had the first major film score based on jazz." In addition, the American Film Institute placed Kazan's film forty-fifth on its list of "the one-hundred best American films of all time" ahead of such classics as, The Philadelphia Story, From Here to Eternity, Fantasia, Giant, A Place in the Sun, and An American in Paris—the work that won the Academy Award for Best Picture when A Streetcar Named Desire was nominated. Like Williams' play, Kazan's motion picture version has been canonized. Kazan's adaptation arrests New Orleans in time and preserves not only many of the original actors' performances, but rescues the city from the irrelevance that Jordan's version implies.

New Orleans, as Williams' works demonstrate, possesses complicated characteristics. It must balance its rich heritage (such as architecture or music) with the needs of the present (such as more hotel space for the burgeoning numbers of conventioneers). It must attract tourists by keeping the city safe, yet risks losing their interest if

38 Yacowar, Williams and Film, 24.
39 American Film Institute: 100 Years, 100 Movies, CBS, 16 June 1998.
the city becomes too sanitized. Like Williams' works, the city grapples with these complexities, but the film and television versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* simplify such matters by providing unalterable depictions of the play and the city in celluloid.

As the playwright realized, film exposes more people to his works than will ever see them in theatrical stagings. In addition, more people will probably see the films than will ever visit the actual city. Thus, the film and television adaptations exert a significant shaping influence on our ideas about New Orleans and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The work of Kazan, Erman, and Jordan represents our cultures most lasting impressions of the city. Although the directors often simplify or enhance *A Streetcar Named Desire*, their versions dominate our popular imagination. Kazan created a city that acted as a dangerous influence but that was ultimately reined in by justice. Erman made New Orleans a safe though exotic presence, allowing his audience to "visit." Finally, Jordan evokes the city as a static, obscure prop, and suggests that New Orleans has become inconsequential for the modern audience. As these director's concepts suggest, all three cities (and probably many more) lurk within Williams' play and within his favorite city in the world.
Chapter Eight—
Conclusion

At the 1999 Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival, Rex Reed theorized that the playwright would be "appalled" by some aspects of New Orleans today. As early as 1950, Williams feared that the "industrial dynamism" of the United States was destroying the "magic" of our metropolises: "Now there are only two cities left in America with a romantic appeal, however vestigial, and they are, of course, New Orleans and San Francisco." As his career advanced, even the playwright's canon began to suggest an increasing disinterest in the Crescent City. By the mid-fifties, Williams largely stopped writing works that featured New Orleans, using the city as setting only two more times: The Mutilated and Vieux Carré.

Nevertheless, in an apparently very late play, The Chalky White Substance, Williams implies New Orleans not only remained in his mind, but also that what it represents will endure in some fashion even after man destroys the planet. Given a public reading in 1991 at the time of its

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3I have been unable to find any information about when Williams' wrote this play, and it was never collected in any of the volumes of his one acts.
The Chalky White Substance is set "after the great thermonuclear war. . . . upon the precipitous verge of a chasm over what is presumably a dried-up riverbed." The play depicts an arid, Orwellian world virtually devoid of water and women, and concerns Mark's betrayal of his lover, Luke, after the young man reveals a secret water source. The pair search for meaning in their hostile environment, and Mark takes pleasure in the younger man's smooth skin, while Luke treasures a rare color picture of the Madonna. Near the play's conclusion, Mark drags Luke off to the authorities to collect a reward for discovering the hidden reservoir. As Luke struggles to escape his grasp, Mark shouts, "We're going to the cabildo where you will stay confined till long outused, to the end of your time" (Williams' emphasis). The play implies that the chalky white substance of the title is the remains of God's dried, pulverized bones, and that the world of the play is devoid of a Higher Being.

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6 Williams, Chalky White, 469.
7 Williams, Chalky White, 472.
The play’s setting above a dry riverbed, and the mention of the Cabildo8 suggests New Orleans’ skeletal remnants. I imagine some great bomb exploding in the Mississippi River, draining it of water, and depositing a huge mound of earth above its former banks. The airy St. Louis Cathedral was obliterated by this Godless event and only the former, more sturdy, Spanish prison remained of New Orleans’ cityscape. The alcohol that flowed at every bar on Bourbon Street is gone, as are the tourists flocking to the Literary Festival or riding the St. Charles streetcar, but even in an almost unrecognizable condition, New Orleans inspires sexual desire, and the appreciation of art in Mark and Luke.

The Chalky White Substance suggests that the feelings New Orleans inspired in Williams would endure in some fashion even after the end of civilization. It implies that the freedom, the hedonism, the spirituality, and everything else that New Orleans promotes cannot be suppressed, but will continue in our imaginations, perhaps even one day entering the Jungian “collective unconscious.” Both consciously and unconsciously, the city asserted a powerful influence on Williams, and he globalized this personal effect through vivid evocations of New Orleans in his works.

8The Cabildo stands next to the St. Louis Cathedral off Jackson Square and currently houses a museum. It is the site of the Tennessee Williams’ Scholars’ Conference held in conjunction with the Literary Festival.
At a memorial service for Williams in the St. Louis Cathedral in March 1983, W. Kenneth Holditch acknowledged how the playwright borrowed details from New Orleans and gave them symbolic meaning that enriched all of our lives:

How many millions of ears and eyes do you imagine heard and saw that "rattle-trap streetcar" named DESIRE without a second thought until one poet shaped it into a metaphor for the human condition? How many millions traveled that undistinguished avenue called, with inflated hopes, Elysian Fields; how many heard those cathedral bells—without exalting avenue and bells into symbols? How many? And then one man came along, one simple and very complex man, one poet, and pointed out to the rest of us, caught up in our mundane lives, that they existed and that they meant something. That is what a poet does. That is what Tennessee Williams did.\(^9\)

As Holditch suggests, we have Williams to thank for mythologizing New Orleans. Through the playwright's vision, Crescent City mass transportation, cathedral bells, and street names became complex metaphors associated not only with his most famous heroine, but with our expectations of the city. Even in Williams' one acts, short stories, and poems, the motifs he associates with New Orleans are constantly present, vividly evoking the city. Blanche, Stanley, Stella, Catharine, Mrs. Venable, Sebastian, Jane, Tye, Mrs. Wire, the Writer, Nightingale, Alma, Oliver, Irene, Celeste, Eloi, and all the other New Orleans' characters act as our tour guides to reveal the

\(^9\)Richard F. Leavitt, comp. and ed., Ave Atque Vale!, Memorial pages preserving the final notices and other memorabilia connected with the death and burial of America's great playwright/poet: Tennessee Williams (Miami: Private Printing, 1983) 88.
city's multifaceted characteristics including: festivals, attractions, street performers, heterosexual and homosexual desire, violence, madness, death, alcohol, nicotine, injections, food, music, paintings, books, and movies. Williams' New Orleans remains just as complex and diverse as Colonel Creecy's nineteenth century account cited in the New Orleans City Guide of 1938. If visitors to the city expected Creecy's version during the last century, today we want what Williams' imagined. His works make us believe that possibility.

Gore Vidal once found Williams at work rewriting a short story that had recently been published. Vidal asked Williams why he was revising what was already in print? Tennessee responded, "Well, obviously it's not finished." Williams' explanation suggests that he never regarded his works as complete. Consistently, the playwright returned to his texts hoping to make them clearer or more meaningful or more moving for himself and for his audience. Williams' frequent revisions of his plays, stories, and poems imply that no text is ever truly finished. He kept rewriting his works just as we keep rewriting him.

Indeed, Williams' works remain as active today in popular culture as they ever were, and this trend shows no sign of abating. Like New Orleans, his works refuse to die. In addition to this manuscript, Williams' scholarship

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is rapidly expanding as the century comes to a close. According to Robert Bray, editor of *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, the second volume of Lyle Leverich's biography will appear within a year or two, as well as a new collection of Williams' letters—the project discussed by Albert Devlin at the 1996 Literary Festival.¹¹ Linda Dorff's study, *Disfigured Stages: The Late Plays of Tennessee Williams, 1958–1983* is also forthcoming.¹² According to Jeanne Newlin, the curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection where many of Williams' papers are deposited, "It's going to take over two generations of scholars to ascertain the significance of the papers [Williams] held at the end of his life."¹³

However, scholarly studies represent only a portion of Williams' current burgeoning. After both critical and popular successes in London and Houston, *Not About Nightingales* (1938) opened in New York City with continuing favorable reviews in the spring of 1999, garnering six Tony nominations, including one for best play. Along with three previously unpublished plays, this early work will comprise the upcoming ninth volume of *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* collection.¹⁴ Williams' dramas remain a staple of professional, regional, university, and community theatres.

¹⁴Rizzo, "Raising Tennessee," 25.
throughout the world. Holditch notes of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, "whether in New York or London or Moscow, in St. Paul or Dallas or Miami, in a production professional or amateur, the New Orleans of the mind comes alive for new audiences and new generations of playgoers."15 Every time *A Streetcar Named Desire* appears on the world's stages, Tennessee Williams is rewritten, enriching more theatregoers through living contemporary performances.

Yet, *Streetcar* and Williams' New Orleans have escaped the confines of the world’s theatres, and beguilingly seep into more and more popular artifacts. As discussed in the previous chapters, *A Streetcar Named Desire* is frequently referenced in television and other popular forms. In 1997, Blanche inspired a wine dubbed Le Trolley Blanc Du Bois from the Pontchartrain Vineyards in Bush, Louisiana.16 With a streetcar rumbling along in the background, Williams himself was commemorated on a postal stamp issued in 1995, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (complete with French Quarter wrought iron galleries and a woman dressed in red) is memorialized among the fifteen key events of the 1940s in the United States postal service's current series celebrating the twentieth century. We are reminded of Williams and his re-creation of New Orleans in our day-to-
day, commonplace activities. He has become a national touchstone, and his incarnation of New Orleans remains the model shaping the actual city and our expectations of it.

Dakin Williams believes his brother is/was "even better than Shakespeare." Dakin may have a point; Tennessee Williams may be the American writer nearest to Shakespeare's stature as a continually produced playwright on international stages. Williams may be the closest writer we have to England's Bard in sympathetically exploring the foibles, desires, follies, and lusts of human beings. The passage of time will confirm the validity of such a comparison.

As the millennium approaches, Tennessee Williams and New Orleans remain locked in a mutual embrace that continually shapes and reshapes our vision of the pair. They are a cantankerous old couple, simultaneously fostering a rich history of art, desire, and adventure, while straining toward an enduring dynamism and relevance in the current era and beyond. They are unfinished texts renewed by contemporary performances. Through the interaction of Tennessee Williams, New Orleans, and the playwright's works set in the Crescent City, we participate in a romantic, mythologized past, a vivid happening in the present day, and glimpse its continuing fruition in the

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foreseeable future. Just as Shakespeare and Stratford-on-Avon are inextricably joined, so too are Tennessee Williams and New Orleans.
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Vita

Mark Zelinsky was born in Des Moines, Iowa, and lived in many cities throughout the state during the first three decades of his life. He became interested in drama as a child, acting in community theatre, as well as primary and secondary school productions. After graduating from college in 1982, he spent a happy (but brief) residence in London, followed by work in the private sector for a number of years. Mark became increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of artistic outlets at his job with the natural gas company, and he returned to graduate school in 1992—the first step in a long term goal to earn the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in theatre.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

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Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Tennessee Williams and New Orleans: Rewriting the Playwright; Rewriting the City

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June 28, 1999