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## Tennessee Williams and the Reinvention of the Southern Plantation

Elizabeth Faye Coggins

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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE REINVENTION OF THE  
SOUTHERN PLANTATION

By

Elizabeth Faye Coggins

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Masters of Arts  
in English Language and Literature  
in the Department of English

Mississippi State, Mississippi

May 2012

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Elizabeth Faye Coggins

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Elizabeth Faye Coggins

Approved:

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Theodore Atkinson  
Assistant Professor of English  
Thesis Director

---

Gregory Bentley  
Associate Professor of English  
Committee Member

---

Robert West  
Associate Professor of English  
Committee Member

---

Lara Dodds  
Associate Professor of English  
Graduate Coordinator

---

Gary Myers  
Dean & Professor  
College of Arts & Sciences

Name: Elizabeth Faye Coggins

Date of Degree: May 12, 2012

Institution: Mississippi State University

Major Field: English Language and Literature

Major Professor: Dr. Ted Atkinson

Title of Study: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE REINVENTION OF THE  
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Candidate for Degree of Masters of Arts

The first chapter consists of an overview of the southern plantation as it survives in cultural imagination, especially in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The second chapter discusses *A Streetcar Named Desire* and how Williams reimagines the plantation in an urban setting through the New Orleans Marigny neighborhood. The third chapter examines Williams's reinvention of the rural plantation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The conclusion explores how Williams's work is used as a blueprint in representing the plantation in postsouthern literature and culture.

## DEDICATION

To my wonderful parents, Terry and Cindy, whose love encouraged me through the last three years, and to my second set of parents, John and Jeanne Marszalek, without their constant support and mentoring I would never be here today.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most enduring images of the Old South is that of the plantation. Immortalized through countless novels, films, tours, and pilgrimages, the plantation's iconic image is emblazoned on popular culture's memory, often serving as a symbol of power, prestige, exclusivity, and brutal exploitation. In her book *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*, Jessica Adams notes how this symbol of the Old South continues to survive in popular culture today. She observes, "The white home as symbol reached its apex in the plantation house, and the plantation houses and their tourist apparatus still call imaginary worlds into being" (54). These "imaginary worlds" inspire literature and film alike, and in turn, shape society's perception of history. While many authors offered their renderings of plantation life, two in particular canonized its image: Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner. In 1936, just months apart, both Mitchell and Faulkner published novels chronicling the rise and fall of plantations in the antebellum and post-bellum South. Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* depicts life on the O'Haras' estate Tara at the beginning of the Civil War through the Reconstruction Era. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner employs several characters' memories, interpretations, and imaginations to relate the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen's plantation named Sutpen's Hundred. While Mitchell's and Faulkner's depictions of life on the plantation greatly differ, the two portrayals do share some similarities. Both Mitchell's Tara and Faulkner's Sutpen's Hundred possess a

sense of exclusivity, demanding that their occupants fulfill traditional roles. Faulkner's uncompromising exploration of the brutality of slavery staunchly suggests that the institution was doomed from the start while Mitchell's portrayal casts the Old South simply as a bygone era to be missed. However, both agree that the plantation life has no future in the modern world by both concluding their novels with the image of a fallen plantation as a relic of a time gone by. These two representations of plantations offer a framework for better understanding how Tennessee Williams responds to these precursors in his reimagination of the plantation. Both Mitchell and Faulkner present their own responses and modifications to the plantation as established in the literary tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just over a decade after Mitchell and Faulkner's contribution to idealizing the plantation's iconic status in the memory of southern culture, Williams added his own representation of the plantation with *A Streetcar Named Desire* and again eight years later with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, extending and revising the familiar plantation roles that Mitchell and Faulkner explore. Drawing on images of the plantation as they exist in cultural memory, Tennessee Williams further defamiliarizes the iconic plantation and reconstructs it as a center of diversity and modernity. Through his reimagination of the plantation, Williams creates a future for the plantation in the modern world.

Both Mitchell and Faulkner illustrate the elitist nature of the plantation by making their characters conform to the traditional roles of gentleman planter and plantation mistress. Born poor and without a refined upbringing in his native Ireland, Gerald O'Hara only embraces the role of gentleman planter after constructing his beloved Tara. He masks his natural tendency to be a "brogue of County Meath still heavy on his tongue in spite thirty-nine years in America" with the "appearance of gentleman" in order to

assimilate into the plantation culture (Mitchell 48). Upon moving to America, Gerald quickly realizes he has no desire to spend his life “bargaining” or pouring over “long columns of figures” to earn his living (63). Remembering his childhood in Ireland where his family lived as tenants on land his ancestors once owned fuels his “deep hunger” to be independent. This desire compels him to aspire to join the elite planter class, possessing “his own house, his own plantation, his own horses, his own slaves” (63). After winning a decrepit plantation in a poker game, Gerald builds up Tara from “blackened foundation stones” to the “whitewashed brick” house epitomizing power and privilege in the Old South (65).

Yet, Mitchell points out that Gerald O’Hara’s transformation from Irish “brogue” to gentleman planter is solely a superficial one. Mitchell reveals, “His habits of living and his ideas changed, but his manners would not change” (62). Despite wearing the “finest leather boots procurable,” making dangerous jumps with his horse still gives him “boyish pride and guilty glee” (49, 48). O’Hara comprehends that he must play the part of gentleman planter to retain respectability and power within the plantation culture, and one of the most important components of a plantation is the plantation mistress. Mitchell writes, “Tara cried out for a mistress!” reinforcing social elitism required to be a member of the plantation class (68). Realizing how crucial his choice in wife would be to his legacy, he possessed but two requirements for Tara’s mistress: “[h]is wife must be a lady and a lady of blood” (69). With his marriage to Ellen, a “Coast aristocrat of French descent,” Gerald succeeds in fulfilling his role as gentleman planter (25). Mitchell notes, “From the day when Ellen first came to Tara, the place had been transformed” (73).

Ellen too begins to play her part once on the plantation. Before her marriage and relocation to Tara, Ellen “had giggled as inexplicably as any fifteen-year-old . . . and

whispered the long nights through with friends, exchanging confidences” (60). However, as her husband did before her, she assumes the role assigned to her by the plantation culture after marrying her gentleman planter. Once at Tara, Ellen transforms from “sweet, gentle, beautiful and ornamental” girl to Tara’s “pillar of strength” (74, 59). While never completely relinquishing his manners and urges deriving from his humble upbringing, Gerald O’Hara understands that he must appear to embody both the plantation lifestyle and the role of gentleman planter. He must fulfill the role in order to maintain authority within the plantation community. With a mix of crude origins and claims on refinement, Gerald is an antecedent, as we shall see, to Williams’s Stanley Kowalski and Big Daddy Pollitt. Yet unlike Mitchell, Williams is not prone to romanticize the master of the house. Both Stanley and Big Daddy must continually assert their authority in the house, while Gerald assumes the role of master at which point it stabilizes.

Just as Mitchell describes Gerald as a “self-made man,” Faulkner similarly characterizes Thomas Sutpen, further casting a model of the aspiring planter that Williams would shape to his own ends. Born in West Virginia, Sutpen only perceives land as “belong[ing] to anybody and everybody” until his family moves to Virginia exposing him to the plantation culture (Faulkner 179). Sutpen maintains his naivety of plantation politics until he is refused entrance into the big house by a slave. He pinpoints this event as allowing him to understand how “certain few men . . . had the power of life and death” as well as the difference between blacks and whites (179). After his first introduction to the planter’s way of life, Sutpen, like Gerald O’Hara and Williams’s Big Daddy Pollitt, aspires to become one of the planting elite and does “not what he wanted to do, but what he just had to do” (178). At the tender age of fourteen, Sutpen travels to

the West Indies and advances to the position of overseer on a sugar plantation. After marrying the owner's daughter and fathering a son, Sutpen abandons his young family upon learning of his wife's mixed racial heritage. Sutpen returns to the United States and decides to build his plantation and legacy outside of Jefferson, Mississippi. Similar to O'Hara's Tara, Sutpen creates his plantation from nothing, "dragg[ing] house and gardens out of a virgin swamp" and inhabiting "the naked rooms of his embryonic formal opulence" (30).

Like O'Hara, Sutpen spends his first years at Sutpen's Hundred in bachelorhood but understands that to fulfill the role of gentleman planter, his wife must "complete the shape and substance of respectability" of his plantation (31). After proposing to the local merchant's daughter, Ellen Coldfield, Sutpen assumes the role of wealthy gentleman planter, insisting on a big wedding and "playing the scene to the audience" (57). Ellen, according to her sister Rosa, also embraces her role of plantation mistress once settling into Sutpen's Hundred. When Rosa first begins to relate the story of her sister involvement at Sutpen's Hundred to Quentin Compson in September of 1909, Rosa discloses that ". . . she lay dying in that house for which she had exchanged pride and peace both" (10). Embracing her role of plantation mistress to the "biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county," Ellen refuses to exit her carriage when shopping in Jefferson and instead insists on the town merchants to bring items to her window "with childlike imposition of the sufferance or good manners or sheer happiness of the men" (59-60). Thomas and Ellen Sutpen play their roles of "arrogant ease and leisure" as gentleman planter and plantation mistress in order to demand power and prestige from the community (57). While residents of Jefferson at first turned their noses up at Sutpen, within ten years of arriving, "he obviously had too much money now to be

objected or even seriously annoyed anymore” (57). Like Gerald O’Hara, Faulkner’s Thomas Sutpen acts as a precursor to Williams’s Stanley Kowalski and Big Daddy Pollitt, especially in terms of sexual politics. With Stella Stanley chooses a wife who will not only submit to his authority as a “new” master but also produce an heir to begin his dynasty. In *Big Mama*, Big Daddy selects a spouse who, like Stella, abides by his rule. Big Mama, ostracized from society by her behavior, has just as much of vested interest as Big Daddy in creating a legacy of tolerance.

Both Mitchell and Faulkner also allow admittance to blacks on their respective plantations, as long as they accept the role of slave. These figurations stand in stark contrast to the even more marginalized role that black characters have in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and, even more pointedly, in *Streetcar*. In *Gone with the Wind*, Mammy provides both guidance and stability to the family. Mitchell’s Mammy “felt she owned the O’Haras, body and soul” and devoted to her last drop of blood to the O’Haras” (42-43). While Mitchell bestows a place on the plantation for Mammy, her character is a one-dimensional one, merely described as “Ellen’s mainstay, the despair of [Ellen’s] three daughters, the terror of the other house servants” (43). However, Mitchell notes that Mammy, not Tara, is the “last link to the old days” at the closing of the novel (959). Mammy finds a place at Tara before and after the war only because of her willingness to play the part of a slave.

Like Mammy, Thomas Sutpen’s “coffee-colored” daughter Clytie also finds admittance to the plantation house (Faulkner 109). While Faulkner fleshes out her character more than Mitchell’s Mammy, and certainly more than any of the characters in Williams’s plays under examination here, Clytie’s acceptance at Sutpen’s Hundred depends upon her willingness to execute the part of slave. Like Mammy, she is the

caretaker of the Sutpen family both before and after the war. Clytie plays nurse to Henry when he returns to the house “[t]o die” in 1909 (298). Only she knows why Thomas travels to New Orleans. When people come to Sutpen’s Hundred, Clytie controls who enters and leaves. After Rosa rushes to the house upon hearing of Henry murdering Charles Bon, a “Sutpen face enough” meets her at the door (109). When Quentin accompanies Rosa to the remnants of Sutpen’s Hundred in September of 1909, Clytie’s “worn coffee-colored face” once again appears at the door (295). Clytie ultimately burns down the plantation both to protect Henry and permanently prohibit outsiders from trespassing. Mitchell’s Mammy and Faulkner’s Clytie never stray from their slave roles. In a noticeable departure from the plantations depicted by Mitchell and Faulkner, Williams excludes a Mammy figure in his rendering of the plantation. Williams resists both the stereotypical Mammy figure and a more fully dimensional rendering of African American voices.

Faulkner paints a grim portrait of what happens when characters of mixed racial heritage attempt to reject the slave role. After befriending Sutpen’s white son at the University of Mississippi, Bon becomes a frequent guest at Sutpen’s Hundred. Although Ellen “spoke of Bon as if . . . [he was] a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishing of her house and position,” the family welcomes him as a possible suitor for Judith until Thomas Sutpen reveals his racial heritage to Henry. While Henry can grapple with Judith’s intention to enter into an incestuous relationship with their half-brother, he cannot fathom anyone of mixed race entering the plantation and becoming “the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride” (7). Both Faulkner’s *Sutpen’s Hundred* and Mitchell’s *Tara* grant entrance to blacks, but only in the subservient role of slave, though Mitchell is far less willing than Faulkner to confront the

brutal realities of slavery. Curiously, Williams pushes such characters even further to the margins in *Cat* and *Streetcar*. In *Streetcar*, Williams moves beyond the binary of black and white to create a more diversified space while in *Cat* he focuses on the whiteness, leaving the black servants in the background.

In both *Gone with the Wind* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the physical structure of the plantation parallels the plight of the family who inhabits it, creating a sort of allegory. Williams draws on this mode of representation extensively in his portrayals of Belle Reve and the Pollitt plantation. As the condition and prominence of each family begins to decline after the Civil War, Tara and Sutpen's Hundred deteriorate into disrepair. In the years before the war, Tara's big house of "whitewashed brick" and "avenue of cedars without which no Georgia planter's home could be complete" exemplifies the prominence of the O'Hara's standing in their community (65, 74). The mere edifice exerts "an air of solidness of stability and permanence" (66). In an effort to make his oldest daughter, Scarlett, perceive how intricately entwined her social status is to the land, Gerald exclaims, "Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything. . .the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for—worth dying for" (55).

While Scarlett dismisses the stability that Tara provides before the outbreak of war, she yearns for it during the Sherman's siege of Atlanta: "She wanted Tara with the desperate desire of a frightened child frantic for the only haven it had ever known" (334). After her escape from Atlanta, the thought of going home to find Tara devoured by war "struck terror to Scarlett's heart" (380). While the O'Haras' plantation fares better than the neighboring estates, it will never regain its glory. When Scarlett first glimpses her cherished home, "Tara stretched before her, negroes gone, acres desolate, barns ruined, like a body bleeding under her eyes, like her own body, slowly bleeding"(399). Inside

the house, the “air reek[ed] with sick-room odors” nearly causing Scarlett to faint (394). Just as Tara degenerates over the course of war, so does the O’Hara family. Ellen O’Hara succumbs to typhoid fever, leaving her once vivacious husband crippled by grief. Though they do not fall victim to the disease, both Suellen and Carreen are gravely ill. Scarlett’s determination to revive Tara to its former glory echoes in Williams’s depiction of Blanche DuBois’ desperate attempt to cling to Belle Reve, even if only through her memory.

Despite Scarlett’s efforts to rebuild Tara to its former glory, the plantation and the O’Hara family are never able to reclaim their pre-war status. Tara no longer exudes the prestige of a prominent family and is instead reduced to a “farm, a two-mule farm, not a plantation” (902). As Mitchell closes her novel, Scarlett, like Blanche DuBois after her, can only derive some repose and much despair from remembering what the plantation once was. In the closing scene, Mitchell’s heroine stands before the fallen plantation feeling “vaguely comforted” by “remembering the small things” that once made Tara grand (958). Whereas Mitchell portrays the plantation as a dying institution at the end of her novel, Williams’s ends both *Streetcar* and *Cat* with a sense that his reimagined plantations will continue and prosper in the future.

The gradual decay of Sutpen’s Hundred also mimics the downfall of the Sutpen family. Before the war, Sutpen’s Hundred exerted power and authority in the county. Rosa remembers, “a house the size of courthouse . . . and called it Sutpen’s Hundred as if it had been a King’s grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather” (Faulkner 10). As Thomas accumulated his wealth and subsequent prestige, so did Sutpen’s Hundred. Before his marriage to Ellen, Sutpen’s Hundred was merely a “Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county . . . whose threshold no woman had so much as seen,

without any feminized softness of window pane or door or mattress” (30). Yet, once Thomas and Ellen marry, Sutpen’s Hundred begins to reflect the change. Thomas’ “position had subtly changed” and with it “produced the mahogany and crystal” (33). During the ante-bellum period, Sutpen’s Hundred, like the Sutpen’s themselves, flourished and developed into a symbol of power and authority. Similarly, *Cat’s Big Daddy* and *Big Mama* also affirm their claim to power and social standing through the accumulation of material possessions.

Just as war ravaged Tara, both the Sutpens and their plantation begin a general decline during the Civil War, eventually culminating in the death of the last legitimate heir of the dynasty and the burning of Sutpen’s Hundred. Like Ellen O’Hara, Ellen Sutpen succumbs to illness during the war years, and Henry kills his half-brother Charles Bon to prevent his marriage to Judith. During her first visit to the plantation in 1865 after her sister’s death, Rosa tells Quentin of “Ellen’s ruined and weed-choked flower beds” and “[r]otting portico and scaling walls” greeted her as if predicting “*some desolation more profound than ruin*” (108, 109). Rosa likens the house to “*a barren and poverty-stricken convent*” as she, Judith, and Clytie await the return of Thomas (124). The war not only stole the lives of two Sutpens, but also the authority and prestige of the plantation. While Williams builds on the framework of the plantation set forth by Mitchell and Faulkner, he offers a contemporary approach to their modern antecedents. On the Marigny and Pollitt plantation, the space continues to be a site of domestic and social crisis, but, in the context of post-World War II receptivity, it provides an environment of greater social and economic mobility for the main characters. Williams, like his Southern Renaissance predecessors, constructs a declension narrative, but, in a

departure from Mitchell and Faulkner, he indicates life emerging from the decline at the end of his plays.

Returning from battle, Thomas Sutpen yearns to “*restore the place*” and “*salvage what was left of Sutpen’s Hundred*” (124). Sutpen, like O’Hara, futilely attempts to rebuild and reclaim his position, but just as Tara will only be a “two-mule farm,” Rosa remarks, “a better name for it would now be Sutpen’s One” (Mitchell 902, Faulkner 136). After Wash Jones murders Thomas Sutpen, the next glimpse of Sutpen’s Hundred occurs in September of 1909. As Quentin and Rosa approach the plantation, the sight that met them was one of “rotting shell of a house” that “seemed to reek in slow and protracted violence with a smell of desolation and decay as if the wood of which it was built were flesh” (Faulkner 292, 293). Henry Sutpen, the last legitimate heir to the Sutpen dynasty, returns “[*t*]o die” (298). When Rosa returns to the house with an ambulance a few months later to rescue her nephew from death, Clytie sets fire to Sutpen’s Hundred, destroying both the plantation and the family. Whereas the death of the traditional patriarchal lineage signals the end of the plantation for Sutpen’s Hundred, Williams revises this plantation trope allowing his reimagined space to hold a place in the modern world.

While Mitchell’s and Faulkner’s characterization of life in the Old South differ, they both agree the plantation and its gentleman planters, plantation mistresses, and slaves hold no future in the New South. Both novels chronicle the rise and ultimate decline of prominent planters and offer little hope the family’s plight will improve. Scarlett, the heiress of Tara, is alone and estranged from her husband and consequently her livelihood at the conclusion of *Gone with the Wind*. With Sutpen’s Hundred completely destroyed, the only living heir to the Sutpen dynasty is Charles Bon’s

grandson Jim Bond, an “idiot boy,” can only “howl” into the “ashes and those four gutted chimneys” (Faulkner 301). Mitchell and Faulkner solidify the plantation and the planters’ culture as a mere relic of the Old South, which will never thrive again.

However, in his plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams reinvents the idea of the plantation, allowing it to have a place in the New South. Playing on traditional roles of the Old South imaginatively reconstructed by Faulkner and Mitchell, Williams reimagines a modern plantation that welcomes greater diversity and gives power to some previously excluded from the plantation as described by Mitchell and Faulkner. Chapter one examines Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, contrasting the urban setting of the New Orleans’ Marigny neighborhood, formerly a plantation, to the dilapidated Belle Reve in Laurel. While Blanche reveres Belle Reve as a noble yet fallen paradise, Stanley imagines it as exclusive and exploitive. Chapter two focuses on Williams’s reinvention of a traditional rural plantation from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. While Big Daddy’s idea of the plantation strives to cultivate tolerance and acceptance for social outcasts, Mae and Gooper imagine restoring the plantation to what southern memory dictates it should be. Likewise, Big Mama and Maggie also have distinct perceptions as to what they believe the future of the plantation will be. In both plays, only the characters that embrace this reinvented idea of the plantation are able to survive on it. In *Streetcar*, Blanche is ultimately forced to leave both the Marigny and Belle Reve behind and enter a mental institution. Similarly, Mae and Gooper have no chance of inheriting Big Daddy’s plantation in *Cat* if Brick and Maggie produce a child. Williams’s reimagination of the Old South’s iconic symbol of power and prestige allows the plantation to embrace modernity, and consequently, once again to flourish for the benefit of those who are positioned to take advantage of the transformation.

CHAPTER II  
THE “LONG PARADE TO THE GRAVEYARD”: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF  
THE TRADITIONAL PLANTATION AND BIRTH OF THE MODERN  
MODEL IN *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*

In his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams explores the idea of imagined communities through utilizing his settings, particularly the idea of the plantation. Playing on southern memory, Williams contrasts the imagined community at the DuBois ancestral home, Belle Reve, as reimagined by Blanche DuBois with his new, reinvented plantation of which Stanley Kowalski is master. In his book *The South That Wasn't There*, Michael Kreyling explores the relationship between memory and history, arguing that the two are so entwined that one may not be studied without the other. He notes that “the relationship between history and memory is one of organic necessity” (2). He argues that

. . . collective memory is ‘present-oriented,’ summoned by social groups and communities who find themselves in troubled waters and in need of reassurance that the present is indeed continuous with a past in which their origins were unambiguously established fact and the history is nothing less than the story of their (our) foreordained triumph. The-way-we-were is the-way-we-are. (8)

In his play, Williams affirms through Blanche that the memory of what was is just as important as the reality, especially in the wake of losing her beloved Belle Reve.

Blanche continually lives in the past and even attempts to play the part of southern belle. Blanche exclaims, “I don’t want realism. I want magic! . . . Yes, yes, magic!” (Williams 145). While Stanley finds the community of Belle Reve exclusive and pretentious, Blanche, who is wading in “troubled waters,” finds both power and her identity through her fantasy of the past. She sees Belle Reve as a sort of fallen paradise and source of power.

However, in this play, Williams creates a second community in New Orleans. While the Marigny neighborhood was once a plantation, it is far cry from the grandiose Belle Reve that lives in Blanche’s memory. With this historical association, Williams moves the plantation to an urban setting and reinvents the idea of the plantation that dominates southern memory. Aside from moving his new plantation to an urban setting, Williams conceives a new kind of master for this community: a working man of Polish heritage, Stanley Kowalski. Blanche continually attempts to circumvent Stanley’s authority on the new plantation by clinging to the memory of her beloved Belle Reve. However, she is ultimately forced to leave the reinvented plantation because she cannot embrace its tolerance and diversity.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the plantation serves as a central place in both memory and actuality for characters. From the beginning of the play, the DuBois family’s ancestral plantation, Belle Reve, is a principal focal point for the characters. However, Belle Reve does not hold the same meaning for all characters. In her book *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation*, Jessica Adams observes, “Plantations, as what we might call theaters of memory, present corrective counterparts to the image of a malformed, backward, or just eccentric South” (56). For two characters in particular, Blanche and Stanley, Belle Reve is a “theater of

memory.” While Blanche remembers Belle Reve as a grandiose and noble place, the DuBois family plantation only elicits feelings of exclusivity and exploitation from Stanley. To justify her conceived authority over Stanley, Blanche continually roots her imagined superiority in tangible materials. Despite holding different perceptions of Belle Reve, both Blanche and Stanley are affected by the memory of the plantation, and how they reimagine it contributes to their motivations and actions.

In the opening scene, Stella’s neighbor Eunice comments on how Belle Reve is a “great big place with white columns” (9). At the opening of the play, Blanche admits to Stella that despite her efforts “to hold it together,” Belle Reve has been lost (20). While Belle Reve is a physical place, it has been lost as material possession to the characters. Therefore, Belle Reve only exists in the memory and imaginations of Blanche and Stanley, who both use competing narratives in constructing it. As she relates the story of losing the family plantation to both Stella and Stanley, Blanche begins to mythologize it by chronicling the events that led to the decay of Belle Reve in an epic fashion. Despite being little more “than the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard” when the DuBois sisters inherited the plantation, Blanche uses theatrical terms to describe how Belle Reve was finally lost. When she confesses to Stella that the family’s homestead is no longer in her possession, she exclaims, “. . . you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!” (20). While Stella terms her “outburst” as “hysterical,” Blanche continues to fashion the loss of Belle Reve as an epic through the use of mythological references (20). Blanche describes a “long parade to the graveyard” by telling Stella the “Grim Reaper had put his tent on our doorstep! . . . Belle Reve was his headquarters!” (21, 22).

Blanche also relates the loss of Belle Reve to Stanley as if it were an epic tale. When he insists on knowing how she lost the deed to Belle Reve without making any profit, Blanche once again exaggerates: “There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications” (44). Blanche’s verbose telling of Belle Reve’s “epic” history allows her to elevate her own family’s history, making Belle Reve and the DuBois family more of a legend than a reality. By developing a legend of the lost Belle Reve, Blanche glorifies the DuBois family’s heritage and by default her own. Blanche makes the loss of Belle Reve into a sort of sacrifice. Stella tells Stanley the house “had to be—sacrificed” after Blanche relates her epic tale (30). When Stanley asks Blanche about her tiara, she refers to it as an “old relic” (153). Even though the house itself might have been a decaying mansion, to Blanche it is a noble yet fallen paradise.

This grandiloquent reimagination of the family’s plantation not only allows Blanche to remember the DuBois family as more exalted than they likely were in reality, but it also gives Blanche a source of self-identity and empowers her to challenge Stanley’s authority in the Marigny. Blanche’s entire sense of self is intricately entwined with her reimagination of Belle Reve. Because her sense of self-identity is interwoven with her memory of Belle Reve, Blanche envisions herself as a “relic” of her now lost ancestral home and portrays herself as a southern belle upon her arrival in the Marigny. In his book *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, Bertram Wyatt-Brown examines the role honor played in southern history. Wyatt-Brown notes that “[i]dentification of moral worth by blood and name” was a common trait of southern families (123). Blanche often relies on both her family name and their French heritage to

identify herself in the Marigny. Upon first arriving at her sister's Elysian Fields apartment, Blanche refers to her as "Stella DuBois" instead of her married name Stella Kowalski (6). Throughout the play, Blanche continues to identify herself by what she perceives as her family's ancestry. When Mitch inquires about her last name, she tells him, "It's a French name . . . We're French by extraction. Our first American ancestors were French Huguenots" (59). Through claiming her ancestral French lineage, Blanche's claim to power has an added air of distinction in New Orleans. The DuBois name, by virtue of Blanche's genealogical claims, links her with a lineage recognized as aristocratic in French Louisiana and associates the DuBois family with plantation owners like the one that preceded the Marigny district. In referencing her French ancestry, Blanche intends to evoke an air of aristocracy about the DuBois family heritage, further separating her from those now living in the Marigny through lineage and historical resonance.

While Blanche is extremely proud of her family's ancestral heritage and often finds power in imparting it to others, she also prides herself on being from a better stock than Stanley, her opponent for power throughout the play. While Blanche proudly references her blood that is "French by extraction", she frequently refers to his inferior background both to other characters and Stanley himself (59). When Stella tells her sister that Stanley is of Polish descent, Blanche replies, "They're something like the Irish, aren't they? . . . Only not so highbrow?" (16). In the conclusion of his book *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Matthew Frye Jacobson affirms that Blanche's prejudices towards Stanley's Polish heritage was not uncommon. He notes that "[i]f they are white . . . they are not *that* white" (278). Jacobson explains that

. . . so pronounced is the social and psychological distance separating European immigrants and their children from the dominant Nordic mainstream that mean ‘ethnicity,’ . . . does not do justice to the full range of variegations in the American order. Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs are ‘born into a history not white Anglo-Saxon and not Jewish; born outside what, in America, is considered the intellectual mainstream—and thus privy to neither power nor status nor intellectual voice (278).

Blanche continually reminds both Stella and Stanley how his ethnicity would bar him from ever gaining any kind of status on the old plantation. For Blanche, power is an inherited privilege, not an earned one.

Upon arriving in the Marigny, Blanche makes it clear that Stanley would have no place in Belle Reve because of his inferior background. She uses Belle Reve as a basis for her argument of her superiority to Stanley. Her reimagination of Belle Reve and the DuBois family history differentiates her from Stanley and the Polish Kowalski name, and in her mind, gives her power over Stanley. Throughout the play, Stanley’s Polish background is often referred to in a negative light, especially by Blanche. Several characters use “Polack” and “pig” to be synonymous with Polish. Blanche’s prejudice against Stanley’s ethnic background is evident from the beginning, and she often becomes bothered by both her sister’s devotion to him and his power within the Marigny. Eunice calls Stanley a “whelp of a Polack” when he yells for Stella after their fight at the poker night (66). Even Stella degradingly refers to Stanley’s Polish heritage at Blanche’s birthday dinner. Stella angrily says he is “making a pig of himself . . . [his] face and [his] fingers are disgustingly greasy” (131). Both Eunice, a close friend, and Stella, his wife, despairingly refer to Stanley’s Polish heritage, demonstrating how unlikely a master

Stanley is in contrast to the aristocratic set that once ruled the Marigny. Blanche pokes fun at his “civilian background” to Stella (18). Even Stella admits that he is a “different species,” one that she knows could not reside in the community at Belle Reve (18). Blanche also worries about what other outside influences in this new plantation has warped her sister’s beliefs. After Stella returns to Stanley despite their physical fight, Blanche declares she “doesn’t understand [her] indifference” and if she has adopted a “Chinese philosophy” (74). Blanche debases anything remotely different from her imagined pure heritage and consequently finds power through this elevated sense of self derived from the DuBois family background. She comments on how “heterogeneous” Stanley’s friends are (17). Blanche’s fantasy of her family’s immaculate background not only gives her a sense of self-empowerment but also enables her to confront Stanley.

Just as she mythologizes her own family history, Blanche also invokes the image of an epic when describing Stanley’s “thousands and thousands of years” of his family’s being “a party of apes” (83). By continually referencing her “epic” family history, Blanche not only elevates her self-worth but attempts to degrade inhabitants of the Marigny, especially Stanley. Blanche also confronts Stanley about his inferior background in an effort to gain power in the Marigny. When he confronts her about the loss of Belle Reve, Blanche degradingly tells him he is “simple . . . a little bit on the primitive side” (39). Once he grabs the papers pertaining to the loss of Belle Reve, the last tangible piece of her beloved home, Blanche shouts, “The touch of your hands insults them! . . . Now that you’ve touched them I’ll burn them!” (42). Blanche’s outburst reveals the extent of her disdain of Stanley’s lower class and ethnic roots. Stanley later overhears Blanche telling Stella:

There's even something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in—anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the stone age! (83)

Blanche often evokes animal imagery to illustrate Stanley. However, instead of giving Stanley a sense of power, she employs images that portray him as “sub-human” instead of “inhuman” (83). While Blanche recognizes Stanley's “*bestial*” qualities, she underestimates the power of his force (82). Blanche refers to his poker night as a “party of apes” (82). Blanche often degradingly refers to Stanley as an animal because of his Polish heritage and tries to undermine his authority through demeaning his ethnic background, telling Stanley that he is “a little bit on the primitive side” (88). While Blanche fails to understand the extent to which Stanley is willing to assert his control over her, she does somewhat acknowledge his power. When attempting to guess his astrological sign, she first chooses an Aries since they are known for being “forceful and dynamic” (88). Nevertheless, Blanche grossly misjudges how predatory Stanley is, and eventually his animalistic instincts conquer her.

However, Blanche is not alone in her assertion that Stanley's background and ethnic heritage prevent him from ever becoming part of Belle Reve. Both Stella and Stanley are too aware that he could not gain admittance in the community at Belle Reve. In Williams's first introduction of Stella, he notes she is from “*a background quite obviously different from her husband's*” (5). Stella attempts to explain to Stanley how their upbringing contributes to Blanche's prejudice towards him and her sense of entitlement. She tells him, “Blanche and I grew up under very different circumstances

than you did,” and Stanley angrily replies, “So I been told. And told and told and told!” (118). Stanley never expresses a desire to become a part of Belle Reve because he is aware that he cannot ascend to a position of power. When Blanche tells him she is from Laurel, Stanley admits that it is “[n]ot in [his] territory” (26). Instead of seeing Belle Reve as a fallen paradise, he conceives it as some “country place” from which he will always be excluded (31). He confides to Stella, “You showed me a snapshot of the place with the columns. I pulled you down off them columns” (137). Stanley is conscious that his blood and background prohibit him from joining the community, and, subsequently, he never attempts to do so. Stanley thinks of Belle Reve and consequently of Blanche, as a direct product of the idealized plantation, as exploitive.

However, Blanche seems to be most upset about the prospect of her pure DuBois blood being dirtied by mixing with Stanley’s. When Blanche first confesses to Stella that she has lost Belle Reve, Stella becomes upset and asks Blanche how such a thing could happen. Blanche angrily retorts, “Where were *you!* In bed with your—Polack” (22). The thought of Stella risking the mixing of the DuBois blood with the Kowalski’s in the form of a child horrifies Blanche. After learning that Stella is pregnant, Blanche refers to how “our [DuBois] blood” has mixed with his (45). Blood like Belle Reve, becomes something tangible from which Blanche attempts to wield her power. She implores Stella to “cling to, and hold as our flag” their own superior heritage (83). Yet, Stella understands that in order to procure a role in the Marigny, she must submit to Stanley’s authority. Through mixing the DuBois’ “French” blood with Stanley’s “Polack” blood, Stella gives her children a future on the modern plantation. However, to Blanche the mixing of Stanley and Stella’s blood is the ultimate insult to the dynasty cultivated by generations of careful breeding.

Another way Blanche physically attempts to demonstrate her authority in the Marigny is through her dress and manners. Blanche's reliance on her family's heritage to gain power and identity is not only evident in her interactions with Stella but also in the meticulous attention that she pays to her appearance and behavior. In her study of the role of women on the plantation, Catherine Clinton discusses the importance of the plantation mistress' attire in order to maintain an image of a "gentle, and refined" lady (16). Clinton shares the story of a visitor to a plantation, who when first arriving, finds the lady of the house "a genial hostess and a model of what he expected 'the southern lady to be'" (16). However, upon wandering the grounds by himself, the visitor saw his hostess "hard at work" and considerably disarrayed; hoop removed from her skirt" (16). Clinton's description of this "delicate situation" affirms Blanche's belief that in order to identify herself as "the southern lady," she must look the part (16). Blanche's "passion" for clothes is apparent throughout the play (Williams 38). When Williams first provides a description of Blanche in his stage notes, he goes to great lengths to describe her clothing, clearly indicating how imperative her appearance is to her claim as Belle Reve's plantation mistress. Williams writes:

*Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. (5)*

From the beginning, Williams sets Blanche apart from the inhabitants of the Marigny. His first sketch of Blanche already discloses the considerable effort that she puts into her appearance. Clinton notes, "Cleanliness and neatness were the foundations for a ladylike appearance" (98). Just after arriving at Elysian Fields, Blanche tells Stella that she "has

brought nice clothes and [will] wear them!” and chastises her for not “[saying] a word about [her] appearance (17, 14). Blanche realizes that others’ perception of her as a mythologized southern belle is essential to both her identity and struggle for power in her new community. Stella, who like Blanche comprehends that looking the part of a southern belle is an important aspect of the culture, appeals to Stanley to make notice of Blanche’s wardrobe. Stella entreats Stanley to “be sure to say something nice about her appearance” because “[t]hat’s important with Blanche” (30, 31).

Blanche wants Stanley to comprehend how her appearance sets her apart from others in the Marigny. Soon after meeting Stanley, Blanche “slip[s] on [her] pretty new dress” and asks him, “How do I look?” (37). Blanche again attempts to solicit a compliment on her appearance from Stanley when she inquires if he could ever “think it possible that [she] was once considered to be—attractive” (38). Blanche’s endeavors to extract a compliment from Stanley further expose how closely her identity of the ideal southern lady is intertwined with her self-image. For Stanley to notice her clothing or attractiveness would be admitting that Blanche does indeed hold some power in the Marigny. While Blanche does succeed in fooling Stanley with her clothes and jewelry for a while, he quickly learns that she only exerts the appearance of wealth. When Stanley rummages through Blanche’s trunks, looking aghast at her pearls and diamonds, he exclaims, “And diamonds! A crown for an empress!” (35). Stella quickly corrects him: “A rhinestone tiara she wore to a costume ball” (35). Blanche’s use of clothing to take power from Stanley finds success for a short time, but her guise of wealth is quickly dismissed by Stella.

Blanche does not only use her appearance as an attempt to claim power from Stanley in the Marigny but also to perpetuate her image as the idealized southern belle to

her potential suitor, Mitch. When Stella and Blanche return to the Elysian Fields apartment during Stanley's poker night, Blanche again wants Stella to reassure her that she looks the part of the Belle Reve mistress by asking, "How do I look?" (49). Before she will enter the apartment, Blanche demands that Stella "[w]ait till [she] powder" before entering into the flat (49). After Stella and Stanley's physical fight at the end of the night, Blanche joins Mitch on the steps for a cigarette and apologizes for not being "properly dressed" (68). While Mitch assures her "[t]hat don't make no difference in the Quarter," Blanche acquires her sense of power through her appearance (68). However, Blanche again asks Mitch to forgive her "not being dressed" when he comes to confront her after her birthday party (142). Mitch asks Blanche if the perfume she wears is expensive, and Blanche replies, "Twenty-five dollars an ounce!" (90). While Blanche's motivation in appearing the part of the southern belle to Stanley is to challenge his power, her incentive for appearing to fulfill the role of the southern lady to Mitch is quite different. With Mitch, Blanche sees a second chance for marriage and, subsequently, a fresh start.

Blanche recognizes one of the most crucial aspects of being considered a southern lady is virginity. Her attire also reveals another aspect of the mythologized southern lady that Blanche perceives herself to be. Although she has been widowed by an ill-fated marriage, Blanche still attempts to present herself as the virginal ideal southern lady. In *The Plantation Mistress*, Clinton examines the "fantasy world" of the "exalted image of the lady" (87). Clinton notes:

Men were virtually obsessed with female innocence. The notion of white women as virginal precipitated a whole series of associations: delicate as lilies, spotless as doves, polished as alabaster, fragile as porcelain—but

above all, pure as the driven snow . . . The vocabulary of ideologues and preceptors conveyed sentimentalized yet severe prescriptions for women.

(87)

Despite admitting later to sexual promiscuity when facing the loss of Belle Reve, Blanche creates the illusion of being virginal when she first arrives in the Marigny. Early in the play, Blanche admits to Stanley, “I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman’s charm is fifty percent illusion” (Williams 41). She later admits to Stella that she knowingly “*deceive[s]*” Mitch so that he will be interested in her (95). Blanche consciously misleads those around her in an effort to continue her fantasy of being an ideal southern lady.

Another way Blanche depicts herself as virginal is by often wearing white. In her examination of Southern culture in the book *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*, Tara McPherson notes that the “white southern lady” was “a mythologized image of innocence and purity” (3). Blanche often chooses to wear the color white to invoke this image of honor. She is in a “*white suit*” and “*white gloves*” when she first arrives in the Marigny (Williams 5). As Stanley sifts through Blanche’s trunk, he notices her “[b]ushy snow-white” furs (34). Blanche is again wearing a “white skirt” when she spills a drink on it (94). Blanche’s white apparel reveals her deep desire to be thought of as a virgin.

Blanche’s manners also reflect her self-identification as an ideal lady, worthy to be mistress of Belle Reve. Clinton stresses the importance of manners in her examination of southern plantation mistresses: “Purity ruled appearance and piety ruled thought; the measure of a plantation mistress’s propriety was thereby reflected in her every deed” (101). Blanche tells Mitch how she cannot tolerate “a rude remark or vulgar

action” (60). When Blanche tells Mitch her name, she explains to him that it means “white,” associating her name with chastity (59). Blanche also reveals her astrological sign to be Virgo, which she associates with virginity. She tells Stanley “Virgo is the Virgin” (89). When Stanley challenges her depiction of herself as chaste by asking if she knows his coworker named Shaw who claims he has met Blanche at the defacto brothel, Hotel Flamingo, Blanche quickly defends her honor by declaring that she would never “dare to be seen” in that “sort of establishment” (89).

Blanche’s façade of virginity is depicted in her relationship with Mitch and the “old –fashioned ideals” to which she clings (108). She confides to Stella that “[h]e hasn’t gotten a thing but a goodnight kiss, that’s all I have given him . . . I want his respect . . . I’m not ‘putting out’” (94-95). She tells Mitch that she only allows him to kiss her because she must “keep a firm hold on her emotions or she’ll be lost!” (103). Blanche’s behavior in her relationship is an effort to play to the part of the “pure” southern ideal of a woman, and she is fully aware that the most important aspect is sexual purity, or at least the illusion of it. Blanche knows that as a southern lady she is expected to entertain her guests, and when she returns from a date with Mitch, she apologizes for failing to “[obey] the law of nature” by not being “gay” enough (101).

Just as she mythologizes her family’s history into an epic, Blanche also creates a sort of epic retelling of her romance with Mitch. She explains her attraction to Mitch by calling him a “natural gentleman” (108). Blanche feigns annoyance at his “unforgivable insult to a lady” when he does not shave and comes to Elysian Fields in “such uncouth apparel” (140). To justify her attraction to Mitch, Blanche reimagines her relationship so that Mitch can have a role on her fantasized version of Belle Reve.

Blanche also contributes to the illusion of her ladylike manners by acting appalled by Stella's and Stanley's overtly sexual desire for one another. Clinton notes that "a proper unmarried female of any age showed puritanical disdain for any but the most circumspect behavior" (95). Stella confesses to Blanche, "I can hardly stand it when he is away for a night . . . When he's away for a week I nearly go wild!" (19). Blanche exclaims, "Gracious!" (19). The morning after Stanley and Stella's physical fight, Blanche interrogates Stella as to why she does not leave Stanley. Stella admits, "There are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant" (31). While Stella equates this passion with love, Blanche names it "brutal desire"—something a lady should never admit to craving (31).

Just as Blanche yearns to fulfill the sexual desire that she feels she cannot openly indulge, she also craves alcohol and refuses to acknowledge her thirst for it. Although Blanche is often portrayed as drinking, she goes to great lengths to hide it. After Eunice lets Blanche into Stella's apartment, Blanche is left alone and quickly "*pours a half tumbler of whiskey and tosses it down*" but is sure to "*carefully [replace] the bottle and [wash] out the tumbler in the sink*" (10). Blanche again downplays her need for drinking when Stanley asks her if she would "[h]ave a shot" by replying that she "rarely" drinks (26). After their date to the amusement park, Mitch asks if Blanche would like a drink, but she quickly turns his question around: "I want *you* to have a drink!" (104). However, despite her efforts to conceal her dependency on alcohol, Blanche cannot hide her drinking habits. At one point, Stella entreats Blanche not to "take another drink!" (96). After Blanche learns that Stanley has disclosed her less than virginal *past* to Mitch, she drinks to "*escape . . . the sense of disaster closing in on her*" but then "*rushes about frantically, hiding the bottle in a closet*" when Mitch knocks on the door (139). Still

attempting to maintain the illusion of how little she drinks, Blanche invites Mitch to have a drink but claims not to have “investigated” what liquor is in the house (140). Blanche goes to great lengths to conceal her dependency on alcohol because of the social connotations it carries. In her book, Clinton notes:

Although drunkenness . . . could result in social ostracism, plantation culture maintained an extremely high tolerance for these vices in men . . . Women . . . refrained utterly from such behavior—which would have been seen as insupportable . . . (105)

Blanche hides her constant drinking because she knows it violates the consummate ideal of the southern lady. Wyatt-Brown concurs with Clinton in his analysis of gender behavior in the South, explaining that “. . . drinking was a function of masculinity, and upper-class women who partook of anything stronger than a sweet wine risked loss of respectability” (278-79). Blanche’s taste for whiskey is a far cry from an occasional glass of wine. Her attempt to conceal her drinking arouses suspicions of other, more serious transgressions against her character. Through her alcoholism, Blanche reveals that the reconstructed memory of herself and Belle Reve is skewed. Blanche’s indulgence in alcohol foreshadows her sexual indiscretions, which Stanley eventually unearths and exposes.

Blanche is well aware of how important purity is to her reputation and future prospects of marriage to Mitch, a marriage which will bring her the “*rest*” she so craves (95). Clinton observes, “Chastity was a crucial condition of female purity. Men sought partners in life who were virginal before marriage” (94). Through her white clothing and constant referrals to her “old-fashioned ideals,” Blanche attempts to create the illusion of chastity, and it is only after Stanley rapes her that her attention to her ladylike appearance

falters. On the evening of Blanche's birthday party, Stanley discloses to Stella the truth of Blanche's tarnished reputation in Laurel and why she can no longer exist in her old community of Belle Reve. Stanley exclaims that "after the home-place had slipped through her lily-white fingers . . . [s]he moved to the Flamingo!" (120).

After the pivotal scene when Stanley exposes Blanche's sexual indiscretions, Williams begins to depict her clothing as stained. In his stage notes for the next scene, Williams describes Blanche's "*somewhat soiled and crumpled white satin evening gown and a pair of scuffed silver slippers*" (151). No longer does Blanche give careful attention to her attire. Just as her clothes are wrinkled and stained, Mitch, Blanche's one chance at sustaining the imagined plantation, also sees her as damaged and disgraced. From this point on, Blanche enters into a downward spiral. She feels the "*sense of disaster closing in on her*" (151). Blanche's unkempt appearance reflects her inner turmoil and impending downfall. Stanley seals Blanche's fate as a fallen woman and rapes her, assuring that she will no longer be able to enter in the community in Belle Reve or the Marigny and thus fulfilling the symbolic promise of the "soiled" dress.

In an endeavor to establish her superiority over Stanley in the Marigny, Blanche clings to tangible differences between them. Throughout the play, Blanche finds both community and empowerment from memories of her family's ancestral home of Belle Reve and claims to her family's aristocratic French heritage. Blanche expresses horror and disgust when she learns that Stella allows "pure" DuBois blood to mix with Stanley's "tainted" Polish blood. Blanche also attempts to dress and act the role of plantation mistress of Belle Reve despite there no longer being a plantation of which to be mistress; she is only a mistress to a the "beautiful dream" of Belle Reve that only exists in her imagination. In his examination of the roots of southern honor, Wyatt-Brown concludes

that southerners' identification through familial and property roots was a common practice for planter families:

. . . Southern whites, whether rich or poor, believed that the chief duty of government was the protection of men's property, by which honor was sustainable. Possessions were an essential component of personality, family identity, and moral position. (72)

Blanche DuBois clearly classifies herself in Wyatt-Brown's description of Southern whites. Her entire personality mimics how she believes that a proper plantation mistress must behave and speak. Blanche frequently refers to the DuBois family's French ancestral heritage to challenge Stanley's power. Blanche relies on ethnic prejudices to establish her family's roots as more "white" and hence of "better" blood than Stanley's. Throughout the play, Blanche clearly indicates that Stanley would not be allowed to enter the community at Belle Reve, much less become a sort of master of it. Blanche's entire personality is interwoven with her former possession of Belle Reve.

Blanche's attachment to Belle Reve also dictates her moral positions, particularly regarding virginity. Blanche's attempts to conceal her vices and portray herself as the Southern ideal of femininity are finally destroyed by Stanley who exposes her sexual transgressions at her birthday party. Blanche's moral position derived from her association with Belle Reve also regulates her courtship with Mitch. She ensures that her physical relationship with Mitch goes no further than a kiss so that he will not suspect the tarnished reputation that she left behind in Laurel. Blanche can only sustain her ladylike reputation and semblance of chastity in the Marigny while Stanley allows her to continue her fantasy. Wyatt-Brown aptly describes Blanche's situation at the end of *Streetcar* when he writes: "Since honor gave meaning to lives, it existed not as a myth but as a

vital code” (72). Once Stanley strips Blanche of her last shred of honor, she can no longer continue on her imagined plantation against the reality of his domain.

While Williams portrays the Old South plantation of Belle Reve as decaying, he offers a new kind of plantation with a new breed of master in the Marigny, giving it a fresh start. To craft his new plantation, Williams relocates it from a rural to an urban setting and contrives a “master” reflective of a modern era. Once the first plantation in the New Orleans area, the Marigny neighborhood where Stanley and Stella’s Elysian Fields apartment is located, is now firmly a part of the “*cosmopolitan city*” (3). From his opening stage notes, Williams begins to set this new plantation apart from Belle Reve. Williams notes that “*there is a relatively warm and easy intermingling of races in the old part of town*” (3). With Stanley, Williams imagines both a powerful and authoritative “master,” as with the mythic plantation of the Old South, but breaks from the traditional formula by incorporating his Polish heritage and his ongoing status in the working class.

However, perhaps the most conspicuous difference on Williams’s reimagined plantation is the new stock of “master” he creates in Stanley Kowalski. Stanley defies the stereotypical plantation master, which dominates Southern memory. Wyatt-Brown offers Robert E. Lee as the “most efficient” example of the ideal southern gentleman. Quoting Jefferson Davis, Wyatt-Brown notes Lee’s reputation as ““a gentleman, scholar, gallant soldier, great general, and true Christian”” (105). However, Stanley hardly fits the description of the idealized southern gentleman. Stella warns Blanche to avoid “compar[ing] him with the men that we went out with at home” while Stanley readily admits to Blanche that “I will strike you as the unrefined type” (Williams 17, 28). While Blanche constantly attempts to assimilate what southern memory dictates a lady should

be, Stanley rejects the traditional role of genteel planter and crafts a new model for himself, ultimately finding power within his position.

While Blanche characterizes Stanley as an animal to demean him, Williams employs this same characterization as an image of power and authority. Williams constructs Stanley's "*lordly composure*" through animalistic terms (29). Williams first describes Stanley's relationship to women:

*Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes.  
Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with  
women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently,  
but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens.*  
(24-25)

Williams's powerful first description of Stanley clearly establishes him as the recognized and unchallenged master of the Marigny. Williams again resorts to animal imagery after Stanley and Stella get into a physical fight. Williams writes, "*There he throws his head like a baying hound and bellows his wife's name,*" but Stella poses no real challenge to Stanley's authority. Later that night, the two reconcile with "*low, animal moans*" (66). Here Williams portrays him as a more sympathetic creature, leading the audience to believe his affection for Stella is genuine and not just an attempt to control her.

However, Williams begins to describe Stanley as something both inhuman and dangerous as he attempts to dominate Blanche and shatter her idealized memory of Belle Reve. Stanley ultimately asserts his authority in his space by raping Blanche. In the famous rape scene, Williams sets the tone for the night as "*filled with inhuman voices like cries in a jungle*" (159). As Stanley approaches Blanche, Williams notes that the background music of the ever-present "*blue piano*" morphs into "*the roar of an*

*approaching locomotive*” (160). Williams’s imagery mimics the impending danger that Blanche faces in Stanley’s drive to assert his power in his domain. Like a panther in the jungle, Stanley “*springs*” towards her and overpowers her. Williams’s animalistic depiction of Stanley bestows on him a sense of dominance and power in this new plantation and danger to those, like Blanche, who test his authority. Williams’s exploitation of animal imagery in his portrayal of Stanley reveals the character’s carnal desire to control and regulate this new space, and with Stanley as master, Williams guarantees his new plantation will be protected. By raping Blanche, Stanley not only gains control of the Marigny but demolishes her “theater of memory” of Belle Reve.

Another aspect of Stanley’s character that acts to reimagine the plantation is his Polish heritage. While Blanche regards Stanley’s ethnic background with a prejudicial eye and attempts to use it against him in their power struggle, Stanley does not think of himself as Polish, but only American. Stanley finally quiets Stella by yelling, “‘Pig—Polack—disgusting—vulgar—greasy!’—them kind of words have been on your tongue and your sister’s too much around here!” (131). He forcefully explains to Blanche: “I am not a Polack. People from Poland are Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don’t ever call me a Polack” (134). Stanley’s understanding of his ethnicity is not based on his family’s ancestral heritage but rather nativism. He prides himself on his working- class status, which allows him to take ownership of his surroundings. Williams’s new master becomes powerful not through an inherited name or property but by his own actions. Williams uses Stanley’s ethnicity to highlight an important difference in the Marigny and Belle Reve: diversity. Blanche only thinks of Stanley as Polish, while in the Marigny, Stanley only identifies himself as an American. This new

plantation reflects a new society, one encroaching on the South. By opening up the Marigny, Williams both modernizes it and demonstrates that the plantation has a place in the future.

Perhaps the most telling characteristic of Williams's reinvented plantation is that it is not decaying and dying like Blanche's Belle Reve but is thriving and growing. While Blanche obsessively tries to portray herself as chaste, she also inadvertently renders herself as sterile. In the closing scene when Blanche will soon leave to be institutionalized, she tells Stella for her funeral she will be "sewn up in a clean white sack" (170). When Stanley exposes Blanche's sordid past and rips off her mask of purity, she can no longer play the role of a virginal Southern lady and at the same time has no chance of marriage. Stanley tells Stella, "Her future is mapped out for her" (127). With Blanche rendered sterile, her family's heritage and the community of Belle Reve ceases to exist.

Contrastively, Williams ensures that his new plantation will grow and expand through Stanley and Stella's child. Williams notes that Stanley is a "*seed-bearer*" and through his child, he will have an heir to the Marigny (25). Stella, who accepts Stanley and the Marigny, finds a role on this reinvented plantation as its mistress. Williams notes that she is "*curving with maternity*" and allows Stanley to be her master as he "*snatches*" her after their fight (67). Her "*rounding slightly with new maternity*" bestows upon her a "*serene*" look of "*narcotized tranquility*" (70). While Blanche is constantly anxious about her façade being unearthed, Stella is content in her role on this new plantation. Despite attempting to reconcile Blanche to Stanley throughout most of the play, she ultimately must choose between her sister and Belle Reve and Stanley and the Marigny. Stella confides in Eunice, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley,"

and subsequently, decides her future lies within the Marigny (165). At the end of the play, Blanche's future is bleak at best while Stella and Stanley have produced an heir to the Marigny.

By the final curtain, *A Streetcar Named Desire* becomes a tale of death and rebirth. For Blanche, her inability to release her fantasy of Belle Reve and accept the terms of living on the Marigny prohibits her from surviving. Blanche tells Stanley when he grabs the papers detailing the loss of Belle Reve that "[t]he touch of your hands insults them," but what she can never accept is that those papers are all that are left of Belle Reve (35). Ironically, her fate is ultimately in Stanley's hands, and he forces her from the Marigny. Stanley becomes the "executioner" to both Blanche and her beautiful dream of Belle Reve (111). Blanche is never able to accept Stanley as a new master, and, consequently, she decays with her beloved Belle Reve, unable to live on the Marigny.

Yet, the play is also the telling of a rebirth and new order. With the Marigny, Williams is able to deconstruct the traditional plantation. Stanley's conquering of Blanche implies that the mythic plantation only survives in the modern world as a memory. However, while Williams demonstrates that the Belle Reves of the Old South only exist as a trace in the modern world, he does utilize some aspects of it on his reinvented plantation. In Stanley's character, Williams proves to cling to the patriarchy that dominated the plantations of the Old South, but with the same character, he also demonstrates how this reinvented plantation is a departure from those existing in popular memory. Instead of power lying solely with those of aristocratic roots as with Belle Reve and the plantation that once inhabited the Marigny, this new kind of plantation becomes a space where those traditionally banned from entering are allowed to thrive and even ascend to power. In reconciling the traditional notion of patriarchy and modern idea of

diversity, Williams conceives a new kind of master in Stanley, and one who can usher the plantation into the modern world. Ultimately, Williams's new master Stanley succeeds in doing what Blanche cannot: establishing a dynasty. In Stella's pregnancy, Stanley secures a future for his plantation without the restraints imposed the shadow of Belle Reve. In the end, Belle Reve only still lives in the imagination of the childless Blanche.

### CHAPTER III

#### “... BIGGER AND BIGGER AND BIGGER”: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’S REINVENTED PLANTATION OF SOCIAL MISFITS

As with his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams reimagines the plantation in his 1955 play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Despite the southern plantation normally symbolizing the epitome of rigid social structure, Williams plays on the plantation’s image in cultural memory and transforms it to represent a space where social misfits can find some measure of solace from a judgmental society. Williams performs a kind of social experiment through examining social misfits away from the harsh eyes of society. In his landmark study examining the origins and traditions of the American South, journalist turned author W.J. Cash notes that “the plantation tended to find its center in itself: to be an independent social unit, a self-contained and largely self-sufficient little world of its own” (32). In creating the plantation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams explores Cash’s assertion of the plantation’s independence from outside society. As the largest plantation in the Delta, Big Daddy Pollitt’s 28,000-acre plantation provides the perfect landscape of seclusion and alienation from the influences and judgments of the outside world. Big Daddy tells Brick, “One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton!—is *tolerance!*—I grown it!” (Williams 122). This plantation is not only fertile ground for cotton but also for social experimentation. Through this isolation from society, these outcasts can explore and discuss their differences. Several characters in his play are social outcasts from mainstream society:

Big Daddy, whose rags-to-riches story is not typical for a Delta plantation owner; Brick, confused about his sexuality and reliant on alcohol to provide an escape; Maggie, the sexually-frustrated young wife; and Big Mama, who is known for her exorbitant behavior. While these characters are not fully accepted in society, Williams creates an environment within the plantation that allows his characters to explore and embrace their social taboos, but he stresses that this understanding atmosphere is contingent upon both Big Daddy's ownership and its separation from outside influences. By employing the plantation as an isolated environment, Williams creates a space that fosters tolerance not only towards the homosexual relationship between Brick and Skipper but also to Maggie, Big Mama, and Big Daddy. Mae and Gooper, the two characters who attempt to fit into society, are, ironically, the misfits in Williams's cast of social outsiders and are ultimately forced to leave the plantation when they cannot accept Big Daddy's rules.

To establish the plantation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as fertile ground for fostering tolerance, Williams demonstrates the plantation's uniqueness through its setting, sheer size, and contrast to the outside world. From the opening stage notes, Williams makes a clear case for how this plantation is different from others. Williams warns his audience in the stage directions that this plantation, particularly the bedroom where all three acts are set, "is not what you would expect from the Delta's biggest cotton-planter" (15). Instead of invoking images of *Gone With the Wind*, Big Daddy's plantation is reminiscent of its former owners, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, with the bedroom being "Victorian with a touch of the Far East" (15). Utilizing Adams' concept, Williams constructs a "theater of memory" on the Pollitt plantation, and more specifically, in the household. On the Straw and Ochello plantation, Williams creates his own "theater of memory." In his opening stage notes, he develops the idea that the previous owners' presence

continues to haunt the plantation, particularly this bedroom where Straw and Ochello once slept and which now houses Brick and Maggie. Williams observes that “it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which is uncommon” (15). This “tenderness” is something Straw and Ochello could not share outside of the protection of the plantation. However, while most of the décor has remained intact since Straw and Ochello’s deaths, some modern additions have seeped into the bedroom. In his chapter “Homo-ness and Fluidity in Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*,” Michael P. Bibler notices how certain pieces of furniture “signif[y] the intrusiveness of outside ideas” (102). One particular example Bibler uses is the television set that Williams describes as “a monumental monstrosity peculiar to our times” (16). Big Mama also notices the intrusion of modern technology. She exclaims, “I can’t stand TV, radio was bad enough, but TV has gone it one better” (68). This “monstrosity” is in the same bedroom in which the ghostly bed of Straw and Ochello sits, reminding the characters of the intrusion of the outside world. Williams’s meticulous instructions on the set design of Straw and Ochello’s former bedroom reveal how this plantation differs from those that survive in popular memory. This plantation is more open to the influences of modernity and change than the traditional notions of the plantation permit.

The presence of Straw and Ochello still endures on the plantation as if to observe its present inhabitants. In his set directions, Williams stipulates, “the set should be roofed by the sky . . . as if they were observed through a telescope lens out of focus” (16). On two separate occasions, characters refer to the “gentle and poetic” haunting that lingers within the house. When Brick and Maggie argue at the beginning of the play, she reminds him that they must not “scream at each other, the walls in [the] house have ears .

...” (Williams 33). Later in the play, Big Daddy echoes Maggie’s earlier warning and tells Brick not to speak loudly because the “walls have ears in this place,” literally referencing Mae and Gooper’s eavesdropping yet still alluding to the presence of Straw and Ochello (Williams 86). When confronted by Big Daddy about his relationship with Skipper, Brick “*looks out into the house, commanding its attention*” as if the spirits of Straw and Ochello are in his audience (124). Williams’s stage notes and characters’ dialog serve as gentle reminders that they are not alone, but surrounded by the ghosts of those who also found solace from a judgmental society within the plantation’s walls.

Another important factor in establishing the plantation as a refuge from a judgmental society is seclusion. Away from the cultural influences and moral codes dictated by society, the characters are able to develop their own sense of moral standards. While the outside world found the two men as a pair of “dirty old men” and deemed their relationship socially unacceptable, they are able to share taboo relationship within the plantation (Williams 120). Like Straw and Ochello, Big Daddy wishes to continue this tolerance and goes to great lengths to separate his plantation from the rest of society. According to C.V. Woodward’s book *The Origins of the New South*, a study of 226 plantations with fifty or more tenants in the Black Belt region in 1910 revealed an average plantation size of 4,216 acres, but Big Daddy’s 28,000 acre plantation is more than ample to provide a safe-haven (407). Williams reiterates the size of Big Daddy’s exaggerated plantation several times to stress the importance of how the space shields the characters from what society deems moral. Brick first mentions the size of the plantation when talking privately to Big Daddy after the birthday party, and Big Daddy reiterates the size when disclosing to Brick how much his estate is worth in cash and property (Williams 82, 88). Within their conversation in Act 2, both Big Daddy and Brick again

mention the massive size of the plantation, and in the final act, Gooper and Big Daddy both discuss the size of the plantation. The enormity of the plantation is a crucial element in giving Williams's cast of social outcasts the space and seclusion needed to explore their social deviations.

The massive size of the plantation also gives Big Daddy the power to establish his own rules to govern behavior. Big Daddy quickly asserts his authority, and throughout the play, leaves no doubt that he is the master of this plantation. He frequently reminds both his wife and children that he is "the boss here" and "back in the driver's seat" (105). When Big Daddy angrily confronts Brick about how he broke his leg, Big Mama pleads with him to use gentler words. He barks back at her that he will "talk like [he] want[s] to on [his] birthday . . . or any other goddam day of the year and anybody here that don't like it knows what they can do!" (77). He goes on to remind everyone that since he has seemingly received a clean bill of health, he will not be relinquishing his authority anytime soon. Big Daddy angrily tells Big Mama:

I went through all that laboratory and operation and all just so I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it turns out that I am and you ain't . . . I made this place! . . . I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! . . . I am just about to tell you that you are not just about to take over. (79)

Later, when Brick attempts to leave the room while Big Daddy is questioning him about his drinking, Big Daddy tells him, "Stay here you son of a bitch!—till I say go!" (103).

The plantation's sheer size allows Big Daddy to assume absolute control and create a new morality within the confines of his estate.

Just as Williams reimagines the plantation, he also explores the residual influence of traditional plantation roles, particularly through Big Daddy. In his rendering of Big Daddy, Williams examines the concept of patriarchy and paternalism that was so prevalent in traditional plantations. In his article “‘A Tenderness which was Uncommon’: Homosexuality, Narrative, and the Southern Plantation in Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*,” Michael P. Bibler asserts, “Big Daddy’s power within the plantation . . . depends on the continued exploitation of gender differences through patriarchal oppression” and concluding that “the oppressiveness of patriarchy is more overtly one of the play’s thematic concerns” (390). While Williams continues the Old South’s tradition of patriarchy, he reinvents this concept too. Bibler offers Big Daddy’s unwillingness to consider leaving his plantation to any of the women in the play as evidence of continued patriarchy. However, while he does not entertain Big Mama, Maggie, or Mae as possible heirs, Big Daddy does reject patriarchal tradition of bequeathing the plantation to the oldest son. Instead, his concerns lie in continuing “[his] kind” through Brick and subsequently Maggie (112). Another departure from traditional paternalism is Williams’s portrayal of Big Daddy as a father. Big Daddy’s embodiment of both strong authoritarian and concerned father is an uncommon combination. Clinton notes, “Many [planter fathers] subscribed to one of two extreme schools and were either stern patriarchs or indulgent papas” (40-41). Yet, Big Daddy exhibits characteristics of both, especially in his interactions with Brick. While angrily demanding that Brick discuss his alcoholism and relationship with Skipper, Big Daddy attempts to comfort him and desires his well-being. The tolerance for Straw and Ochello’s relationship-- and by extension Brick and Skipper’s--is rooted by patriarchal desire. Just as in *Streetcar* with

Stanley, Williams's emphasis on residual patriarchy is evident in *Big Daddy*, and, while the concept of the traditional plantation weakens, the patriarchy does not.

Despite *Big Daddy*'s tolerance for unorthodox relationships on the plantation, he seems to have little tolerance for the African American presence on his estate. The play's two black characters are limited to the subservient roles of house servants and provide little if any impact on the action of the play. Bibler notes that each time the black servants appear on stage, Williams depicts them as a "racial intrusion" ("A Tenderness" 388). Bibler determines that because of *Big Daddy*'s exclusion of African Americans from his plantation of tolerance "the play contradicts him with a dose of reality by revealing the continued subordination of African Americans on his own plantation" (388). While *Big Daddy* employs his role as patriarch to accept homosexuality in his household, he does not grant admittance to blacks, revealing even his open-mindedness has its limitations. With *Big Daddy*, Williams manipulates the traditional role of patriarch by crafting a character who embraces modernity with his acceptance of the plantation's taboo relationships. However, *Big Daddy*'s tolerance limits itself only to white characters, exposing that his understanding has its handicaps.

Whereas alcoholism and homosexuality are taboo and not discussed in proper society in the outside world, *Big Daddy* insists that Brick not only discuss his drinking but also reveal the cause of it. Throughout his conversation with *Big Daddy*, Brick continually refers to the "peaceful" effect his whiskey eventually brings him each night. *Big Daddy* cautions Brick that life away from the plantation is not as forgiving when it comes to his drinking. *Big Daddy* warns, "If you ain't careful you're going to crawl off this plantation and then, by Jesus, you'll have to hustle your drinks along Skid Row!" (Williams 102). Despite his efforts to avoid *Big Daddy*'s confrontation, Brick eventually

submits to his authority and opens up about the root of his alcoholism. Once Big Daddy points to Skipper's death as the birth of Brick's alcoholism, Brick immediately becomes protective of his relationship with Skipper. Williams notes, "*The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to 'keep face' in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the 'mendacity' that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with*" (116). Brick's deep psychological dilemma is further revealed in another stage note. Williams writes that ". . . *we gauge the wide and profound reach of the conventional mores he got from the world that crowned him with early laurel*" (122). In his book *Cotton's Queer Relations: Same-Sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation 1936-1968*, Bibler uses *Cat's* open discussion to illuminate the continued discrimination against women and blacks. In his chapter analyzing homosexuality in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Bibler argues, "*Cat takes a . . . progressive stance and suggests that in the modern South, the more serious problem is that the potential for homo-ness between elite white men still depends on the enduring oppression of women and African-Americans*" (97). Bibler argues that the acceptance of homosexuality on the plantation elucidates the oppression of other groups, specifically women and African Americans. Bibler finds the irony that "liberating social equality ironically depends on a very large system of social inequality" (110).

Perhaps the most striking contrast between the plantation's society and that of the outside world is how the relationships between Straw and Ochello and Brick and Skipper are perceived. Big Daddy tells Brick that he "live[s] with too much space around [him] to be infected by the ideas of other people" (122). Big Daddy's plantation offers Brick a safe haven from the judgmental outside world. Through the open discourse that can only take place on his plantation of tolerance, Big Daddy attempts to demonstrate how the scathing eye of the outside world inadvertently caused Skipper's death. While living

under the microscope of outside society, Brick could not face Skipper after his “drunken confession” (126). Brick is appalled when his father compares his and Skipper’s relationship to that of Straw and Ochello, declaring that society saw them as a “pair of old sisters [who] slept in a double bed where both of ‘em died” (Williams 118). However, no one on the plantation discusses their relationship and this lack of attention allows the relationship to remain one that is only called “uncommonly tender” (15). When Maggie brings up Brick’s relationship with Skipper, she calls their bond “*noble*” but adds that while outside the plantation she was “necessary to chaperone you . . . to make a good public impression” (59). Big Daddy also attempts to help Brick distinguish the different perception of his and Skipper’s relationship on the plantation. While any hint of a homosexual relationship in the society outside of the plantation would be met with “*disgust*” at the hint of such an “unnatural thing,” within the confines of this plantation their relationship becomes a “pure an’ true thing” (123). Big Daddy illuminates the dangers of the labels society forces on such relationships by telling Brick that he has only himself to blame for Skipper’s death since he “dug the grave . . . and kicked him in it” because he would not face the truth when Skipper confessed his feelings (127). In the relationships between Straw and Ochello and Brick and Skipper, the plantation allows them not to be branded as deviant and, consequently, allows them to be nothing but “uncommonly tender” and “pure.” Establishing the plantation as a separate society with a different moral code is an essential factor in seeing Williams’s plantation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as social experiment in tolerance.

One of Williams’s most dynamic characters in his cast of social outsiders is Big Daddy Pollitt. Despite being patriarch of “twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile,” Big Daddy is far from a traditional plantation owner

(Williams 88). As a young child with shoes “worn . . . through” and sleeping in a wagon at Ochello and Straw’s cotton gin, Big Daddy began “to work like a nigger in the fields” (119, 79). From these humble beginnings, he eventually ascends to the position of overseer. In his book *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity*, James C. Cobb notes that the overseer “was a crucial figure on Delta plantations” (22). Most overseers, like Big Daddy, came from “yeoman origins” but were discouraged from interaction with other whites in their class (Cobb 24). One of the most important aspects of Cobb’s analysis of Delta overseers is his observation that the “doors of the big house were, for the most part, closed to [the overseer] socially” (24). However, on this plantation, which is so different from its contemporaries, Big Daddy cannot only climb his way from field hand to overseer, but he can also eventually become partner. Big Daddy exclaims that when Straw passed away, “I was Ochello’s partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger!” (Williams 79). Big Daddy’s ability to cross class lines and his eventual inheritance of the Straw and Ochello plantation contribute to this plantation’s unique nature. As a boy with no birth rights to the land, Big Daddy is a rare, if not unheard of, anomaly to the rigid class system that Cobb describes. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams not only explores the “queerness” described by Bibler in terms of sexuality and gender roles but also in terms of class distinctions. Big Daddy’s social mobility demonstrates how rare this plantation is.

As male owners of a plantation with no wives or children to provide for traditional bloodline heirs, Straw and Ochello took in Big Daddy, a social outcast, and eventually bequeathed their plantation to him. However, even upon becoming sole owner of the largest plantation in the Delta, Big Daddy does not behave with manners and a disposition characteristic of most plantation owners. In his book *Away Down South*,

Cobb observes that the ideal for southern plantation gentlemen was to exhibit “breeding, manners, idealism, or any other traits not directly related to making money” (77). Cobb explains that the pursuit of money was associated with the North and a decidedly bad habit for southern gentlemen. Big Daddy’s manners are far from the southern genteel ideal. Maggie reflects, “He hasn’t turned gentleman farmer, he’s still Mississippi redneck, as much of a redneck as he must have been when he was just overseer here on the old Jack Straw and Peter Ochello place” (Williams 54). However, it is his rough manners that allow him to engage in a free and open discourse contributing to the tolerant nature of the plantation.

Big Daddy also realizes the importance of frank and open talk to create an environment of tolerance and understanding. Throughout the play, Big Daddy’s “coarseness” and his “four-letter words” distinguish him from other, more refined plantation owners commonly portrayed in literature. Big Mama tells him at one point that she “even loved [his] hate and hardness” (Williams 80). When he tells a story about an elephant in heat redolent of a “powerful and excitin’ odor,” Big Mama gasps in shock as at the indecency of such vulgarity (164-65). While Big Daddy’s uninhibited language is evident in his interaction with several characters, the most conspicuous example of Big Daddy’s rejection of typical “gentlemanly” behavior is his often blunt and crude comments towards Big Mama. In his stage notes, Williams comments, “*Big Daddy is famous for his jokes at Big Mama’s expense,*” which are often “*cruel*” (68). When Big Mama appeals to Big Daddy to stop yelling at everyone during his birthday party, he angrily replies to her that he will “talk like I want on my birthday . . . or any other goddam day of the year” (77). Big Daddy’s uses his blunt and brutal words to secure his authority over his “kingdom” (168).

Big Daddy's uninhibited manners also allow him frankly to discuss marriage and sexuality. When telling Brick that he intends to take a mistress after returning from the Ochsner Clinic with what he believes is a clean bill of health, Big Daddy declares that society's "scruples" and "convention[s]" have kept him from doing so until now, but on his plantation and with his own moral code he feels that he may "cut loose and have . . . a ball" (95). Big Daddy also tells Brick that if Maggie is not satisfying him, to "get rid of [her]!" (85). Realizing that he is the "boss" on this plantation, he also has no hesitation about redefining the traditional idea of marriage, saying that he will find a mistress no matter "how much she costs" (98). Within the confines of his plantation, Big Daddy is able to create his own moral code.

Like Big Daddy, Maggie also shuns social conventions in her actions on the plantation. While away from the protection of the plantation's seclusion, she attempts to create an unconventional marriage. To achieve intimacy with Brick, she sleeps with Skipper, hoping that they can forge some kind of connection. However, Maggie's actions are only considered an affair under the scrutinizing gaze of society. Once on the plantation, Maggie endeavors to create an unorthodox marriage and is successful this time. Realizing Brick will not willingly help her to produce an heir to secure their financial position, she lies about being pregnant to a dying Big Daddy and locks up Brick's liquor, the one thing that brings him peace of mind, until agrees to come to bed with her. While society would judge Maggie for lying about being with child, distorting the truth empowers her and allows her to achieve the two things she desires most: intimacy with Brick and financial security.

However, because this isolated plantation establishes a space where the truth can be addressed, Big Daddy must also come to terms with his own mortality from which the

outside world shielded him. In forcing Brick to confront the truth about Skipper, Brick in turn makes Big Daddy aware of that his condition is a terminal one. While away from the plantation, Big Daddy is made to believe that his condition is no more than a “spastic colon,” but upon learning that he will not live to celebrate another birthday, he must come to terms with what his legacy will be. While at first he is outraged that the “liars” did not let him hear the truth about his condition, Williams implies that Big Daddy decides to leave his estate to Brick and Maggie after Maggie’s announcement that she is pregnant (131). Williams further portrays Gooper on the outside when he “appeal[s] to a sense of common decency” in the inheritance of Big Daddy’s property because of his assistance in business matters (156). Big Mama reminds him that Big Daddy never asked for his help or interference in matters on the plantation but only used him for affairs outside of the plantation. She exclaims:

You never had to run this place! What are you talking about? As if Big Daddy was dead and in his grave, you had to run it? Why, you just helped him out with a few business details and had your law practice in Memphis (154).

Instead of using the plan Gooper has prepared, Big Daddy tells him, “I want my lawyer in the mornin’” (Williams 168). In bequeathing the plantation to Brick, Big Daddy is protecting it from the “odor of mendacity” that Gooper and Mae will undoubtedly bring to the place (Williams 166). Instead, by leaving it to Brick, he is ensuring that it will remain a place where tolerance will flourish untainted by society’s influence. In confronting his own mortality, Big Daddy secures the plantation as a refuge for the social outcasts it has harbored from society’s judgment.

Another character who finds asylum from society on the plantation is Maggie. In his discussion of southern white womanhood, Cobb discusses the theory of “pure white Southern womanhood” in which southern men use the defense of women’s honor as a means to commit racially-charged violence (*Away* 175). However, Maggie and her marriage receive a very different portrayal on this plantation of social outcasts. At the beginning of the play, a sexually-frustrated Maggie describes the loneliness that she feels in a celibate marriage to Brick. Maggie laments, “Living with someone you love can be lonelier—than living entirely *alone!*—if the one that y’ love doesn’t love you . . .” (28). Brick’s indifference to her pleading only causes her desires to “[grow] and [fester]” (32). Maggie even turns down Brick’s offer for her to “take a lover” and is determined to “stay on this hot tin roof” (41, 51). Maggie’s determination to be intimate even compelled her to sleep with Skipper in an effort to “feel a little bit closer to [Brick]” (56). Bibler argues that Maggie’s attempt to establish sexual intimacy with Brick is an attempt to gain power and equality. He asserts that “she . . . hates the gender-exclusive continuum of male homosocial relations that can thwart a woman’s desire to become a truly equal partner, as it were, to her husband” (“A Tenderness” 392). Despite her efforts to establish some sort of intimacy with Brick through Skipper, she is unable to forge a relationship.

Maggie’s brazen discussion of her sexual frustration contradicts the moral code women on plantations were expected to observe. In her examination of women in her book *The Plantation Mistress*, Catherine Clinton explains, “Southern society prided itself on a rigorous code of behavior. The female preoccupation with the ‘niceties,’ a rigid pattern of manners and politeness.” Consequently, as Clinton points out, an ideal woman was almost completely “desexualized” (88, 110). However, Clinton also notes that women’s “isolation from the ‘outside world’” contributes to their “exalted status as

guardian of the culture” (90). Ironically, the isolation of the plantation is what allows Maggie to communicate openly about her sexuality and yearning for financial security. However, her need to secure her position in the family and therefore a place on this plantation seems to have much deeper motivation than love. Raised in a family “poor as Job’s turkey,” Maggie finds herself in a precarious position because she is unable to produce an heir to ensure her financial stability after Big Daddy’s death (Williams 55). Maggie tries to emphasize to Brick that “[y]ou can be young without money, but you can’t be old without it” (55). Like Big Daddy, Maggie also values the freedom to discuss taboo subjects such as her sexless marriage on the plantation without fear of condemnation. Maggie rejects “niceties” and openly discusses sexual desire and the need for companionship, in some capacity, with her husband.

However, within this plantation which grows tolerance, Maggie is able to create an unconventional marriage that satisfies both her need for intimacy and financial security. After admitting to her affair with Skipper, Maggie is met with complete apathy by Brick. Bibler argues that Maggie “transforms her identity into something more fluid and ambiguous than either man can tolerate” (116). While Maggie’s blurring of gender roles and attempt to enter the “homosocial/homosexual continuum” does not successfully secure her either financial security or intimacy with her husband, she finds her “fluidity” more well received on the plantation than off of it (Bibler, 116-17). Maggie’s fear motivates her to adapt her marriage in order to sustain her financial security. While the plantation allows Brick and Big Daddy to confront the truth, it enables Maggie to manipulate her reality. After Big Mama learns of Big Daddy’s fatal condition, she confides to Maggie that Big Daddy’s dream would be to have a “grandson as much like his son as his son is Big Daddy” (Williams 162). With Maggie’s announcement that she

is pregnant with a baby “sired by Brick, and out of Maggie the Cat,” Bibler notes that she once again transforms her identity (Williams 167). However, on the plantation, Maggie’s transformation into mother has a much more favorable outcome. Big Daddy confirms her metamorphosis into a mother. Upon examining her, he exclaims, “Uh-huh, this girl has life in her body, that’s no lie!” (168). Maggie, who is not “thin-skinned,” realizes the power that she has if she can produce an heir, and while she cannot force Brick to love her, she can use his drinking as leverage to ensure that she conceives a successor to the Pollitt plantation (27). Maggie knows that only “[t]he rich or the well-to-do can afford to respect moral patterns,” and she is no position to be bound by society’s moral code. Within the seclusion of the plantation, though, Maggie cultivates her position in this society of social misfits. Locking up Brick’s liquor until he “satisf[ies] [her] desires,” Maggie coerces Brick to forge an unconventional bond with her so that they can both stay content. Maggie’s fluidity of gender roles is rejected and unsuccessful in the outside world, but within the alienation of this plantation, she is able to successfully secure her financial future and create an unconventional marriage with Brick.

Another character residing on and revising the conventions of the plantation is Big Mama. Like Maggie, Big Mama is not a traditional plantation wife. Big Mama is trapped in a marriage in which the affection is one-sided, telling Big Daddy she “even loved [his] hate and hardness” (80). In his stage notes, Williams describes her as “*very sincere*” but “*notorious throughout the Delta for . . . inelegant horseplay*” (43, 69). Clinton’s description of the wife of the planter varies greatly from Williams’s Big Mama: “the measure of a plantation mistress’s propriety was . . . reflected in her every deed and word” (101). Likewise, Cobb describes the four essential characteristics of a plantation mistress according to the New South Creed as “virtuous, kind, gentle, but quietly strong”

(*Away* 82). While Big Mama is virtuous in her unwavering love towards her husband and attempts to please him whenever possible, she is anything but gentle and strong. Williams often employs animalistic terms to describe her often outrageous behavior. In one scene, she is “*huffing and puffing like an old bulldog*” and in another “*entering through hall door like a rhino*” (42, 67). Even her apparel gives her the appearance of a rough animal. Williams describes the “*large irregular patterns, like the markings of some massive animal*” (69). Williams’s animalistic portrayal of Big Mama, which is reminiscent of such characterizations in *Streetcar*, dehumanizes her and portrays her as being confined to this plantation. Unlike plantation mistresses of the Old South, she is not “gentle” and “quietly strong,” but her identity is still bound both to the plantation and to its master. Bibler notes that Big Mama can only “[assert] her power as matriarch by invoking the position of her husband” (“A Tenderness” 391). Despite assigning Big Mama a more traditional role, Williams creates a plantation mistress who is anything but socially acceptable, complimenting the non-traditional plantation master.

Unlike the rest of the inhabitants of the plantation, Mae and Gooper want to fit into the mainstream society, and ironically, it is these two characters who are outcasts on a plantation founded on tolerance. Williams uses this couple to contrast the rules that apply outside of the boundaries of the Pollitt plantation. Mae, like Maggie, married into the Pollitt family, yet Maggie has come to realize how “[u]nderstanding is needed on this place” (151). Almost an antithesis of Brick, Gooper is “[a] sober responsible man with five precious children” (147). Despite fulfilling the duty of the traditional plantation mistress, Mae is an unwelcome feature on Big Daddy’s plantation. Clinton notes how the “sacred charge of motherhood” is a “vital” duty of the plantation mistress (90). Mae “*religiously*” recites the numerous shots that she makes certain each of her children gets

(66). Even Big Daddy notices that Mae has fulfilled her duty in being a “good breeder” and producing heirs that can inherit the plantation (82). However, instead of being excited about her ability to have children and continue the family name, Maggie calls her a “monster of fertility” and refers to Mae and Gooper’s children as “no neck monsters” (22, 53). Williams’s rendering of Mae and Gooper makes them grotesque figures on Big Daddy’s plantation. In the outside world, their family represents the ideal model, yet on this plantation, they are viewed as an undesirable intrusion. Whereas Maggie defines herself through her sexual needs and want of financial security, Mae identifies herself through the roles of “housewife and mother” (74). Big Daddy even exclaims, “Pretend to love that son of a bitch of a Gooper and his wife Mae and those five same screechers out there like parrots in a jungle? Jesus! Can’t stand to look at ‘em!” (110).

Despite adhering piously to the traditional roles of the plantation, Mae and Gooper find themselves without function on Williams’s reinvented plantation. Mae and Gooper are almost equated to the intrusion of society that Big Daddy and the others try so hard to avoid. Each time Gooper or Mae enter the room, they are portrayed as undermining the tolerance of the plantation. When talking to Brick in Straw and Ochello’s bedroom, Big Daddy catches Mae listening in and tells her to leave so he “can have some privacy here” (84). When Gooper tries to get Big Daddy to come out and see the grandchildren, he yells to Gooper to “[k]eep out!” (109). When Maggie and Brick are discussing their marital problems in the first act, she quickly silences Brick realizing Mae is at the door listening (36). The presence of Mae and Gooper on the plantation is a constant reminder of the cruel influence of society. Each time Maggie, Big Daddy, or Brick realizes that Mae or Gooper is spying, he or she quickly stops what was relatively free and open discourse.

However, like Brick, Gooper gets his moment of truth on the plantation. Instead of addressing Big Daddy, Gooper's confrontation is with Big Mama when he tells her the truth about Big Daddy's real prognosis. Gooper asks Doctor Baugh to tell Big Mama about Big Daddy's terminal condition, and she calls out for Brick, her "*only son*" (147). Though Gooper is her "first-born," Big Mama tells him that he is "not [her] blood" since he "never liked Big Daddy" (148). Even though Gooper appeals to "common decency and fair play" to receive a "square deal" in his inheritance from Big Daddy, he fails to understand the uniqueness of this plantation (136). One again representing the outside influences of society, Gooper tells Big Mama he sought the "advice and assistance" from the attorney "who handles estates for all the prominent fam'lies in West Tennessee and th' Delta" (159). Far from comforting Big Mama, this declaration instead reminds her of what will become of the plantation if Gooper and Mae are left in charge of it. Instead of plantation society's typical patrilineal inheritance practices, the Straw and Ochello plantation passes to those who value the tolerance found through alienation from society the plantation offers. Only when Big Daddy is convinced that Maggie is indeed with child is he comfortable to "give up [his] kingdom—twenty-eight thousand acres of th' richest land this side of the valley Nile" (168). When Mae and Gooper were the only ones who could continue Big Daddy's legacy, he confessed to Brick that they are "not [his] kind" and refuses to leave his plantation of tolerance and understanding to "five little monkeys [who] are little Maes an' Goopers" (112). Believing that Brick will provide a suitable heir, Big Daddy is finally able to rest assured his plantation will not be "infected by the ideas of other people" (122).

In his experiment of social misfits, Williams proves that when isolated from the obtrusive influences of society's code of morals, these outcasts are able to discuss their

differences and ultimately come to terms with them. Big Daddy's crop of tolerance extends, with the exception of Mae and Gooper, throughout the family. Only on this plantation is a homeless child given refuge and allowed to work his way from field hand to partner. However, as Bibler demonstrates, Big Daddy's tolerance only seems to extend to the white residents of the plantation, completely ignoring the black labor that first built the plantation and continues serve it. Yet, Big Daddy, like his predecessors Straw and Ochello, succeeds in cultivating a new kind of plantation and bringing it into modernity. He understands that the soil on this plantation is not only rich for growing cotton but also tolerance and acceptance for those who are deemed unnatural or taboo by the outside world but acceptable under the revised rules governing this plantation. Big Daddy ensures this legacy of tolerance will continue for another generation by rejecting traditional inheritance practices and bequeathing his vast plantation to his second son and not his first.

In moving to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams continues his work to reimagine the plantation from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In *Cat*, however, he chooses a more traditional rural setting for the Pollitt plantation. While Belle Reve exists in the memories of *Streetcar*'s characters, the traditional plantation house is center to all the action for the Pollitts. However, Williams's two plays share more similarities than differences. Both Stanley and Big Daddy represent the potential of social and economic upward mobility. While Stanley is still of modest means at the end of *Streetcar*, he aspires to fulfill the prospect social and economic power that Big Daddy holds. With Stella's pregnancy and Big Daddy's decision to leave his estate to Brick, they both dictate their own dynasties, ensuring their legacies will pass into the next generation. At the end of both plays, characters previously excluded from the traditional plantation are

the only ones left. In *Streetcar*, Stanley banishes the committed Blanche from the Marigny, and in *Cat*, Mae and Gooper leave the Pollitt plantation to return to the outside world. On both plantations, Williams's reinvention of traditional plantation values and roles allows a new class of inhabitants, and in essence, offers the plantation a place in the modern world.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In cultural memory, the plantation remains at the heart of southern folklore and traditions. Numerous films and novels have crystallized the plantation and the planter culture into a myth, a fairy-tale of the Old South, offering popular culture snapshots into a past era that perished. This fabled history of the South's plantation system inspired Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner's attempt to contextualize the South's rise and fall. Like Mitchell and Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, a native son of Mississippi, reaches into his southern roots for inspiration for his plays. In a 1957 interview with *The Tennessean*, Williams discloses,

I don't write about the North, because I feel nothing for it but eagerness to get out of it . . . I don't write about the North, because—so far as I know—they never had anything to lose culturally. But the South once had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember—a culture that had grace, elegance. (43)

However, unlike his southern-born predecessors Mitchell and Faulkner, Williams does not perceive the end of the Old South as the final coffin-nail for its most celebrated symbol, the plantation. Instead, Williams reimagines the plantation and its roles, carving a place for them in modern society. During a visit to his birthplace of Columbus, Mississippi in 1952, Williams wrote to his partner, Frank Merlo, describing the array of parties hosted by the town's most prominent families living in homes as old as the town

itself. Williams confides, “The homes, the interiors, are just incredibly beautiful, almost everything in them is a priceless antique. But the people’s ideas are older than their furniture” (*The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Volume II, 1945-1957*). While fascinated by the “grace, elegance” of the Old South, Williams realizes that for the South to subsist in the future, not as a relic but as a viable entity, the “antique” ideas of the Old South must be replaced with new ones embracing tolerance, diversity, and modernity.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams presents both an antiquated plantation of the Old South and one that he reconstructs in modernity. Just as with Mitchell’s Tara and Faulkner’s Sutpen’s Hundred, his treatment of Belle Reve and its last plantation mistress Blanche maintains the depiction of the plantation as a decrepit and outdated symbol of the past. Blanche clings to the traditional role of plantation mistress, which ultimately prohibits her from surviving in a modern world. She continually attempts to mask her promiscuity and appear to be the virginal figure of the traditional southern belle. Blanche lives in the past and derives all her power from what the DuBois family once was, not what it presently is. However, with the Marigny neighborhood in New Orleans, Williams depicts his reinvented, modernized plantation. This plantation turned urban neighborhood provides a landscape for diversity and change. Williams’s new plantation master, Stanley, possesses no blood claim to the plantation and is of Polish descent. Barred from entrance to Belle Reve, working-class Stanley asserts his authority in the Marigny and demands that its inhabitants be of a “new” stock. His plantation mistress, Stella, is the only character that successfully survives on both plantations. Stella realizes her family’s ancestral home of Belle Reve is a relic of the time gone by and embraces the reimagined plantation and her role on it. While her sister Blanche refuses to submit to Stanley’s authority, Stella recognizes him as the master and fulfills her role within his

dominion. Stella, unlike Blanche, feels no need to hide her sexuality and relationship with Stanley. At the end of the play, Stanley ensures his dynasty with Stella's pregnancy and banishes the widowed and childless Blanche.

Williams again reimagines the plantation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with the Straw and Ochello place. Much like Gerald O'Hara and Thomas Sutpen, Big Daddy is a self-made man and the master of the largest plantation in the Mississippi Delta. Big Daddy inherits his plantation not from a family dynasty but instead works his way from field hand to overseer and eventually the heir apparent of owners Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. Determined to create an environment of tolerance, albeit according to his definition, Big Daddy chooses his successor not based on lineage but on which son will continue his policy of tolerance and acceptance. Oldest son Gooper and his wife Mae embody the traditional roles and values of the plantation of the Old South and have already produced five children with a sixth on the way. However, Big Daddy instead favors Brick and Maggie to take over the plantation once his reign as master is over. Brick, like his father, exhibits few qualities of a traditional plantation master. The outside society's scrutiny of his relationship with Skipper fuels his alcoholism, and only on the Straw and Ochello plantation can he escape judgment and tolerance and acceptance. While Mae was once "cotton carnival queen," Maggie's poor roots and open discussions of sexuality would never permit her admittance to the Old South's plantation, but on Williams's reinvented space, she inherits and thrives in the role of future plantation mistress (25). Williams reimagines this modern plantation as a haven for social misfits and provides a space where greater diversity is welcomed and encouraged, even if full equality for all remains elusive.

With these two plays, Williams evolves the plantation into a potential breeding ground for tolerance and a shelter from discrimination for those who can afford its privileges. While Williams continues to institute residual patriarchy in both the Marginy and Pollitt plantation, he creates a new “master” to administer it. Neither Stanley nor Big Daddy fits into the Old South’s gentleman planter role, yet they flourish on their modern variations of the traditional plantation. Before the end of each play, the master has effectively established his dynasty and banned those who do not submit to their authority, only allowing those who embrace modernity and change to remain. Blanche’s Belle Reve is lost forever as is Gooper and Mae’s futile attempt to traditionalize the Straw and Ochello plantation. Williams agrees with Mitchell and Faulkner that a Tara or Sutpen’s Hundred has no place in the New South, but he proves a reinvented plantation can both survive and prosper in a modern society.

As globalization emerges in the South, Williams’s reinvention of the plantation in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* provides a sort of blueprint for emergence of the postsouthern plantation in literature and culture. In her novel *The Celestial Jukebox*, Cynthia Shearer creates a postsouthern representation of the plantation in her novel *The Celestial Jukebox*. The Old Abide plantation provides characters with a location for a healthy exchange of ideas and shelter from the rapidly urbanizing South as seen in the Lucky Leaf casino, which draws on plantation images for commercial purposes. Shearer reimagines the plantation in *The Celestial Jukebox*, creating a postsouthern model in the Old Abide house that serves as both a refuge from urbanization as well as a space for global exchange among characters.

Williams’s reimagination of the plantation survives in popular culture as well. In the 1975 film *Mandingo*, Hammond, heir to the decrepit Falconhurst plantation, shuns his

wife, who is aptly named Blanche, upon learning that she was not a virgin when they married. Hammand instead begins an affair with one of the plantation's slaves while Blanche in turn begins an affair with another slave, Mede. In his 2005 film *Manderlay*, Lars von Trier offers another postsouthern representation of a plantation. His protagonist Grace discovers a plantation in Alabama that still practices slavery in the 1930s. Attempting to overthrow what she believes to be last master's code of conduct for the slaves, Grace eventually learns it was actually conceived and enforced by the plantation's oldest slave as a means to protect Manderlay's slaves from the cruel world outside of the plantation. In another example, HBO's series *True Blood* again explores the postsouthern plantation through the character of Russell Edgington. As the King of Mississippi, Russell rules his territory from plantation in Natchez, Mississippi. Continuing the traditional plantation's residual patriarchy, he claims absolute authority, often killing those who challenge his power. Instead of blacks as slaves, Russell employs the werewolves to do his bidding, and as an alternative to the traditional plantation mistress, the King of Mississippi's consort is Talbot, who is responsible for the running of the household. In several episodes set on the King of Mississippi's plantation, the presumptive "belle," an African American bartender, is literally held captive by her crazed "gentleman" suitor, a vampire who thinks of himself as her cavalier. Echoing Blanche DuBois, she nearly goes insane from the hold that the plantation has on her. However, she evokes an even earlier predecessor just by virtue of her name: Tara. In each of these postmodern depictions of the plantation, the plantation becomes a space for reimagining tropes associated with the traditional plantation and re-evaluating its painful historical legacies.

African Americans have engaged in this re-evaluation of the plantation increasingly over the years and have created a sort of counter-narrative to the traditional literature surrounding the image of the plantation. In her 1966 novel *Jubilee*, Margaret Walker chronicles the life of a biracial slave, Vyry, before, during, and after the Civil War. Alex Haley's novel *Roots* and the TV miniseries adaptation portray the institution of slavery by tracing his ancestry to its African heritage to the modern day United States. Interestingly, a tradition has recently emerged of African Americans signifying on traditional plantation tropes has also become popular in recent years. In her 2001 novel *The Wind Done Gone*, Alice Randall offers a reinterpretation of Mitchell's famous predecessor. Told through the eyes of the biracial slave Cynara, daughter of Mammy and Gerald O'Hara, the novel offers a very different narrative than Mitchell's glorification of the Old South. However, perhaps the best example for this conclusion of African American embodying traditional plantation roles in popular culture is the recent Broadway revival of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* featuring an all-African American cast with James Earl Jones as Big Daddy Pollitt.

With his plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams not only enters into a long literary tradition of centering action around one of the South's most iconic images, the plantation, but he also creates a future for what most authors before him viewed as merely a relic of a bygone era. In these plays, Williams successfully marries his deep-rooted respect for southern culture with his need to promote diversity and acceptance in modern society. His contributions help to shape our perception of the plantation and the modern South and continue to influence popular culture's portrayal of the reimagined plantation today.

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