

Abstract

The aim of this BA thesis is to describe the origins of the Old South's archetypal feminine ideals and how they were altered in the course of time. In what follows, I will attempt to explain how the Southern Belle myth became (re-)defined, enacted and/or maintained throughout the era of the Antebellum, Post-Bellum and New South perspective. The thesis will employ literary theory, namely in respect to relevant archetypal definitions that will be applied to the specific Southern Belle figures, as well as historical, social and cultural studies. Finally, feminist and gender theories will be utilized in order to demonstrate how the cultural archetype of the Southern Belle served as a socially constructed norm enforcing women's passivity and submission to patriarchy.

After the introductory chapter, which will present the American South and its inhabitants as a distinct cultural entity, chapter two will discuss the aims and methodology of the thesis and the basic terminology that is essential for the Southern Belle concept. Chapter three shall afterwards briefly introduce the specific constructs of the Post-Bellum (Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*) and New South (Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*) Belles in relation to their concrete socio-historical contexts. Chapter four will then consist of contrastive and comparative analyses, determining which of the Southern Belle features persisted and/or disappeared in terms of visual and behavior aspects in both of the aforementioned plays. In chapter five, the gender and feminist theories will be discussed to indicate how the archetypal Belle concept reinforced and subverted the patriarchal society. Among these, Simone de Beauvoir's definition of a woman as the "Other" and Judith Butler's performative gender theory will constitute a substantial part for my observations. The last chapter is intended as a conclusion, which will summarize the relevant points of my thesis.

Key words: American, South, Belle, Birdie, Blanche, Hellman, Williams