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Neither Old, Nor New: The Southern Belle Archetype in Lillian Hellman's Birdie Hubbard from *The Little Foxes* and Tennessee Williams's Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Ani stará, ani nová: Archetyp jižanské krásky v postavách Birdie Hubbard z *Lištiček* Lillian Hellmanové a Blanche DuBois z *Tramvaje do stanice Touha* Tennesseeho Williamse

Markéta Soukupová

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce

(supervisor):

PhDr. Hana Ulmanová, Ph.D., M.A.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

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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

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza původu jižanského ideálu ženství a jeho vývoje postupem času. V následujících kapitolách bude ukázáno, jak byl tento archetyp (re)definován, nahrazen či zachován v obdobích před a po Občanské válce a éře Nového Jihu. Z literární teorie se práce především opře o relevantní definice archetypu, které pak bude dokazovat na postavě jižanské krásky. Dále pak bude čerpat zejména z historie, sociologie a kulturních studií.

Po úvodní kapitole, která představí americký Jih a jeho obyvatele jako jedinečné kulturní entity, kapitola dva okomentuje a zdůvodní základní metodologii a cíle práce společně s klíčovou terminologií, která se v souvislosti s jižanskou kráskou jeví jako nepostradatelná. Kapitola tři se poté bude zabývat krátkým úvodem k jednotlivým konstruktům jižanských krásek v jejich specifických společensko-historických kontextech, tzn. po Občanské válce (*Lištičky* Lillian Hellmanové) a v éře Nového Jihu (*Tramvaj do Stanice Touha* Tennesseeho Williamse). Kapitola čtyři pak přistoupí k samotné analýze postav a jejich prvků, jež byly v jednotlivých hrách buď zachovány, nebo zatraceny, a to jak v rámci zevnějšku, tak chování. Pátá kapitola za použití feministických a genderových teorií nastíní, jak jižanský archetyp krásky posiluje - a zároveň podrývá - patriarchální společnost. Pro tuto část využiji především feministické teorie Simone de Beauvoir a koncept performativnosti Judith Butlerové. Poslední kapitola bude sloužit jako shrnutí, ve kterém zhodnotím všechny klíčové poznatky.

Klíčová slova: Americký, Jih, Kráska, Birdie, Blanche, Hellman, Williams

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Exceptional "Other"

> MARSHALL. That you Southerners occupy a unique position in America. You live better than the rest of us, you eat better, you drink better. I wonder you find time, or want to find time, to do business.[1]

Even though Mr. Marshall's words above function merely as a perfunctory gesture of amicability, the underlying content that is conveyed on the subconscious level clearly testifies to the undeniable role of the American South as the exceptional "Other."[2]

Primarily denoting the geographical division between the colonies of New England and the southern ones, the term 'Southern'[3] adopted a far more prominent meaning in the social sphere at the end of the colonial era.[4] Despite the fact that both the Southern demographics and the Southern cultural distinctiveness are all rather a matter of personal perspective, various intricacies began to resurface which gave rise to the notion of "irreducible distance"[5] between the North and the South. This gap was based not only on different demographic situations but also the contrasting behavior of their respective citizens. Thomas Jefferson summarizes his observations in the following words:

> In the North, they are cool, sober, laborious, independent, jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others, interested, chicaning, superstitious and hypocritical in their religion. In the South they are fiery, voluptuary, indolent, unsteady, jealous for their own liberties, but tramping on those of others, generous, candid, without attachment or pretentions to any religion but that of the heart.[6]

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[1] Lillian Hellman, *Four Plays: The Children's Hour; Days to Come; The Little Foxes, Watch on the Rhine* (NY: Random House, 1942) 171.
[2] Orville Vernon Burton, "The South as 'Other,' the Southerner as 'Stranger,'" Journal of Southern History 79.1 (Feb. 2013): 9, Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The_south_as_other_the_southerner_as_stranger.pdf>, 12.7. 2016.
[3] As the American South is examined and presented as a culturally and historically specific region in which the Southern Belle myth is steeped, the initial letter shall be hereby capitalized. Should there be a word referring to the South written as "south" or "southern," it is only for the purpose of retaining the original quotation.
[4] James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 9-10.
[5] Burton, 12.
[6] Cobb, 10.

Yet, whereas Jefferson presents the contradiction in 'Southern' behavior as a result of the climactic difference,[7] other critics do not limit themselves to the meteorological factors only. Perhaps the most influential theory was first introduced by the French military officer Marquis de Chastellux, whose claims of predisposed aristocracy contributed to the overall perception of the Southern mythical "exceptionalism."[8] Focused more upon the national identity than external influences, he perceived the uniqueness "not only in the nature of their climate, soil and agriculture, but also in that indelible character which every nation acquires at the moment of its origin, and which by perpetuating itself from generation to generation, justifies this great principle, that everything which is partakes of what has been."[9]

Even if his musings referred solely to the inhabitants of Virginia, de Chastellux's conjectures quickly spurred another series of explanations until the idea of settlement by two distinct groups of immigrants arose. By the 1830s, it was widely believed that Northerners represented the descendants of the seventeenth century English Puritan Roundheads, while Southerners attributed their personality traits to the aristocratic Cavaliers of Norman origins.[10] This peculiar revelation led to two eventual outcomes. Firstly, as Sheldon Hackney recounts "Southerners traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to the presumed American norm."[11] If this norm equals the American North, it seems only logical to presume that the American South grappled for something to adhere to against the opposition of their Northern brothers. The "cavalier thesis"[12] therefore, regardless of its little veracity,[13] operated as a defense mechanism

[7] Cobb, 10.
[8] Burton, 13.
[9] Cobb, 11.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Burton, 9.
[12] Ibid, 22.
[13] The historian David Hackett Fischer claims the whole concept of "cavalier thesis" as a largely inconsistent fiction. However, he is convinced that it may find some evidence in Virginia, since, apart from

which effectively managed to feed the idea of the South as the "significant Other." Secondly, due to its wide-spread popularity, the concept of aristocratic descendants spread rapidly between other Southern states and became the cornerstone of the universal Southern beliefs.

With the origins and characteristics of the 'South' covered, one can begin discussing one of its main components: the Antebellum society.

"the seventy-five percent of the colony's immigrants which comprised indentured servants and landless whites mostly, it had served as the only city of refuge left in His Majesty's Dominion for the distressed Cavaliers" as well.

1.2. The Antebellum Society

As Anne Goodwyn Jones notes, the genesis of the Antebellum society, which denotes the time before the Civil War, laid on its solid set of ethos that Southerners firmly endorsed.[14] This included namely the traditional sense of honor and chivalry as well as the concept of Victorian England which the American South utilized as its model framework. With the plantation class at the top, the image of the Southern planter began to shape the relationships among the patriarchal, in other words masculine-dominated, South. This male superiority in authority is crucial, for as much as the Southern white patriarchal society exaggerated the stereotypes of masculinity, men's authority was often taken for granted.[15] The Southern gentlemen "never justify, never explain, never back off."[16] A "Southern Hamlet," as William R. Taylor terms him, was portrayed as "gay, pleasure-loving and generous-hearted [...] with polite culture and genteel way; yet vacillating and self-indulgent, or wild, vindictive and self-destructive."[17] Emerson even goes as far in his description that he depicts him "as ignorant as a bear, as irascible and nettled as any porcupine, as polite as a troubadour, and a very John Randolph in character and address."[18] Yet, in spite of all the possible negative connotations, through his aristocratic planter-cavalier image, the Southern Gentleman represented the pinnacle of the uniquely Southern culture;[19] the barometer for racial and social perfection, for Southerners at least, and the emblem of invincible quality.

[14] Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 8
[15] Burton, 21.
[16] Ibid, 22.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Goodwyn Jones, 18.
[19] Gabriela Petrušová, "Southern Womanhood: A Story Behind The Southern Belle/Jižanské ženství: příběh za jižanskou kráskou, diplomová práce," Univerzita Karlova (květen 2015): 10, Portál elektronických zdrojů Univerzity Karlovy <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/150723>, červenec 2015.

With such a warped manner of thinking, it appears self-evident that the Southern man's female counterpart was expected to precisely fit the vision of gentlemen's "alarmingly organic society."[20] Indeed, the Southern Lady was a figment of similarly socially constructed ideals. Her image was generated primarily in terms of class and race and it was imperative that she displayed four fundamental qualities that further complemented her husband's image: piety, purity, family devotion and submissiveness.[21] It is this belief that tentatively suggests that there could not have been a Southern Lady without a Southern Gentleman; that her traditional role permitted his (see chapter six); or, better yet, that their respective personae presupposed and enhanced each other. This begins the discussion of the myth of the 'Southern Belle.'

[20] Goodwyn Jones, 11.
[21] Petrušová, 15.

1.3 The Southern Belle Myth

There has scarcely been a more contingent image so inextricably linked with the American South than that of a Southern Belle. As the symbol of white civilization, the character of Belle impersonated "the core of a region's self-definition,"[22] which, as Goodwyn Jones argues, appears perfectly understandable since the "Southern men have toasted and celebrated southern womanhood since the South began to think of itself as a region."[23] In contrast to the Southern Lady, referring to the upper-class young woman once she was securely married to a Southern Gentleman, the character of the Southern Belle engaged herself for several years in various parties, social gatherings and innocent flirting with her potential suitors, all the while looking and acting her best.[24] This unique period which constituted the most exciting part of her life, and desirably ended in an act of matrimony, came to be known as the time of Southern Belle. Let us now further explore what exactly the Southern Belle myth entails.

Since the tradition of the Southern Belle was a largely preconceived ideal, it required certain criteria to be fulfilled. Foremost, to be a Southern Belle was deemed a distinguishing prerogative, which applied solely to the elite women of middle- and upper-class circles whose genes were "pure white."[25] Similar to the Southern Gentleman, the Southern Belle exemplified racial and social perfection. Yet, unlike him, she was supposed to exude religious, moral and sexual purity as well. She is, in Goodwyn Jones's words: "pious—whether aristocratic Episcopalian or middle-class Methodist— […] She is chaste […] and embodies virtue, but her goodness depends directly on innocence […] she serves others—God, husband, family, society—showing in her submissiveness the

[22] Ibid, 4.
[23] Ibid, 3.
[24] Petrušová, 11.
[25] Goodwyn Jones, 9.

perfection of pure sacrifice."[26] While all the aforementioned is accurate, a Southern Belle was, predominantly, dependent.

As opposed to the "physical prowess"[27] of the Southern man, a Southern Belle embodied the fragile "flower,"[28] whose saving the Southern Gentlemen considered appealing as well as essential.[29] As George Fitzhugh further clarifies "so long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her."[30] This concept of Lady reverence seems not unlike the Medieval chivalric themes. In fact, the "knightly bravery,"[31] which the Southern Gentlemen were expected to profess, only complimented their identification with their assumed Norman origins.[32] Helpless and in need of protection, the Southern Belle impersonated their ultimate conquest as much as a proof for establishing their own authority.[33] Ironically, it was thus Belle's weakness that constituted her main strength. This obvious dependence led, as Anne Firor Scott states elsewhere, to a bold belief that Southern women could not, and *would* not, take care of themselves, since their only strive resided in their acknowledged submission to their men's virility. As a consequence, the Southern Belle was treated as a child who has "but one right […] the right to protection [which] involves the obligation to obey."[34]

It seemed thus slightly ironic though that the element of obedience entailed on the Belle persona aided the Southern overall perception of white sovereignty. With her "generosity of spirit" and "love for beauty," she reified everything Southerners prided on and contributed to the conceptualization of the feminine and genteel South. Yet, the Southern

[26] Goodwyn Jones, 9.
[27] Ibid, 19.
[28] Ibid, 3.
[29] Ibid, 5.
[30] Ibid, 8.
[31] Ibid, 19.
[32] Cobb, 11.
[33] Goodwyn Jones, 31.
[34] Ibid.

Belle myth was, at its extreme, likewise exploited as propaganda to propound and enjoin the essential need for the social hierarchy. In this manner, the Southern Belle functioned as a substantial representation of white supremacy and served as moral justification for the physical and psychological abuse of black population. Her character was deferent to authority but her potential as an emblematic vision ensured and perpetuated the authoritarian system of society, which will be further examined in chapter three.

Chapter 2: Aims and Methods

2.1. Aims and Methods

The primary aim of the thesis is to discuss how Tennessee Williams and Lillian Hellman (re-)defined, enacted or maintained the distinctive role of Southern Belle through their female protagonists: Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Birdie Hubbard in *The Little Foxes.* Approaching the selected plays from the standpoint of feminist and gender theories, this thesis shall try to demonstrate how the cultural archetype of the Southern Belle served as a socially constructed norm enforcing women's passivity and submission to patriarchy.

The thesis will be structured as follows. The introductory chapter has discussed the American Southern society as one distinct entity with unique cultural features such as the Southern Belle tradition. Given that the second chapter will also contend feminist literary criticism in relation to the South, as well as establish the "archetype" as a term to use throughout the thesis, chapter three will address the evolution of the Southern Belle element in time – with Birdie portraying the Post-Bellum South and Blanche the New South. Though these terms may seem similar, the difference is that *The Little Foxes* (written in 1939) takes place before the Second World War while *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is set most probably after it. Even though the Southern Belle myth pervades various texts of the Southern literary world, from John P. Kennedy's Antebellum figure of Bel Tracy in *The Swallow Barn* to Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, the following plays were selected for analysis upon the basis of the similarity in their Belles in terms of age, setting and the behavior that collides with the archetype, as much as due to the difference in standpoints that both of the authors assume. This involves Hellman's rebuke for the inability to adapt, as well as

Williams's doubts of the perseverance of the Southern Belle phenomenon, respectively. Afterwards, chapter four will consist of analyses of Birdie and Blanche's physical appearance and personality traits, the latter of which defies the traditional Southern Belle demeanor that dictates submissiveness, passivity and asexuality. I will also discuss the problematic of education that both characters have received as a result of social expectations and the patriarchal environment that Blanche and Birdie live in. This will directly lead to chapter six, in which gender and feminist theories will be applied to indicate how the archetypal Belle concept reinforced and subverted the patriarchal society. The last chapter shall serve as a conclusion which will follow a comparative discussion of the two playwrights, how they view their Southern Belles and the potential message they are sending to the audience.

2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism and the American South

As opposed to men, little or no attention was paid to the image of Southern women in both its history and literary manifestation in the Antebellum South and later historical periods. In the second decade of the twentieth century, however, the female voice became much more prominent, and so the critics turned to the representation of Southern womanhood in the American literature.[35] Moreover, as women's studies and feminist criticism emerged, the manner in which literary texts were read had changed significantly.

From both theoretical, as well as methodological perspective, there are multiple approaches to the feminist readings of the texts. This thesis will base its analysis of the Southern Belle myth on feminist cultural and critical theories, all of which will be further examined later in this chapter, and, in more detail, in chapter five.

[35] Petrušová, 13.

2.3 Archetype and Stereotype

The term archetype reaches back to the Old Greek "archi," denoting a beginning or first instance, and "typos," meaning a stamp.[36] Nevertheless, even though the word archetype generally indicates a primordial form, the meaning of the term is not fixed and may differ in particular contexts. In literary studies, for instance, it signifies a model typological characterization of protagonists in a text; in some other cases, a model situation/story.[37] Should we apply the perspective of Foucault's theory of power and also that part of feminist literary criticism following his theory, archetypes may be viewed not as something essential that is given, but as mere constructs formed by specific contexts and thus the consequences of a dominant discourse that influences them.[38]

As opposed to an archetype, the stereotype denotes a fixed form that cannot be subjected to any variation. Deriving from the Greek "stereo," meaning "firm and/or solid," the stereotype is defined as a permanent image, symbol and/or narrative pattern.[39] In contrast to an archetype, it does not possess a fluid nature and, therefore, cannot be liable to a multitude of perceptions, varying not only from culture to culture but also within a given culture or in an individual mind.[40] Since this thesis primarily concentrates on the fluid development within the character of the Southern Belle, the term archetype, occasionally referred to as the Southern Belle myth, will be utilized throughout in connection to the analysis of the Belle phenomenon.

[36] Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1981) 3.
[37] Ibid, 3-4.
[38] Petrušová, 13.
[39] Pratt, 3.
[40] Ibid, 4.

2.4 Archetype and Feminist Theories

Viewed from the perspective of poststructuralist feminist criticism, archetypes may also be considered in terms of their deconstruction. This approach focuses on how these archetypes are created, how they affect the power relations and what their implications are for the creation of identity. Such a position is central to Simone de Beauvoir's crucial work of feminist philosophy entitled *The Second Sex*. In this work, de Beauvoir proposes one of her most recognized and revolutionary thoughts that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[41] And it is this specific concept of becoming that shall be linked with the Southern Belle tradition. Furthermore, elaborating on de Beauvoir's thinking of gender as a mere social construct, Judith Butler deems gender attributes, i.e. the characteristic features labeled as either masculine or feminine by society, as behavior patterns acquired through imitation and externally performed through one's own self-internalization.[42]

Provided we think of gender, as well as gender roles, in this manner, Judith Butler's performative theories, and likewise de Beauvoir's opinions on woman as the referential "Other,"[43] are of particular importance for the discussion in regards to the archetypal Southern Belle, as shall be addressed in chapter six.

[41] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Vintage eBooks, 2011) 14, <http://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1949_simone-de-beauvoir-the-second-sex.pdf>, 30.7. 2016.
[42] Judith Butler in *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer*, ed. Experience Bryon (Routledge: NY, 2014) 29.
[43] de Beauvoir, 34.

3. The Belle in Time

3.1 The Post-Bellum South - Hellman's Genteel Belle

There was a series of important social and economic changes that the United States experienced after the end of the American Revolution. Nevertheless, the initial wave of patriotic enthusiasm that began to sway across the continent was rather short-lived, as the vast differences between the North and the South became more and more apparent. The inevitable clash between the contradicting images of the self-made Yankees and Southern Cavaliers ultimately led to a Civil War, with the Southern Belle as the cornerstone of the regional and group identity for the latter.[44] And, it was in the wake of defeat that her image acquired even more prominence and her credos fully solidified. Lucian Lamar Knight defines her figure as follows:

> The Confederate woman. Imagination cannot dwell too tenderly upon a theme so inspiring. Reverence cannot linger too fondly at so pure an altar [. . .] It took the civilization of an Old South to produce her—a civilization whose exquisite but fallen fabric now belongs to the Dust of dreams. But we have not lost the blood royal of the ancient line; and in the veins of an infant Southland still ripples the heroic strain. The Confederate woman, in her silent influence, in her eternal vigil, still abides. Her gentle spirit is the priceless heritage of her daughters. The old queen passes, but the young queen lives.[45]

As the excerpt above clearly shows, the Southern "prideful difference […] and defensiveness"[46] is greatly steeped in the Southern Belle figure which endured not only the Civil War, Reconstruction and the New South but, as Firor Scott further believes, also "never entirely disappeared."[47]

[44] Goodwyn Jones, 8.
[45] Ibid, 4-5.
[46] Burton, 14.
[47] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*, 1830-1930. (USA: University Press of Virginia, 1995) x.

Yet, as much as the environment changed, the Belle was always expected to preserve her "blood royal"[48] and function as a repository of Southern culture and arts. Unsurprisingly, this strict demand put an enormous emotional and physical strain upon women. Even if the abolition of slavery gave rise to further inquiries about the stratified roles of Southern womanhood which stressed women's own strength and independence in both the public and private spheres, their primary purpose never wavered; in fact, it intensified.[49]

It was predominantly during the period of Reconstruction that the Southern Belle symbolized the "bulwark against social and racial chaos"[50] and comprised the yearning nostalgia for the ideal Old South and the Confederacy's utter loss. She was the personification and the closest remainder of the Antebellum era, and the very reason Southerners continued to believe in their superiority over their Northern brothers.[51]

With the increasing changes in the economy and further industrial progress, though, the plantation past was gradually transformed into a new business-oriented future, and the Southern identity reinvented and misused. As Van Woodward writes, "one of the most significant inventions of the New South was the 'Old South.'" [52] The validity of Woodward's words may be foremost reflected in the manner with which the "Southern class of […] opportunistic nouveau riche"[53] not only tolerated but even embraced the Southern myth in order to pursue their economic ambitions. Thus, contrary to the aristocratic plantations that slowly disappeared, the Southern Belle figure prevailed but, instead of morality, she underwrote the materialism of the present, fundamentally

[48] Goodwyn Jones, 5.
[49] Cobb, 79.
[50] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Awakening in the Context of the Experience, Culture and Values of Southern Women," cited in Bernard Koloski ed. *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's The Awakening* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) 37.
[51] Orville, 14.
[52] Ritchie D. Watson, Jr., "Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* and the New South Creed: An Ironic View of Southern History" in *The Southern Literary Journal* 28.2 (1996): 59-68, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20078153>, 2.4. 2016.
[53] Watson, Jr., 67.

unethical, economic order.[54] Her outer image endorsed the traditional stability, but her inner corruption closely corresponded to that of the New South.

This paradox is, apparently, best intellectually apprehended by Lillian Hellman's play *The Little Foxes* in which a conflict between the grasping industrialist future and the hopelessly romantic past is introduced, only to convey how "equally sterile" they both are.[55] "Neither fully Northern, nor fully Southern in her temperament,"[56] Hellman adopts a clinically ironic, semi-detached standpoint, as she, with an utmost historic accuracy presents the brute Hubbard clan on one side, and the genteel reminiscence of aristocrats, Birdie, on the other. What may initially appear as a mere family disagreement escalates, when Hellman stylizes Birdie into the victim of her new family and, on a larger scale, of her time as well. Her Belle is violated, trapped and completely isolated, as she repeatedly strives to apply her Southern mannerism, only to discover it is no longer possible. Even if her role as a symbol for society is crucial, her authority as a person is scarce.

Birdie is not meant to arouse compassion though, since Hellman's portrayal warns against rather than supports the Southern Belle concept. Her further inability to abandon the Old South belief that being "good to their people"[57] is the only appropriate mode of life, as scene one shows, only reinforces Katherine Lederer's understanding of Birdie as of "a silly, lost, pathetic woman […] that learned nothing from the Civil War."[58] Birdie might be "stupid,"[59] but her stupidity only echoes the traditional codes of the plantation past. At this point one can turn to Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and his faded Belle in the New South.

[54] Ibid, 66.
[55] Watson, Jr., 67.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Hellman, 173.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, 226.

3.2 The New South – Williams's Faded Belle

As long as the nostalgic ideal of the noble Old South was retained, so was the rigid notion of its indispensable part, the Southern Belle. Yet, with the arrival of the twentieth century and, especially after the 1920s, the American South underwent profound changes regarding the perception of the traditional set of values as well as of the members of the society that lived within its solid structure.[60] With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment that gave women the right to vote, the female voice started to become more prominent and the old codes gradually disposed of. This shift had naturally a significant influence upon Southern Womanhood, since the standard image of a dependant Southern woman began to crumble, as the women's engagement outside of the family started to take shape.

During the 1920s, the archetypal Southern Belle figure was challenged and deconstructed, giving the Southern Belle myth a new meaning.[61] The major claim raised consisted of the diatribe against the deeply steeped image of beauty, passivity, submissiveness, virginity and asexuality. Quite specifically, Kathryn Seidel asserts that:

> Society['s] emphasis on the beauty of the belle can produce a selfishness and narcissism that cause her to ignore the development of positive aspects of her personality. Taught to see herself as a beautiful object, the belle accentuates only her appearance and is not concerned with any talents that do not contribute to the goal her society has chosen for her: winning a man. The sheltering of the belle leads to a harmful innocence: she cannot adequately interpret the behavior of men who do not believe in the code of southern chivalry that respects the purity of women.[62]

The quotation above simply indicates that society accepted and promoted shallowness for the price of individuality and personal development, as women were objectified. This is

[60] Biljana Oklopčić, "Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois," in *Americana* 4.2 (2008) Web, n.p. <http://americanaejournal.hu/vol4no2/oklopcic> 6.7.2016.
[61] Petrušová, 30.
[62] Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) 32.

also noted by Diane Roberts who writes that even though "southern women might be no longer queens and saints, they were not allowed to be flesh and blood or humans either."[63] As Roberts further states, the failure to respect the traditional prescriptive codex of behavior usually implied some kind of punishment – hysteria, madness, rape, or loss of social privileges.

The heavenly depiction of the Antebellum South was thus greatly reduced, before and after World War II, as the era of nostalgia reached its end. Capitalism and the rude vigor of modern life gained power and the old lines of renowned dynasties were superseded by incoming immigrants and the advancement of lower classes, whose physicality, money and pragmatism subverted the once ruling royalty. This loss of governing status and social transition was naturally mirrored in the literary world as well. As the image of the Old South was altered and reassessed, so was the portrayal of the Southern Bellehood. Unlike their predecessors, the later Southern writers such as Tennessee Williams and Margaret Mitchell perceive the Southern Belle phenomenon through a more critical lens; consequently, the new type of Belle, also known as the faded Belle or fallen Belle, abounds in somewhat darker and more destructive tones, as she finds herself "helpless in the grip of the presently constituted world."[64]

Williams, "a Southerner not merely by association,"[65] does not present the Southern Belle figure as a heroic character but rather as a conflict that arose after the decline of the golden plantation South. With her personality stained with both virtues and vices, Blanche DuBois in his play *A Streetcar Named Desire* exemplifies the downfall of the Southern Belle whose character suggests mockery instead of respect. Yet, since Blanche

[63] Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens and London: The University of London Press, 1994) 109.
[64] John Gassner, "Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration" in *The English Journal* 37.8 (1948): 391, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/807030>, 20.12.2015.
[65] Glenn Loney, "Tennessee Williams: The Catastrophe of Success," Performing Arts Journal, Inc *Performing Arts Journal* 7.2 (1983): 82, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245324 >. 15 June 2015.

resists the prototypical Belle-like flatness and reveals psychological and socio-cultural depth, she is viewed as both an affirmation and subversion; a symbol and, at the same time, the antithesis of the Southern Belle stereotype.[66] Her disobedience and fight against the New South result in two distinct outcomes: pain and mistreatment; both of which shall be discussed further in chapter four.

[66] Oklopčić.

Chapter 4 - Analysis

4.1 Outer Beauty – The Visual Aspects of the Southern Belle

Constantly chaperoned, economically dependent, developmentally denied; be it the Antebellum South, the time of Reconstruction or the era of New South, the rigid Southern Belle construct produced various reactions throughout the Southern history.[67] Whilst only few Southern women rejected and/or criticized their society, others were determined to "shape themselves entirely into the ideal."[68] Whether it was due to the physical, as well as psychological, perseverance of the Southern culture, despite the differences in time, the Southern Lady and Belle continued to live on.

Both *The Little Foxes* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* exploit the Southern Belle myth in their central plots. However, the respective Belles are portrayed as elements that stir conflicted feelings rather than admiration. Even though several traditional traits and qualities are retained, Williams and also Hellman modify others which, in effect, contrasts with the still, "marble"[69] image the Southern Belle is usually associated with. Williams's Blanche DuBois and Hellman's Birdie Hubbard both perpetuate the hold on their Southern Belle identities and refuse to climb out of the Bellehood shell. Nevertheless, since the Belle represented a role declared on women by the Southern patriarchal society, any diversions from the original were deemed unacceptable. As the aim of the following two chapters is to discuss and analyze Blanche's and Birdie's characters in relation to the Belle myth, let us now examine how exactly they fit the Southern archetype, firstly in terms of their appearances.

[67] Goodwyn Jones, 22.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

As was already implied in the previous chapter, appearance and physical beauty played a crucial part of the Southern Belle. In spite of the negative consequences, more specifically her narcissistic nature, the fundamental concept of Southern Bellehood mostly comprised of the quality of being "beautiful or potentially beautiful."[70] Since Williams's Blanche "grew up under very different circumstances" [71] than Stanley Kowalski (i.e. on such an idealization of woman's beauty), she continuously seeks explicit confirmation of her wonderful looks. This is frequently shown through her interaction with Stella "How do I look?"[72] and, later, with Stanley "Would you think it possible that I was once considered—attractive."[73] As a proper Southern Belle, she dotes on her outer appearance and regards herself as a "beautiful object, which has to be properly decorated in order to sell well."[74] Regardless of her limited audience consisting "of a mixed lot,"[75] she dresses "as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail,"[76] since she "brought nice clothes […] [and proclaims to] wear them."[77] This particular streak of Blanche's character could be justified on the grounds of other quintessential characteristics associated with the Southern myth that Williams decides to preserve: vanity and whim.

The whimsical nature can be also easily detected in the character of Birdie. Hellman grants Birdie with equally capricious trait but, unlike Blanche, Birdie does not concern herself with the dress code. She does not dress herself as if she "raided some stylish shops in Paris"[78] because "clothes is [not] her passion."[79] This is clearly evident in scene three

[70] Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda H. MacKethan eds., *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 95.
[71] Tennessee Williams, *The Streetcar Named Desire* (New York: Signet, 1974) 98.
[72] Williams, 47.
[73] Ibid, 39.
[74] Oklopčić.
[75] Williams, 23.
[76] Ibid, 15.
[77] Ibid, 23.
[78] Ibid, 38

when she "burst in […] wearing a flannel kimono […] her face flushed and excited."[80] She hardly enjoys being the center of attention and can barely recognize a compliment, even when she is given one. Similar to the Southern Belle, Birdie is rather seen than heard. She rarely voices her opinion and when she does, often no one hears her; the moment she displays genuine joy, she is immediately dismissed for "chattering like a magpie"[81] or "running about like a child."[82] Being "a ninny […] and how shy,"[83] she is very surprised when someone consults her with "the unaccustomed friendliness,"[84] which only testifies to her acknowledged role of inferiority. As her husband Oscar never tells her anything, she is "delighted with the unprecedented interest,"[85] when she is asked about her own opinion, as shown in the scene below:

> OSCAR (*slowly, carefully*). What are you chattering about?
> BIRDIE (*nervously*). I was talking about Lionnet and---and about your shooting---
> OSCAR. You are exciting yourself.
> REGINA (*to* BEN) I didn't hear you. There was so much talking.
> OSCAR (*to* BIRDIE) You have been acting very childish, very excited, all evening.
> BIRDIE. Regina asked me what I'd like.
> REGINA. What did you say, Ben?
> BIRDIE: Now that we'll be so rich everybody was saying what they would like, so I said what I would like, too.
> BEN. I said---(He is interrupted by OSCAR)
> OSCAR (*to* BIRDIE) Very well. We've heard you. That's enough now.[86]

This short dialogue suggests that Birdie maintains the still, silent tradition of the Belle. Her modest innocent personality perfectly illustrates her complete passivity to the men's

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Hellman, 205.
[81] Ibid, 169.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid, 221.
[84] Ibid, 177.
[85] Ibid, 180.
[86] Ibid, 182.

authority but, simultaneously, greatly clashes with the traditional Southern Belle concept of self-love.[87]

Blanche, on the other hand, is genuinely vain. She "love[s] to be waited on"[88] and "serve[d]" cokes.[89] When Stella talks to Stanley, she warns him not to forget to "admire her [Blanche's] dress and tell her she's looking wonderful. That's important with Blanche. Her little weakness."[90] Blanche also intentionally fishes for compliments and desires attention, which only complements the Southern Belle stereotype even more. However, as scene five shows, when she confides in Stella that she "want[s] to deceive him [Mitch] enough to make him want [her],"[91] her inquiries are scarcely selfish; she surrounds herself in dark, for "[one's got] to be soft and attractive. And…I—I'm fading now."[92] This statement clearly demonstrates that her recurrent enquiries regarding her appearance can be superficial but they also denote her implicit bitterness in relation to her fading beauty.

Another important element that a Southern Belle was expected to possess was her young age. Since the Belle figure is largely associated with beauty and youth, both Hellman and Williams subvert the archetype by depicting their characters as far older. In spite of the fact that Blanche is much younger than Birdie, it is, paradoxically, Blanche that perceives her age as one of her major flaws.

> STELLA: Why are you sensitive about your age?
> BLANCHE: Because of hard knocks my vanity's been given. What I mean is--he thinks I'm sort of--prim and proper, you know![93]
>
> […] BLANCHE:

[87] As Firor Scott further notes, a Southern Belle could be "innocently flirtatious, winsome, spirited, haughty, spunky, mischievous, impulsive." Yet, after she married, these qualities had to be disposed of and the concept of self-love was replaced by her love for her husband and family only.
[88] Williams, 79.
[89] Ibid, 97.
[90] Ibid, 31.
[91] Williams, 81.
[92] Ibid, 79.
[93] Williams, 26.

> -I don't know why Stella wants to observe my birthday! I'd much rather forget it--when you--reach twenty-seven! Well--age is a subject that you'd prefer to--ignore![94]

Her feigned ignorance in scene two only exposes to what extent Blanche truly concerns herself with the issue. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown states, being unmarried was not an option for the Southern Belle.[95] This obviously puts enormous stress on Blanche's persona, since as a girl who is "still 'going out' at 30," she is conscious of her two possible choices: "a lonely spinsterhood [...] or garish indiscretions."[96] Her youth and beauty are both "yellowing with antiquity"[97] as much as the "love-letters"[98] from Allan which she keeps in her trunk.

Hellman does not let Birdie grapple with the marital issue, as she is, contrary to Blanche, securely married. Yet, since Birdie is also accustomed to her aristocratic upbringing provided by her father who "was a fine soldier, a fine man,"[99] Oscar's gentlemanly image cannot meet her expectations. With his concept of courtly love which resides in "pass[ing] by and lift[ing] his hat,"[100] while showing temporary kindness, Birdie's illusions are soon dispersed. Although "he was initially kind [...] and used to smile,"[101] his courting was as fraudulent as their whole marriage. A rather peculiar notion abounds in her abusive relationship with Oscar, nevertheless. Despite Birdie's fear and hatred of him, she doesn't abandon her role of the archetypal Belle and strives to act innocent, pure, and caring almost, most of the time.[102] She hence follows the traditional full commitment as a Southern wife only partially, since she displays financial dependency

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[94] Ibid, 81.
[95] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2007) 177.
[96] Henry Popkin, "The Plays of Tennessee Williams," in *The Tulane Drama Review* 4.3 (Mar., 1960): 55, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1124844>, 15 June 2015.
[97] Williams, 37.
[98] Williams, 37.
[99] Hellman, 174
[100] Ibid, 225.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Wyatt-Brown, 228.

but not psychological loyalty. A similar instance of psychological non-commitment can be traced in Blanche's relationship with Mitch. In scene five, Williams allows Blanche to reveal that she does not separate herself from the Southern Belle tradition either. Her active search for both protection and a husband did not cease; nor the threat of living alone a life of poverty that restlessly haunts her. Since she, akin to Birdie, continually desires a male authority in her life, despite his obvious lacking in Southern chivalry, Blanche favors Mitch even though he "dance[s] like an imitation of a bear."[103] The sacred bond of marriage is thus stained as neither of the Belles believe in their individual, or potential, husbands anymore. Birdie becomes a disillusioned wreck and Blanche a scarred nymphomaniac. Quite interestingly, as little as Birdie thinks of her own marriage though, the more she relentlessly supports that of Horace and Regina. This fact can be explained in rather simple terms. Since Birdie knows of Horace's qualities, for he "has been mighty kind to her all those years,"[104] she regards him as not only her savior but also one of the last "fine[st] man."[105] Blanche encounters this "*kind*[ness]"[106] (emphasis mine) as well when she is, in the final scene, presented with the doctor whom she perceives as her ultimate salvation.

Another of the chief assets that an archetypal Southern Belle should possess springs from the concept of drawing and keeping one's attention. The ability to enchant played a considerable role, since it aided to the greatest aspiration of her life: a marriage to a real Southern Gentleman. Even though the aspect of charm did not form a compulsory rule for the Southern Belle codex, "if she was pretty and charming […] so much the better."[107] Yet, as much as Williams's and Hellman's depiction of their Belles emphasizes this

[103] Williams, 57.
[104] Hellman, 222.
[105] Ibid, 174.
[106] Williams, 79.
[107] Seidel, 6.

unique ability, both Birdie and Blanche are mocked instead of revered. Whether trapped within the dirty street with "raffish charm"[108] in New Orleans or between the wooden chairs during a business meeting in the drawing room, Blanche and likewise Birdie emerge as "incongruous to this setting."[109] In fact, both of the opening scenes correspond with each other as they fulfill the same purpose: an ironic contrast in which the members of the New South are juxtaposed against the Old South's misplaced individuals.

Whereas Blanche's conspicuous exterior immediately captures the attention of Eunice who promptly sees to her, it is Birdie's Southern streak of aristocratic finesse that is not lost on Mr. Marshall. When Ben Hubbard begins to explain the "great distinctions"[110] about the "ancient family tales,"[111] the gap between the old credos and the new ones becomes even more prominent:

> BEN. Now you take Birdie's family. When my great-grand-father came here they were the highest-tone plantation owners in this state […] they had the best of everything […] but when the war comes and […] ends Lionnet is almost ruined and the sons finished ruining it. And there were thousands like them. Why? Because the Southern aristocrat can adapt himself to nothing.[112]

As the "only one of us who belongs to the Southern aristocracy,"[113] Birdie stands in opposition to the crass members of the Hubbard family. Unlike them, she is the delicately nurtured flower of Antebellum plantation society who reflects the breeding and gentility of the previous era.[114] And, since Mr. Marshall seems as "a very educated, cultured gentleman,"[115] he immediately recognizes and admires this cultivation. Blanche's character is based on a similar notion of sophistication. Yet, with Stella's personal

[108] Williams, 18.
[109] Ibid, 15.
[110] Hellman, 173.
[111] Ibid, 174.
[112] Ibid, 173-4.
[113] Ibid, 173.
[114] Goodwyn Jones, 226.
[115] Hellman, 169.

development and her only potential suitor Mitch, who is far from understanding her exhibited aristocratic qualities, it falls on deaf ears.

The deliberately different, if not altogether hostile settings, into which Williams and Hellman throw their Belles without the slightest chance of escape are not purely coincidental; for this obvious isolation and hopelessness that Blanche and Birdie experience are not unusual for the archetypal Belle. According to the Southern tradition, the Belle belonged strictly to the private, domestic sphere where she was "locked behind the walls of the Southern Gentleman's home"[116] and served the role of the "most skillful housekeeper."[117] "Glorifying in […] [her] subordination of self"[118] by consenting to the values of the patriarchal society, the Belle was irrevocably divested of activity and any sense of self-authority or awareness of her surroundings. As a consequence, the traditional passivity and sheltering unavoidably crystallized into her future inability to deal with any possible obstacles, leaving her helpless and socially crippled. This particular problem is addressed by Williams and likewise Hellman. In both of the plays the Old South mansions Belle Reve and Lionnet are gone, but, as opposed to feeling free, Blanche and also Birdie are as lost as ever.

Blanche's tribulations mostly stem from her economic inability to provide for herself. With all of the male ancestors dead and Belle Reve (i.e. her beautiful dreamy past[119]) lost, Blanche's sedentary life of a Southern Belle proves next to impossible. This obvious displacement forms a major conflict within her character, as the luxurious lifestyle she is so accustomed to no longer finds a place in modern life. The sudden change entails not only the loss of her residence in her ideal world but also a prominent part of her given

[116] Goodwyn Jones, 26.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid, 10.
[119] The French phrase "Belle Reve" literally translates as "a beautiful dream" in English. This meaning, as well as the pun aimed at the Southern Belle myth (i.e. the dream of the Belle) as a whole, is one of many examples of dramatic irony that Williams employs throughout the play.

identity. She is reluctant to choose between retaining her prized Bellehood and accepting reality with its responsibilities. And, since Blanche is neither a valid Southern Belle, nor a Southern Lady, Williams puts his character into a position with no possible option to escape.[120] His use of dramatic irony regarding the toponyms, Cemeteries and Elysian Fields especially, merely reinforce this idea. No longer young and pure, no matter how skillfully Blanche masks the truth in front of the "naked light bulb,"[121] she can't pass as a Southern Belle anymore. With her husband dead and unable to save him with her beauty, Blanche's portrayal of a Southern Lady also digresses from the archetype.

Birdie's hopelessness derives mostly from her inability to adapt because, unlike Blanche who, with a considerable degree of sarcasm on her part, proclaims how "very adaptable [she is] ---to circumstances,"[122] Birdie remains loyal to her ancestral blood and is, therefore, "too high-tone to try."[123] Her understanding of family devotion, however, radically differs from that of the Southern Belle. By her declaration that she doesn't "like Leo, my own son. I guess, I even like Oscar more,"[124] Birdie creates her most profound deviation from the archetypal Belle, as she subverts the role of the loving mother within her family.

Even if the Southern Belle was, in contrast to her Northern counterpart, never orphaned, both Birdie and Blanche depart from this rule. Their respective attitudes to their lost, as well as present, families greatly differ, nonetheless. Whereas Birdie cherishes her ancestors and condemns the behavior "that her Papa didn't like,"[125] Blanche scorns them for their ostentatious acts of debauchery. A similar division can be traced in their current

[120] William, Sharp, "An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams," in *The Tulane Drama Review* 6.3 (Mar., 1962): 160, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1124941>, 15 June 2015.
[121] Williams, 55.
[122] Williams, 55.
[123] Hellman, 174.
[124] Ibid, 225.
[125] Hellman, 180.

domestic spheres. While Blanche loses both Mitch and Stella and is left completely isolated against the "rough bunch"[126] in the end, Birdie's "old-fashioned"[127] ideals and her plead for her "pretty picture"[128] gains her mockery from her Hubbard in-laws but ultimately also compassion and understanding from Alexandra and Addie. Birdie's and Blanche's familial love perspectives may thus contrast with each other but their desperate need for protection and understanding is of the same nature, as shall be further addressed in the following section.

Unlike Birdie, who is "usually nervous and timid,"[129] Williams enables Blanche to voice her displeasure and, furthermore, gives her access to mobility. This liberation seems relevant as it permits Blanche to travel and hence challenge the well-established passivity and domestic sheltering of the Bellehood stereotype. However, her travelling is limited by her dire financial situation. Hellman is not so sparing though. Birdie's movement remains fairly restricted. She does not have the willpower to decide for herself and when she is advised by Ben that "a change of climate will do"[130] her good in scene one, it is merely a ridicule on her part. Consequently, contrary to Blanche, Birdie's travelling may be financially possible, but, as an individual, she is not psychologically, nor physically free.

The concept of free movement is crucial for Blanche, for thanks to her mobility, she is able to visit her sister in New Orleans. But even if she can physically move, she is not psychologically advancing in the slightest. In fact, her arrival to New Orleans proves, detrimental to her psyche, as Stella's home starkly clashes with Blanche's expectation from her upbringing. "They mustn't have—understood—what number I wanted…This—

[126] Williams, 55.
[127] Hellman, 225.
[128] Ibid, 180.
[129] Hellman, 168.
[130] Ibid, 181.

can this be—her home?"[131] When she can't see "a great big place with white columns"[132] or anything similar to the picture of Belle Reve, and her worst fears are confirmed, Blanche remains shocked. As she presses Stella with further inquisitions, she desperately seeks explanation to her question of "what are you doing in a place like this,"[133] referring not only to her sister's residence but also to Belle Reve for which "she bled [and] almost died."[134]

A similar instance is likewise echoed at the end of the play. Like Birdie, Blanche insistently searches for the reminders of the Old South, not realizing that the only remnant of "besieged Agrarianism"[135] is herself; the same idea is mirrored within Birdie's character. Due to her aristocratic character, Birdie strives to return "back to Lionnet [where] everybody'd be better."[136] As the last member of the society that no longer exists, her venture to reestablish her "pretty picture"[137] of Lionnet is analogous to Blanche's wish for regaining her life at Belle Reve. This constant need for stability that both of the Belles share makes them seem, in Annette J. Saddiks words, as "fugitives [...] who crave […] a return to origins (read Old South) […] never resting, despite their desperate, romantic need to cling to an unattainable ideal."[138]

The last point that shall be stressed examines the traditional link between artistry and a Southern Belle. As the Southern myth dictates, a proper Belle is skilled in artistry. Secured by her family the Belle was relieved of any need to work, which enabled her to

[131] Williams, 15.
[132] Ibid, 17.
[133] Ibid, 19.
[134] Ibid, 26.
[135] Watson, Jr., 67.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Hellman, 180.
[138] Annette J. Saddik, ""You Just Forge Ahead": Image, Authenticity, and Freedom in the Plays of Tennessee Williams and Sam Shepard," in *South Atlantic Review* 70.4 (2005): 77, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20064688>, 15 June 2015.

focus more on the cultivation of her own skills.[139] Whether it was sewing or singing, all her accomplishments were motivated by one common goal: the search for a husband.

Following the example of her parents who "went to Europe for the music,"[140] Birdie demonstrates a great liking for art and "plays [the piano] just wonderfully."[141] The artistic traits are also maintained in Blanche's character. Even though she doesn't play any instrument, her broad knowledge of literature, overall eloquence and occasional 'bath' singing make Blanche Birdie's equal. The manner in which the New South deals with this "reckless charge of extravagance" [142] is rather peculiar though. As opposed to the traditional expectation that the Gentleman will be enchanted by the Southern Belle, both Stanley and Oscar are repelled.

If Oscar's opposition resides in his doubts that Mr. Marshall "didn't come South to be bored with you,"[143] and his rebukes that Birdie was "very excited, the whole evening,"[144] Stanley takes his crudeness to another level when he "without oath tosses the radio out the window." Both the male characters strongly disapprove of women's fondness for art, more specifically music. Williams's Stanley doesn't "let the girls have their music"[145] and is considerably aggravated by the constantly singing "canary-bird" [146] in his bathroom. The same displeasure applies to Hellman's Oscar, though he manages to rein his disapproval on a verbal level. His discouragement of Birdie's playing the piano is therefore justified simply by his claim that "music makes him nervous."[147] This obvious lack of appreciation displayed in both of the male characters attests to Stanley's and

[139] Wyatt-Brown, 173.
[140] Hellman, 168.
[141] Ibid, 172.
[142] Watson, Jr., 64.
[143] Hellman, 169.
[144] Ibid, 180.
[145] Williams, 51.
[146] Ibid, 98.
[147] Hellman, 222.

Oscar's inner fears; their preference for, in Blanche's words "swilling and gnawing,"[148] which includes bowling, card parties or shooting, thus seems only natural. The inability to understand the aesthetic value proves essential, since it is precisely through artistry and sophistication that both Birdie and Blanche manage to threaten the well-established patriarchal authority of the New South.

[148] Williams, 72.

4.2. The Beast Within – The Southern Belle Demeanor

> BEN Our Southern women are well favored.
> LEO (*laughs*). But one must go to Mobile for the ladies, sir. Very elegant worldly ladies, too.
> BEN (*looks at him very deliberately).* Worldly, eh? *Worldly,* did you say?
> OSCAR (*hastily, to* LEO). Your uncle Ben means that worldliness is not a mark of beauty in any woman.[149]

Since the Southern patriarchal society indulged in control and physical, as well as mental, superiority, the matter of education and intellectual sophistication posed quite a problem for the character of the Southern Belle. Even though a bit of wit indisputably increased her "desirability in the marriage market,"[150] she often suffered from the fear of displaying either too much ignorance or intellectuality. As Goodwyn Jones notes:

> […] where the ideal woman was a repository of culture and the arts, her actual ignorance of worldly reality (which ensured her desired innocence) was maintained by the low quality of education available for women in the South."[151]

And, since a Belle's primary focus of life was based on being beautiful, it was believed "that a girl need not have the education"[152] and the best preparation for a woman's life is ignorance. As the little interaction between Ben and Leo above shows, in actuality, women's intelligence distressed more than it pleased.[153] With the ability to work in public, the image of the sheltered Southern Belle started to fade. Even though her transformation from the earlier prisoner in the domestic realm into the active social participant facilitated her independence in both personal and financial sphere, the educational factor still did not cease to pose a threat for the male authority. Williams presents this concrete phenomenon in an interesting paradox, for Blanche is both

[149] Hellman, 170.
[150] Oklopčić.
[151] Goodwyn Jones, 27.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, 24.

chronically dependent and, at the same time, very well-educated, which will be further examined now.

Since Stella has obviously "forgotten […] of [Belle Reve] […] [and their] bringing up,"[154] Blanche adopts a superior attitude and begins to treat Stella as a servant to remind both her and herself of their past. The same applies to her relationship with Stanley; for Blanche and Stanley represent the contradicting ideologies,[155] the Old South and the New, she has no choice but to regard him only in the plebean-aristocratic terms, as "the Kowalskis and the DuBois have different notions."[156] Because he does not possess any gentility or intellectual sophistication, Blanche ascribes to Stanley the attributes of apes:

> BLANCHE: He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is – Stanley Kowalski – survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat from the kill in the jungle! And you – *you* here – *waiting* for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! [...] In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching […] *Don't – don't hang back with the brutes!*[157]

As this section plainly indicates, Williams is not interested in the archetypal submissiveness. Stylized into the "strong-minded woman,"[158] Blanche subverts the traditional Belle passivity and, instead, rather accentuates the extreme dichotomy within her character. This is mostly evident from her behavior when she acts as a "spoiled child, tyrannical in the home and helpless outside" one moment, and as a "hypocritical deceiver […] sweet as sugar, [yet] scheming within" the other.[159]

[154] Williams, 74.
[155] Oklopčić.
[156] Williams, 37.
[157] Ibid, 72.
[158] Goodwyn Jones, 38.
[159] Ibid, 14.

If Williams depicts Blanche as an arrogant aristocrat who treats everyone around with contempt, Birdie is her complete opposite. Unlike Blanche, she is rather "stupid."[160] Yet her stupidity merely echoes the "harmful innocence,"[161] since contrary to Blanche, her education follows the conventional Belle protocol. When she explains that "everybody knew"[162] why Oscar married her, she is genuinely sad but, simultaneously, fully aware that "she would lose respect if she settled herself as a burden on a brother, or even a father."[163] By not providing Birdie with any intellectual power, Hellman increases her "marriage desirability,"[164] for as innocent as Birdie was at her age, she did not, and, in fact, still does not, constitute any danger for the greedy Oscar. As a proper Southern Belle, she displays a strong sense of submission as she lets her husband decide for her. However, this lack of control inevitably results in Birdie's utter deprivation of any psychological autonomy and character depth. She is portrayed as a victim of her time and yet, she is condemned for her behavior that Hellman does not sympathize with. In effect, compared to Blanche, Birdie appears flat and vastly marginalized.

Even though Birdie's cultural sophistication is more than apparent, it is recognized and fully appreciated only within a small circle of Horace, Alexandra, Mr. Marshall and, partially, Addie. "When Lionnet was almost ruined and they [Hubbards] finished ruining it,"[165] Birdie has been taken over as a possession and she is treated accordingly. With her head bowed low and her lips mostly shut, Hellman preserves most of the behavioral traits of the archetypal Belle. In comparison to Blanche, who doesn't hesitate to voice her displeasure, Birdie remains silent most of the time. Where Blanche tries to escape, Birdie

[160] Hellman, 226.
[161] Seidel, 32.
[162] Hellman, 226.
[163] Goodwyn Jones, 14.
[164] Oklopčić.
[165] Hellman, 174.

desperately strives to fit in, but, since she was "babied so much,"[166] it is not possible. Passive, weak and frightened by her husband Oscar, who exercises full control over her body, she is the epitome of the slave in what Goodwyn Jones sees as a "Lord-Master relationship."[167]

If Blanche's character is associated with superiority, then Birdie's is based on her bitter acceptance of inferiority. Her firm belief that "they [Hubbards]'ll make […] [Alexandra marry Leo]"[168] only solidifies this notion. Her submission is accepted to such an extent that Oscar often speaks for her, and when she disobeys his orders, she is punished. This is evident when she tries to interject and, consequently, receives a slap across her cheek at the end of Act I. Her complete denial of the situation, as she gives a smile and blames her ankle, is not coincidental. A similar instance occurs when she masks her drinking habit with her headaches, or when she abruptly halts before she can fully reveal Oscar's physical abuse on her body. Since Birdie struggles to portray the archetypal Belle as closely as possible, all these cases embody how excessively she clings to the Southern code, despite the domestic violence that she must endure.

Caroline Oilman asserts that "[A woman's] first study must be self-control, almost to hypocrisy. A good wife must smile amid a thousand perplexities, and clear her voice to tones of cheerfulness when her frame is drooping with disease."[169] This "sheep's clothing" or "public persona,"[170] to use Goodwyn Jones's terms, obviously generated many ambivalences within the inner self of the Southern Belle character. Not only did such a self-division produce guilt both about what they felt was the "wolf within"[171] but

[166] Ibid, 189.
[167] Goodwyn Jones, 8.
[168] Hellman, 192.
[169] Goodwyn Jones, 24.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.

also about the inevitable hypocrisy involved in concealing it.[172] Both Birdie and Blanche wear this mask and, similarly to the archetype, they likewise blame their failures upon themselves. Even though their respective guilt stems from different sources, their means of dealing with their troubles prove similar, which shall be discussed later.

According to Williams, "a character that isn't ambiguous […] is a false character, not a true one."[173] Judging solely on this basis, Williams negotiates the meaning of the archetypal Belle and introduces a modified type of the Southern myth with unprecedented subversive potential. His fallen Belle outlives the era of the plantation South but her altered image conflicts with the archetypal ideal. Whereas Hellman's Birdie follows the tradition and demonstrates the pedestal of pristine purity, Blanche's character radically differs in this respect. Despite the fact that she translates her name as "white woods [...] like an orchard in spring,"[174] Blanche is "no lily."[175] It is through her sexual promiscuity that Williams provides the most dominant deviation from the Southern Belle figure and thus subverts the given archetype.

As the norm had it, a Southern Belle embodied virtue and her goodness depended predominantly on her innocence. It was therefore unthinkable for her to desire sex and when she did engage in sexual intercourse, she was supposed to "perform passion without taking part in it."[176] This contradiction led to one simple result: the Belle was rendered completely asexual. This issue is central for Blanche, as she, instead of exhibiting sexual purity, "cannot keep her hands off children [and young men]."[177] Her choice of countless suitors ranging from seventeen-year-old boys at school, to the not yet fully matured "he-

[172] Ibid.
[173] Da Ponte, 263.
[174] Williams, 55.
[175] Ibid, 99.
[176] Oklopčić.
[177] Williams, 84.

man mama's boys,"[178] and even to death fantasies in terms of a "ship's doctor, a very young one"[179] attests to her desperate need to quench her lust. Through concealing her body behind the white garments and her face against the glaring light, Blanche strains to systematically neutralize the pain of her past with physical desire. This pain that hinders her from any possible development harks far back to her husband, Allan's, death. Since homosexuality was perceived as a curable disease, it was a Southern Belle's duty to, by means of her beauty, bring a man from his temporary swoon back to appropriate heterosexual path. Yet, as Blanche fails and publicly reveals Allan's orientation, instead of merely having conflicted feelings, she is inflicted with perpetual guilt and responsibility for his suicide. Nevertheless, even with her reputation thus stained, she refuses to surrender her Southern Belle identity and it is specifically this self-division that becomes fatal to her future being.

While Blanche's mask conceals her grief for Allan's death, Birdie hides her discontent of her life with Oscar. As Goodwyn Jones notes "the Southern lady marries the Northern charmer,[180] then persuades him to agree with her political ideas […] and thus preserves the culture of the South."[181] Since marriage constitutes the main goal in Belle's life, Birdie considers her marriage to the nasty "commercial plutocrat"[182] rightful and acts upon it. Nonetheless, since Oscar is far from the Southern Gentleman, her hopes are soon ruined and her guilt intensifies, as she comes to terms with the harsh reality. For she cannot persuade Oscar to stop with his obsessive shooting, let alone his mischievous thoughts, she ascribes her lack of success to her own imperfections and, like Blanche, searches for the flaws in herself.

[178] Popkin, 54.
[179] Williams, 136.
[180] In this case, "Northern charmer" carries the same meaning as "Southern Gentleman." Goodwyn Jones further explains that the Southern Belle was supposed to eradicate the flaws and/or ambivalences of any man's character through her charm and beauty.
[181] Goodwyn Jones, 14.
[182] Watson, Jr., 63.

When she opens about her troubles, she is conscious of her, what many may see as, very unsouthern-like behavior.[183] In an analogous manner, she is ashamed to like Alexandra more than her own child, since it contradicts the idea of traditional family devotion; she is scared to reveal her feelings, because the Southern Belle dictum strictly forbids her to do so; she accepts that "matrimony locked the door […] so thick that not even the cry of pain could ever penetrate to the outer world"[184] but she cannot repress her feelings any longer. This constant fear and trepidation that Birdie experiences is that of a victimized woman in a strictly patriarchal society, an instance that Henry Popkin terms as "the sorest anguish [or] the most disturbing violence."[185]

A similar concept of violation can be located in the abusive relationship between Blanche and Stanley. When he "crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb [and] she [Blanche] cries out as if the lantern was herself,"[186] the similarities, though metaphorical at this point, become more apparent. Blanche's rape directly corresponds to Oscar's physical abuse of Birdie as much as the forced denial with which both Belles respond to such actions. This notion of repressed feelings testify to what Goodwyn Jones defines as physical, as well as psychological, alienation and, consequently, gradual loss of oneself.[187] Since neither Birdie nor Blanche try to break from the Southern tradition and, paradoxically, the more deviations they profess, the more they cling to it, they both exemplify the "hypersensitive, tragic woman" whose uniqueness forced her to create her own little world.[188] They take refuge in their past fantasies against the constant harassment committed by men like Stanley Kowalski and

[183] Goodwyn Jones, 24.
[184] Ibid, 22.
[185] Popkin, 62.
[186] Williams, 140.
[187] Goodwyn Jones, 23-4.
[188] Oklopčić.

Oscar Hubbard and indulge in their "romantic evasions," [189] based on their idealizations of their (at this point defunct) Belle lives.

As Birdie and Blanche succumb to the power of authority, physical force and intimidation, it is shown that Stanley's/Oscar's/authority's/society's victory comes for a very simple reason. Stanley wins because he, unlike Blanche who disregards the "normal female sexuality and class and [...] tries to subvert the social order" remains within the parameters he was born into.[190] When Blanche ventures to threaten his alleged authority over Stella, he mercilessly assaults her and deprives her of her magic, image, and overall humanity. The very retreat into her imagination and "the ability to mold image(s) of the self," [191] to use Annette J. Saddik's words, are what ensures her freedom and helps her escape the reality and its constricting expectations. Thus, through her effort to combine the real and the illusionary, for, as Blanche asserts "woman's charm is fifty percent of illusion," she tries to liberate herself and constructs a world where she can exist without being abused and judged and, at the same time, where she can combine decorum with her desire. The gradual loss of understanding the difference between reality and fiction is the ultimate price she must pay for such a luxury.

Birdie's downfall, in contrast, stems from the opposite cause: she loses because she stays within her socially prescribed role. By the time she marries Oscar, she is gradually stripped of respect and treated with scorn. Her exclusion is, similarly to Blanche, involuntary, but her authority is far lower. Since "Aunt Birdie"[192] is unable to take care of herself and often "look[s] scared about everything,"[193] she is frequently accused of acting

[189] Ibid.
[190] Oklopčić.
[191] Saddik, 77.
[192] Hellman, 192.
[193] Ibid, 178.

as a "child" or a "fool"[194] when she lets her emotions free. Her Southern Belle innocence thus functions as a double-edged sword, as it helped her to ruin her life by marrying Oscar but it likewise saves her from the harshness of the present reality she barely endures. Her only aspiration is to return to Lionnet, because, unlike here, people there were "good and kind."[195] Both she and Blanche this way express their shared archetypal plead for protection, as Birdie "like[s] people to be kind,"[196] and Blanche is also dependent "on the kindness of strangers."[197]

The last challenge to the Southern Belle archetype that both Williams and Hellman explore springs from Blanche's and Birdie's compulsive drinking habit. Similarly to Birdie, Blanche indulges herself in solitary drinking, whenever the gravity of the present situation exceeds her limits. Even though she asserts that she "rarely touch[es] it"[198] and she is "not accustomed to having more than one drink,"[199] she is seen throughout the play with a glass of liquor in her hand. She does not drink her coke without "a shot in it,"[200] explaining that "a shot never does a coke any harm."[201] Her drinking may be voluntary but Blanche is not an alcoholic by choice; she merely attempts to hide her loneliness and unhappiness through "a half tumbler of whiskey."[202]

Birdie is infamously known to be a "miserable victim of headaches"[203] yet, as she asserts, she "has never had a headache"[204] in her life. This "lie they tell [Hubbards] when they want to hide"[205] her alcoholism attests to two specific things. Firstly, contrary to Blanche,

[194] Ibid, 169.
[195] Ibid, 225.
[196] Hellman, 225.
[197] Williams, 142.
[198] Ibid, 30.
[199] Ibid, 54.
[200] Ibid, 79.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid, 18.
[203] Hellman, 172.
[204] Ibid, 226.
[205] Ibid.

Birdie's drinking habit is widely-recognized. Secondly, even though Birdie thereby further stains her Southern Belle character, the society around her continues to pretend their blissful ignorance of her seemingly wrong behavior. Living in fear of breaking the Belle morals, Birdie secretly "drinks by herself"[206] within the privacy of her own room. When she reveals to Alexandra that behind that mask of shy smiles and headaches she hides her obsessive alcoholism and inner turmoil, Birdie is, to her own astonishment, accepted with deep understanding and sympathy.

Blanche's situation is, on the other hand, vastly different, as she is subjected to further ridicule firstly by Mitch and, later, also by Stanley. Unlike Birdie, she does not have her own room and, when she is offered a drink in public, she never opposes it; the additional drinking is, however, performed secretly. Her excessive alcoholism helps her for the moment, yet, it, paradoxically, turns against her in the end. Unable to uphold the social/moral standard and with everyone aware of her "lapping,"[207] Blanche is robbed of her last element of Southern Bellehood and is forced to leave Laurel and, consequently, New Orleans as well. Thus, as opposed to Birdie, who finds possible refuge and love in the hands of Addie and Alexandra, Blanche becomes completely alienated. With her reputation thoroughly destroyed, her fall signifies not only the end of Blanche as an individual but, symbolically, also the end of the Old South in the modern era.

[206] Ibid, 170.
[207] Williams, 115.

Chapter 5: Feminist and Gender Theories

With the description of the maintenance and digression of the archetypal appearance and behavior of the Belle thus covered, let us now examine how the Southern Belle tradition corresponds with Beauvoir's feminist and Butler's gender theories.

In contrast to Williams, Hellman retains most of the archetypal qualities. This is vividly shown by Birdie's complete submission and pristine purity. However, instead of the traditional family devotion, Birdie displays only partial commitment. As much as she strives to shape herself into the ideal, she doesn't fulfill the role of the traditional wife and neither of the mother. Her contempt for Oscar and Leo is evident, as is her awareness of her very Southern Belle misconduct. Yet, since Birdie refuses to escape her Southern Belle identity and maintains archetypal pattern of dependency and helplessness, her pain is unavoidable. The very quintessence of her existence resonates solely around her husband Oscar whom she claims her absolute master and, at the same time, without whom she wouldn't be able to exist.

In connection to this specific point, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* declares that "one is not born [a woman], but rather becomes one."[208] This notion explicitly states that gender is not regarded in terms of biological division, but rather as a socially generated construct. The patriarchal society in which a woman, and thus also Birdie and Blanche, lives is a society dominated by sheer power of men and their valued credos; a woman is not offered "a role"[209] but rather decreed one. According to de Beauvoir:

> […] the triumph of patriarchy was neither an accident nor the result of a violent revolution. From the origins of humanity, their biological privilege enabled men to affirm themselves alone as sovereign subjects; they never abdicated this privilege; they alienated part of their existence in Nature and in Woman; but they won it back afterward; condemned to

[208] de Beauvoir, 14.
[209] Ibid, 111.

> play the role of the Other, woman was thus condemned to possess no more than precarious power: slave or idol, she was never the one who chose her lot.[210]

The passage above plainly indicates that a woman's servility formed a pivotal part of the society, and therefore also the Southern Belle concept, since a complete submission to the male (i.e. Cavalier) was imperative.[211] The Southern Belle's domain was thus rather limited, as she could serve only three roles: a mother, daughter and/or a wife.[212] Birdie's persona is codified by those roles; she starts as a daughter and, later, becomes dominated by Oscar as his wife and then by Leo as his mother. She is "devoid of meaning without reference to male"[213] and defined not through her own capabilities, but her relation to men's authority. Her individual identity is factually non-existent since, as Goodwyn Jones writes, the Southern Belle tradition "denied one self."[214] The only salvation stems from embracing this fact and abdicating herself to men, an act that Blanche strives to consistently oppose.

As Goodwyn Jones writes, the Antebellum society radically differed in terms of social roles regarding both of the genders; whereas the Southern Gentleman fulfilled his class expectations by marrying a Belle, the Southern Belle hers by becoming one. [215] This idea of identity in terms of becoming versus the fixed reality is crucial for de Beauvoir's conjectures. As her observations suggest, femininity should be considered as an aspect of gender identity which is gradually cultivated with age. Birdie learns this from her "mama"[216] and Blanche never seems to forget that she was "brought on the different

[210] Ibid.
[211] As Mary Chesnut notes, "there is no slave, after all, like a wife […] all the children and girls who live in their father's houses are slaves."
[212] Goodwyn Jones, 12.
[213] de Beauvoir, 26.
[214] Goodwyn Jones, 4.
[215] Goodwyn Jones, 22.
[216] Hellman, 224.

notions"[217] than Stanley. De Beauvoir further clarifies that "if I[woman] want to define myself, I first have to say, 'I am a woman'; all other assertions will arise from this basic truth. A man never begins by positing himself as an individual of a certain sex: that he is a man is obvious."[218] Gender is thus not only viewed as a cultural concept that a woman is inflicted with, but also as a manner of constructing her own individuality. Judith Butler in her "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" further elaborates:

> Simone de Beauvoir does not directly address the burden of freedom that gender presents, but we can extrapolate from her view how constraining norms work to subdue the exercise of gender freedom. The social constrains upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they are not really manly or womanly, that they have failed to execute their manhood or womanhood properly. Indeed, insofar as social existence requires unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside the established gender norms. The fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If existence is always gendered, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question.[219]

As a faded Belle, Blanche perfectly exemplifies such a dislocated individual, as she is juxtaposed against the rough world whose rules she is unable to follow. Even though Blanche resists the archetypal role of ornamental wife,[220] to which the patriarchal society reduced its women, Birdie including, "she can't be alone"[221] because she is unable to operate by herself. Similar to Birdie, "her wings are cut" (i.e. she is not able to leave the house) but, since Blanche is provided with the psychological and physical freedom, only she is explicitly "blamed for not knowing how to fly"[222] (i.e. where to go). The most

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[217] Williams, 37.
[218] de Beauvoir, 25.
[219] Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*," in *Yale French Studies*, Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century, No. 72 (Winter 1986): 41-42.
[220] Goodwyn Jones further notes that the Southern Belle was expected to perform an "essentially ornamental role for the society." This role consisted primarily of being a beautiful symbol of her husband's wealth and power. Thus the concept of beauty was key for the Southern Belle, as she was compelled to compliment and physically emphasise her husband's strengths.
[221] Williams, 23.
[222] de Beauvoir, 713.

prominent deviation she displays, nevertheless, springs from her failure to adhere to the well-expected asexuality.[223]

Since a Southern Belle was regarded as a pedestal of innocence and purity, Blanche's numerous sexual encounters result in a loss of her character credibility. She is not pure, nor fragile and feminine enough, and hence cannot be classified as a Southern Belle. This inability to fit her given role obviously creates many ambivalences within her persona and eventually culminates in her character disintegration which corresponds to what Butler terms as "the fall from established gender boundaries."[224] Because the Southern Belle's success heavily depended on various roles and features that marked her as feminine among the masculine-dominated South, the ideal, as a consequence, represented a "procrustean bed"[225] for the Southern womanhood. Such a concept included namely the ideas of completely masking her feelings under the marble statue as well as suppressing her sexuality under a block of ice,"[226] which, as Goodwyn Jones asserts, required a certain degree of creativity and persistence to fulfill. However, as opposed to Birdie, whose feminine qualities are mostly intact, Blanche and, in effect, her gender existence alike, is astray. Her desire to be beautiful links her to the archetypal Belle but her fading beauty disrupts her Bellehood image. Unable to save her homosexual husband Allan with her femininity, she is aware of her Southern Belle misdemeanor. Yet, it is specifically in this relation to her unsatisfying performance of her prescribed Southern Belle qualities that directly brings us to the discussion of Butler's theory of performativity.

In her *Integrative Performance*, Butler recounts that gender is "a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative

[223] Oklopčić.
[224] Butler, 41-42.
[225] Goodwyn Jones, 12.
[226] Goodwyn Jones, 13.

is to say that nobody really has a gender from the start."[227] This notion suggests that her understanding of gender is not limited by biologically given identity, but it rather operates as a social construct comprising of a certain pattern of repetitive performative behavior that keeps an individual in a certain place. Blanche's numerous attempts to break from such a traditional order heavily clashes with the archetype. She no longer engages herself in the archetypal innocent flirting. Her seduction is conscious as is her manipulation of males around her. In fact, she expresses her femininity in such an exaggerated manner (see scene two) that even though it aids in masking her repressed feelings, it, simultaneously, undermines the general constructiveness of gender roles as a whole. Since the image of the fragile Belle allowed the Southern Gentleman to gain his own authority (gender identity), Blanche's treatment of Stanley proves devastating to him on both physical and psychological level. Not only does she systematically strive to impeach and diminish his, and therefore male's, authority but she also attempts to assume female superiority, which is against the "Napoleonic code"[228] which Stanley, "the king,"[229] endorses. Instead of the desired innocence, Blanche exhibits arrogance. Her overall behavior is based on pretensions and fiction, not unlike the aristocratic origins she vows to claim. The denial with which she faces reality, including herself, persists and her Southern Belle image is thus no more real than the "white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of [fake] pearl"[230] behind which she constantly hides. By providing his Belle with such an ambiguous character, Williams enables Blanche to challenge the well-defined roles of womanhood and manhood. And it is through her rebellion against the traditional gender roles that Blanche interferes with the archetypal ideal and is eventually punished.

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[227] Judith Butler, *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer*, ed. Experience Bryon (Routledge: NY, 2014) 29.
[228] Williams, 34.
[229] Ibid, 107.
[230] Williams, 15.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As shown in this thesis the archetype of the Southern Belle has been subjected to various changes and interpretations throughout the time. Even though the persistent Southern Belle phenomenon reappears in myriad of various texts, this thesis was concerned merely with two particular works: Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. In each of these plays Williams and Hellman present their Southern Belle figures in a distinct manner. Whereas Hellman adopts a semi-detached tone and stylizes her Post-bellum "silly"[231] Belle into a victim of her time, Williams's fallen Belle represents his conflicting feelings about the perseverance of the Old South values in the new era. This obvious difference in time and attitude proved essential for my thesis, for a deeper, more comprehensive analysis could be composed and the fluid nature of the Southern Belle archetype better chronologically dissected and demonstrated.

If we start with Hellman's Belle first, Birdie Hubbard is the last relic of the plantation past; abandoned and ostracized by her abrasive Hubbard in-laws, Birdie finds herself displaced within the new codex of the Post-Bellum South. Although Hellman portrays Birdie only as a minor, mostly marginalized, character, her role for the society is crucial; despite her passive contribution to the making of Southern ideology, her literal presence constitutes its most integral element.[232]

Williams's Blanche DuBois, in contrast, stirs doubts rather than the sense of stability. Even though Williams does not condemn his Belle in a similar manner that Hellman treats Birdie, his depiction is scarcely heroic.

[231] Lillian Hellman; Jackson R. Bryer, *Conversations with Lillian Hellman* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1986) 35.
[232] Goodwyn Jones, 9.

Being a faded Belle, Blanche illustrates a perfect example of a soft dislocated individual, in a world she is not fit to live in anymore. Though Williams preserves some characteristic archetypal traits, he debunks and alters the others, which provides the stereotypical Bellehood with unprecedented subversive potential. Unlike Hellman's Birdie, who breaches the traditional concept of familial love when she despises her own husband and son, Williams's most prominent deviation springs from Blanche's promiscuous sexuality through which she defies the traditional "chaste heroine/whore dichotomy."[233] For Blanche is not pure, nor innocent, even though she constantly pretends to be, her Southern Belle image soon crumbles. Thus, despite the fact that both Birdie and Blanche in many respects divert from the archetypal Belle in a similar manner, it is Birdie's sexual, as well as moral, purity that eventually provide her with a prospect of better future. Blanche, on the other hand, is punished for her misbehavior, as she is gradually stripped of compassion, understanding and, ultimately, her own sanity.

I have examined the following works: Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, which denote the Post-bellum South and New South, respectively. The main aim of this thesis was to determine how (and if) the archetypal Southern Belle myth became modified and, if so, in which manner these Southern Belles both echoed and digressed from its traditional form and environment that produced them, in terms of both the Post-Bellum and New South. This thesis also employed feminist and gender theories in order to explain how the Southern Belle tradition reinforced and, simultaneously, subverted the absolute patriarchal authority.

In spite of the fact that the objective of this thesis was primarily concerned with the fluid development of the Southern Belle archetype, I am fully aware that other disciplines,

[233] Oklopčić.

including psychoanalytic feminism or postmodern philosophical approaches towards race and identity could be also applied. Furthermore, since the focus of my analysis comprised merely two particular plays, I am fairly convinced that further research with the help of different perspectives but likewise by incorporating different texts may be conducted; for, as Goodwyn Jones believes, the pertaining image of the Southern Belle figure never entirely disappeared,[234] evidence of which can be grounded on its numerous other literary manifestations including the recent representations in Larry L. King's *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* as well as Robert Harling's play *Steel Magnolias*.

[234] Goodwyn Jones, 17.

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