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

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

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Permission

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 the 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 southern elite (re) defined, enacted and/or maintained the distinctive role of Southern Belle while others refused, modified or debunked these ideals. The thesis will be approached from an interdisciplinary point of view; it will encompass 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 employed 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 entity, chapter two will comment on and explain the aims and methodology of the thesis and the key terminology that is essential for the Southern Belle concept. Chapter three shall provide a succinct socio-historical context of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* in relation to their particular Southern Belle constructs. Chapter four will consist of contrastive and comparing analyses, determining which of the Southern Belle features persisted and/or disappeared in terms of visual and behavior aspects, respectively. The last chapter is intended as a conclusion, which will summarize the relevant points of my thesis; simultaneously, gender and feminist theories will be applied 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.

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

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza původu ženského ideálu jižanského archetypu a jeho vývoje v průběhu času. V následujících kapitolách se pokusím názorně vysvětlit, jak jižanská elita vnímala, (re)definovala a zachovala osobitou roli jižanské krásy, zatímco jiní její klíčové prvky zaměnili, upravili či zcela ztratili. Práce bude koncipována interdisciplinárně. Z literární teorie se opře především o relevantní definice archetypu, které pak bude ztotožňovat na postavě jižanské krásy. Dále pak bude čerpat zejména z historie, sociologie a kulturních studií. Závěrem přistoupí k oběma zvoleným hrám z pohledu feministických a genderových teorií, na kterých dokáže, jak byl koncept jižanské krásy použit jako společenský konstrukt, sloužící k prosazení mužské authority.

Po úvodní kapitole, která představí Americký Jih a jeho obyvatele jako jedinečné 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 bude zabývat krátkým popisem společensko-historických kontextů, do kterých Tramvaj do Stanice Touha Tennesseeho Williamse a Lištičky Lillian Hellmanové spadají v rámci jejich specifických jižanských krás. Poté se v kapitole čtyři přistoupí k samotné analýze postav a jejich prvků, jež byly buď zachovány nebo ztraceny, a to jak v rámci zevnějšku, tak chování. Poslední kapitola bude sloužit jako shrnutí, ve kterém zhodnotím všechny klíčové poznatky a zároveň uplatním feministické teorie, abych poukázala na to, jak jižanský archetyp krásy posiluje - a zároveň podryvá - patriarchální společnost. Pro tuto část využiji především feministické teorie Simone de Beauvoir a koncept performativnosti Judith Butlerové.

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

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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

The term ‘Southern,’³ primarily denoting the geographical division between the colonies of New England and the southern ones, 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:

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 pretensions to any religion but that of the heart.⁶

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*; Feb. 2013, 79.1: 9, Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation, <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The_south_as_ohter_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.

Whereas Thomas Jefferson presents the contradiction in ‘Southern’ behavior as a result of the climactic change⁷, other critics do not limit their observations 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 though his musings referred solely to the inhabitants of Virginia, Marquis de Chastellux’s theory 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, whereas Southerners inherited their attributes from the aristocratic Cavaliers of Norman origins.¹⁰ This peculiar notion led to two eventual outcomes. First, despite the fact that the veracity of the “cavalier thesis”¹¹ proved, with the exception of Virginia, only partially true, it managed to feed the idea that the American South should be treated 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.

⁷ Cobb, 10.

⁸ Burton, 13.

⁹ Cobb, 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 22.

Sheldon Hackney writes that “Southerners traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to the presumed American norm.”¹² If the 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. If so, the cavalier theory operates merely as a defense mechanism; nevertheless, the thoughts it triggered irreversibly redefined the whole concept of the American South.

With such an opposing set of ethos on each side, the American continent marked a rise of two distinct nations on its soil. There were the cold, individualistic, money-driven Yankees in the North to whom the aristocratic, non-materialistic Cavaliers in the South formed their genteel counterpart. With the origins and characteristics of the ‘South’ covered, one can begin to discuss one of its main components: the Antebellum society.

¹² Burton, 9.

1.2. The Antebellum Society

As Burton firmly believes, the Southern environment offers intriguing ironies and contradictions that continue to “confuse and confound, yet titillate and substantiate.”¹³ Strong evidence of such a proclamation can be easily found in the hierarchical white patriarchal society. Even if a great deal of Southern identity was defined by means of feminine gentility and “grand hospitality,”¹⁴ the historical necessity to enforce enslaved labor and to maintain the social order made violence an integral part of Southern culture. This was best reflected in the complicated relationship between the white Southerners and the black population. However, this notion was not constricted by the racial limitations only, for the southern man’s understanding of white manhood stretched far beyond the affirmation of white supremacy. Their warped sense of the need to control and dominate is likewise mirrored within the traditional gender relations.¹⁵

As much as the Southern patriarchal society exaggerated the stereotypes of masculinity, men’s authority over morality was often taken for granted; 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.” 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.”¹⁷ Yet, despite all the possible negative connotations, through his aristocratic planter-cavalier image, the Southern gentleman

¹³ Burton, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid, 22.

¹⁷ Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981): 18.

represented the pinnacle of the carefully structured society¹⁸; the barometer for racial and social perfection as well as the emblem of invincible quality.

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 his "alarmingly organic society."¹⁹ Indeed, the archetypal Southern Lady was a figment of similarly socially-constructed ideals. Her image was generated primarily from the assumptions of class and race and it was imperative that she displayed four fundamental qualities that further complement her husband's image: piety, purity, family devotion and submissiveness.²⁰ It is this particular belief that tentatively suggests that there couldn't be a Southern Lady without a Southern man; or, better yet, that their respective roles presupposed and enhanced each other. This begins the discussion of the myth of the 'Southern Belle.'

¹⁸ Gabriela Petrušová, "Southern Womanhood: A Story Behind The Southern Belle/Jižanské ženství: příběh za jižanskou kráskou, diplomová práce," Univerzita Karlova, Praha, květen 2015, 10 <<https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/150723>>, červenec 2015.

¹⁹ Goodwyn Jones, 11.

²⁰ Petrušová, 15.

1.3 The Southern Belle Myth

Contrary to the Southern gentlemen, whose innate superiority enabled them to operate within the same sphere throughout their lives, the gradual development of Southern womanhood exposes far more complexity of the traditional Southern lifestyle. Prior to becoming a rightful Southern Lady, a unique period of time was had during which the upper-class young woman engaged herself in various parties, social gatherings and innocent flirting with her potential suitors, all the while looking and acting her best.²¹ This period, which lasted several years and constituted the most exciting part of her life, came to be known as the time of Southern Belle. Ending desirably in the act of matrimony, the Southern Belle thus spent most of her time preparing for the gradual transition from the dependency on her father to that of her future husband.

As was already hinted, the character of the Southern Belle, or Southern Lady (once she was married), was largely a preconceived ideal and, therefore, required certain criteria to be fulfilled. Firstly, 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.”²² 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 perfection of pure

²¹ Petrušová, 11.

²² Goodwyn Jones, 9.

sacrifice.”²³ While all the aforementioned is accurate, a Southern Belle was, foremost, exclusively dependent.

As opposed to the “knightly bravery and physical prowess”²⁴ of the Southern man, a Southern Belle embodied the fragile “flower,”²⁵ helpless and in need of protection, whose saving the southern gentlemen considered appealing as well as essential.²⁶ As George Fitzhugh further clarifies “so long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her.”²⁷ Ironically, it was thus her weakness that constituted her main strength. This obvious dependence led, as Anne Firor Scott states, to a bold belief that Southern women could not, and would not, take care of themselves, since they strived to be subdued to the gentleman's virility and mastery of his environment. As a consequence, they were treated as children who have “but one right [...] the right to protection [which] involves the obligation to obey.”²⁸

The adopted prestige and aristocratic status with which the persona of the Southern Belle was mostly associated aided the Southern overall perception of white sovereignty. As the symbol of white civilization, the character of Belle impersonated “the core of a region’s self-definition.”²⁹ Goodwyn Jones perceives this as perfectly understandable since the “Southern men have toasted and celebrated southern womanhood since the South began to think of itself as a region.”³⁰ With her “generosity of spirit” and “love for beauty,” she reified everything Southerners prided and contributed to the conceptualization of the feminine South. Yet, as Burton asserts, where there is hospitality, there is always

²³ Goodwyn Jones, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

violence.³¹ Since the American South continued to be shaped by a series of contradictions, the Southern Belle ideal was, at its extreme, likewise exploited as propaganda to propound and endorse 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. It is this precise notion that leads John C. Ruoff to believe that although the Belle indirectly supported the patriarchal defense of slavery, she did not “originate” in it.³² Her character merely functioned as an emblematic vision that ensured and stabilized the society.

³¹ Burton, 19.

³² Goodwyn Jones, 12.

Chapter 2: Aims and Methods

2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism and the American South

Compared to the history of men in the antebellum South and later historical periods, little or no attention was paid to the representation of Southern women in the accounts of its history and literary world. 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.³³ 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 in chapter 2.3.

2.2 Archetype and Stereotype

The term archetype reaches back to the Old Greek “archi,” denoting a beginning or first instance, and “typos,” meaning a stamp.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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

³³ Petrušová, 13.

³⁴ Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1981), 3.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 3-4.

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.³⁶

Stereotype, on the other hand, 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.³⁷ Archetype, thus, in contrast to a stereotype, possesses a fluid nature and, therefore, can 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.³⁸ The term archetype will be utilized throughout this paper in connection to the Southern Belle phenomenon.

2.3 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*. One of her most recognized and revolutionary thoughts claims that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”³⁹ Elaborating on de Beauvoir’s thinking of gender as a mere social construct, Judith Butler deems gender attributes - the characteristic features labeled as either masculine or

³⁶ Petrušová, 13.

³⁷ Pratt, 3.

³⁸ Ibid, 4.

³⁹ 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.

feminine by society - as behaviour patterns acquired through imitations and introduces her performative theory regarding gender identity.⁴⁰

Provided we think of gender in this manner, Judith Butler's performative theories, and likewise de Beauvoir's opinions on women as the referential "Other,"⁴¹ are of particular importance to the discussion of gender roles with regards to the archetype of Southern Belle.

2.4. 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, I will demonstrate how the cultural archetype of the Southern Belle served as a socially constructed norm enforcing women's passivity and submission to patriarchy. Hence the thesis may be read as a contribution to the already existing discourse of feminism, power relations, domination and hierarchy.

The methodology of the paper is as follows. The introductory chapter has discussed the American Southern society as one distinct entity with cultural features such as the Southern Belle tradition. Given that the second chapter has also discussed feminist literary criticism in relation to the South, as well as established "archetype" as a term to use throughout the thesis, I will discuss in Chapter 3 the notion of the Southern Belle 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)

⁴⁰ Judith Butler in *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer*, ed. Experience Bryon (Routledge: NY, 2014): 29.

⁴¹ de Beauvoir, 34.

takes place before the Second World War while *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is set most probably after it. Even though the Southern Belle phenomenon pervades various texts of the Southern literary world, from John P. Kennedy's antebellum figure of Bel Tracy in *The Swallow Barn* to the most legendary Belle Scarlett O'Hara in Margaret Mitchell's *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 behaviour that makes them stand out from the archetype. Afterwards, Chapter 4 will consist of analyses of Birdie and Blanche's physical appearance and personality traits, the latter of which go against the traditional Southern Belle demeanour that dictates submissiveness, passivity and asexuality. I will also discuss here the problematic of education that both characters have received in accepting social expectations and the patriarchal society they live in. This will lead to the conclusion where following a comparative discussion of the two playwrights and how they view their Southern Belles and the potential message they are sending to the audience, gender and feminist theories will be applied to indicate how the archetypal Belle concept reinforced and subverted the patriarchal society.

3. The Belle in Time

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

With the end of the American Revolution, a strong sense of nationalism began to spread across the American continent. Having severed ties with Great Britain, the United States experienced a series of important social and economical changes. Nevertheless, the initial wave of patriotic enthusiasm 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 Southern Cavaliers and self-made Yankees ultimately led to a Civil War, which is carved deeply into the memory of the South.⁴²

With the Southern Belle as the cornerstone of the regional and group identity, the historian W. J. Cash believes that “the ranks of Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her.”⁴³ In addition, it was in the wake of defeat that her image acquired even more prominence and her credos fully solidified. Lucian Lamar Knight defines her 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.”⁴⁴

As this passage clearly shows, the Southern “prideful difference [...] and defensiveness”⁴⁵ is greatly steeped in the Southern Belle figure. And, since “her eternal vigil”⁴⁶ depicts the bitter protest of the American South, any violation of the Southern

⁴² Burton, 14.

⁴³ Cash, 89.

⁴⁴ Goodwyn Jones, 4-5.

⁴⁵ Burton, 14.

⁴⁶ Goodwyn Jones, 5.

Belle was regarded as an attack against the South itself, and vice versa.⁴⁷ This conjecture may, perhaps, account for the fact that the Southern Belle myth endured not only the Civil War, Reconstruction and the New South but, as Fiora notes, also “never entirely disappeared.”⁴⁸

Yet, as much as the environment changed, the Belle was always expected to preserve her “blood royal [...] silent influence (...) [and] gentle spirit (...) [as her preceeding] old queens.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

It was predominantly during the period of Reconstruction that the Southern Belle symbolized the “bulwark against social and racial chaos”⁵¹ and comprised the yearning nostalgia for the ideal Old South and the Confederacy’s fierce loss. She was the personification of the antebellum era, and the very reason Southerners continued to believe in their superiority over their Northern brothers. Therefore, no matter how significantly the post-bellum South diverted from its original form, the Southern Belle image always functioned as the closest reminder of the Old South.

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

⁴⁷ Goodwyn Jones, 5.

⁴⁸ Anne Prior Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. (USA: University Press of Virginia, 1995) x.

⁴⁹ Goodwyn Jones, 5.

⁵⁰ Cobb, 79.

⁵¹ 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.

Southern identity reinvented and misused. As Van Woodward writes, “one of the most significant inventions of the New South was the ‘Old South.’”⁵² Yet, even though the post-bellum “Southern class of [...] opportunistic nouveau riche”⁵³ superseded the Southern aristocrats, they never debunked the Southern myth and, in fact, not only tolerated it but even embraced it. This had obviously nothing to do with their ethics since they followed the established pattern only 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 unethical, economic order.⁵⁴ Her outer image ensured 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. Whereas the abrasive Hubbards manipulate and promote the Southern myth for the sake of commercial-industrial success, the genuine Southern Belle finds herself as the last member of a society which no longer exists. What may initially appear as a mere family disagreement escalates, when Hellman stylizes Birdie into not only the victim of her new family but, on a larger scale, a victim of her time as well. Her Belle is violated, trapped and completely isolated, as she repeatedly strives to apply her

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.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 66.

⁵⁵ Watson, Jr., 67.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Southern mannerism, only to discover it is no longer possible. Her role as a symbol for society is crucial, but, her authority as a person is scarce. She impersonates what Goodwyn Jones terms “a weak link”⁵⁷ of society, of which she is a proud member, but in which she does not actively partake.

Even if critics like Elizabeth Hardwick stress Birdie’s importance as a remnant of “besieged Agrarianism,”⁵⁸ to Katherine Lederer Birdie is nothing but “a silly, lost, pathetic woman [...] that learned nothing from the Civil War.”⁵⁹ Lederer’s description seems far more accurate, as scene 1 shows that Birdie still clings to the belief that being “good to their people”⁶⁰ is the only appropriate mode of life. Her inability to abandon the Old South code thus only seconds her position of inferiority and suffering of her “tender heart.”⁶¹ Birdie is not meant to arouse compassion though, as after all, Hellman was foremost a social critic, audacious enough to rebuke the Post-bellum South and insightful to reveal its corruption. Her portrayal of Birdie thus warns against rather than supports the Southern Belle concept. Birdie might be “stupid,”⁶² 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.

⁵⁷ Goodwyn Jones, 11.

⁵⁸ Watson, Jr., 67.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hellman, 173.

⁶¹ Ibid, 195.

⁶² 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.⁶³ 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 Southern Renaissance period, the archetypal Southern Belle figure was challenged and deconstructed, giving the Southern Belle myth a new meaning.⁶⁴ The major claim raised consisted of the diatribe against the deeply steeped image of beauty, passivity, submissiveness, virginity and asexuality. Quite specifically, it was then asserted by Kathryn Seidel 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.⁶⁵

⁶³ Biljana Oklopčić, “Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois.” in *Americana* 4.2 (2008) Web. 1.Apr.2015. <<http://americanajournal.hu/vol4no2/oklopcic>>

⁶⁴ Petrušová, 30.

⁶⁵ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985), 32.

The quotation above shows that the society accepted and promoted shallowness for the price of individuality and personal development, as instead the women were objectified. This is also noted by Diane Roberts who writes that even though “southern women might be no longer be queens and saints, they were not allowed to be “flesh and blood or humans either.”⁶⁶ The failure to respect the traditional prescriptive codex of behavior usually implied some kind of punishment – hysteria, madness, rape, or loss of social privileges.

Before and after World War II, the heavenly depiction of the antebellum South was greatly reduced, as the era of nostalgia reached its end. Capitalism and the rude vigour of modern life rose to power and the old lines of renowned dynasties were superseded by incoming immigrants and advancement of lower classes, whose physicality, money and pragmatism subverted the once ruling royalty. The principle of “noblesse oblige”⁶⁷ ceased to exclusively exist on its own and the sole means of, at least, partial survival for the nobility rested in mixing their blood with “the inferior newcomers who bore Italian, Polish and Jewish names.”⁶⁸ 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 modern Southern writers such as Tennessee Williams and Margaret Mitchell perceived the Southern Belle phenomenon through a more critical lens; consequently, the new type of Belle, also known as the faded Belle or fallen Belle,

⁶⁶ Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens and London: The University of London Press, 1994), 109.

⁶⁷ Oklopčić.

⁶⁸ Henry Popkin, “The Plays of Tennessee Williams.” The MIT Press, *The Tulane Drama Review* 4. 3 (Mar., 1960), pp. 56, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1124844>>, 15 June 2015.

abounds in somewhat darker and more destructive tones, as she finds herself “helpless in the grip of the presently constituted world.”⁶⁹

Williams, “a Southerner not merely by association,” 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.⁷⁰ 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 rather than respect. Yet, since Blanche 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.⁷¹ Her disobedience and fight against the social quota result in two distinct outcomes: pain and mistreatment; both of which shall be discussed further in chapter 4.

⁶⁹ John Gassner, “Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration” in *The English Journal* 37.8.(1948), pp. 391, JSTOR. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/807030>>. 20.12.2015.

⁷⁰ Loney, 82.

⁷¹ Oklopčić.

Chapter 4 - Analysis

4.1 Outer Beauty – The Visual Aspects of the Southern Belle

As Anne Goodwyn Jones asserts, “whereas southern manhood could be demonstrated [solely] by obtaining an ideal southern woman, southern womanhood had to be shown by becoming one.”⁷² For this purpose, several traits and qualities must be retained. Constantly chaperoned, economically dependent, developmentally denied; the rigid Southern Belle construct produced various reactions throughout the Southern history.⁷³ Whilst only few Southern women rejected and/or criticized their society, others were determined to “shape themselves entirely into the ideal.”⁷⁴ Since Blanche Dubois and Birdie Hubbard both belong in the latter category, let us now examine how exactly they fit the Southern archetype, firstly in terms of their respective appearances.

According to Durant Da Ponte, “Williamsian heroines are an incredibly varied portrait gallery of female types with one common quality [they all share] - an ability to fascinate.”⁷⁵ A similar concept may be easily applied to Lillian Hellman’s characters as well. Be it the “materialistic and undecidedly un-Southern-lady-like”⁷⁶ Regina, her good-hearted daughter Alexandra or, foremost, the genteel aristocratic Birdie, her female protagonists never seem to pass unnoticed.

The notion of drawing and keeping one’s attention was, indeed, one of the chief assets that an archetypal Southern Belle possessed in her demeanor arsenal. The enchantment played a considerable role, since it aided the highest aspiration of her life: a marriage to a real Southern gentleman. Even though the aspect of charm did not form a compulsory

⁷² Goodwyn Jones, 22.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Durant Da Ponte, “Tennessee Williams’s Gallery of Feminine Characters,” reprinted in Robert A. Martin (ed.) *Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977), 263.

⁷⁶ Watson, Jr., 61.

rule for the Southern Belle codex, Seidel conjectures that “if she was pretty and charming [...] so much the better.”⁷⁷ Both Williams and Hellman present their Belles in a similar manner that clearly emphasizes their unique charm. Whether trapped within the dirty street with “raffish charm”⁷⁸ in New Orleans or between the wooden chairs during a business meeting in the drawing room, both Blanche and Birdie emerge as “incongruous to this setting.”⁷⁹ 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. As Ben Hubbard begins to explain, the “great distinctions”⁸⁰ about the “ancient family tales,”⁸¹ 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.⁸²

As the “only one of us who belongs to the Southern aristocracy,”⁸³ Birdie stands in contrast 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.⁸⁴ And, since Mr. Marshall seems as “a very educated, cultured

⁷⁷ Seidel, 6.

⁷⁸ Tennessee Williams, *The Streetcar Named Desire* (New York: Signet, 1974), 18.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁰ Hellman, 173.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 173-4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁸⁴ Goodwyn Jones, 226.

gentleman,”⁸⁵ he immediately recognizes and admires her cultivation. Blanche’s character is based on a similar notion of sophistication. Yet, with Stella’s personal development and her only potential suitor Mitch, who is far from understanding her exhibited aristocratic qualities, she is left completely isolated against the “rough bunch.”⁸⁶

Williams and Hellman thus throw their Belles into deliberately different, if not altogether hostile settings without the slightest chance of escape. The isolation that Blanche and Birdie experience is not unusual for the archetypal Belle, as a Southern Belle traditionally belonged strictly to the private, domestic sphere where she, according to the “Victorian definition of woman as an angel of the house,”⁸⁷ served the role of the “most skillful housekeeper.”⁸⁸ Laura S. McAdoo writes that a Southern Belle “was prone to live entirely in the lives of their children, glorifying in (...) [her] subordination of self.”⁸⁹ This citation clearly indicates that by consenting to the values of the patriarchal society, the Belle was irrevocably divested of activity and any sense of self-authority. As a consequence, the traditional passivity and sheltering of the Belle unavoidably crystallized into her future inability to deal with any possible obstacles, leaving her helpless and socially crippled. And, since the secluded world of plantation functioned as a self-contained system, the Belle, who was locked behind the walls of the Southern gentleman’s home, had no idea about the possibilities around her. In both works the Old South mansions Belle Reve and Lionnet are gone and Blanche and Birdie still feel just as isolated.

Birdie’s isolation derives mostly from her inability to adapt because, unlike Blanche who, with a considerable degree of sarcasm, proclaims that she “is very adaptable---to

⁸⁵ Hellman, 169.

⁸⁶ Williams, 55.

⁸⁷ Petrušová, 28.

⁸⁸ Goodwyn Jones, 26.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 10.

circumstances,”⁹⁰ Birdie remains loyal to her ancestral blood and, therefore, is “too high-tone to try.”⁹¹ 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,”⁹² Birdie creates her most profound deviation from the archetype, as she subverts the role of the loving mother within her family. Similarly to the Southern Belle, Birdie is rather seen than heard. She rarely voices her opinion and when she does, often no one hears her. When she displays genuine joy, she is immediately dismissed for “chattering like a magpie”⁹³ or “running about like a child.”⁹⁴ Being “a ninny [...] and how shy,”⁹⁵ she is very surprised when someone consults her with “the unaccustomed friendliness,”⁹⁶ which only testifies to her accepted role of inferiority. As Oscar never tells her anything, she is “delighted with the unprecedented interest,”⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Williams, 55.

⁹¹ Hellman, 174.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

Ironically, when she is allowed to join the conversation, her “old-fashioned”⁹⁹ ideals hinder her from any further development. Her vision of her Lionnet past “might be a most pleasant way to live,” but since she does not ask for anything solid, her Hubbard in-laws unanimously ignore her plead for her “pretty picture.”¹⁰⁰ They mock her request and, sadly, her relationship with her husband, Oscar, seems not much better, as shall be now discussed.

Accustomed to her aristocratic upbringing provided by her father who “was a fine soldier, a fine man,”¹⁰¹ Oscar’s gentlemanly image cannot meet her expectations. With his concept of courtly love comprising of “pass[ing] by and lift[ing] his hat,”¹⁰² while showing temporary kindness, Birdie’s illusions are soon dispersed. Although “he was initially kind [...] and used to smile,”¹⁰³ his courting is as much of a fraud as their whole marriage. Since she married a crude individual whose ideals of chivalry consist of shooting animals, it seems only obvious that Birdie’s aristocratic character strives to return “back to Lionnet [where] everybody’d be better.”¹⁰⁴ Even though Birdie fears and despises Oscar, she doesn’t abandon her role of a proper Southern Belle and strives to act innocent and pure most of the time.¹⁰⁵ She thus follows the traditional full commitment as a Southern wife only partially, since she displays financial dependency but not psychological loyalty to her family. As little as she thinks of her own marriage though, she relentlessly supports that of Horace and Regina. This fact can be explained in rather simple terms. For she knows of Horace’s qualities, as he “has been mighty kind to her all

⁹⁹ Hellman, 225.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 180.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 174

¹⁰² Ibid, 225.

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 228.

those years,”¹⁰⁶ she perceives him as not only her savior but also one of the last “fine man.”¹⁰⁷

Blanche’s isolation and helplessness mostly stem from her economic inability to provide for herself. With all of the male ancestors dead and Belle Reve 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. What more, this sudden change entails not only the loss of her residence in her ideal world but also a prominent part of her given identity. She is reluctant to choose between retaining her prized Bellehood and accepting reality with its responsibilities. Since Blanche is neither a valid Southern Belle, nor a Southern Lady, the former referring to the stage before marriage and the latter to the life after that, Williams puts his character into a position with no possible chance of escape.¹⁰⁸ For Blanche is no longer young and pure, no matter how skillfully she masks the truth in front of the “naked light bulb,”¹⁰⁹ she can’t pass as a Southern Belle anymore. With her husband dead and unable to save him with her beauty, her portrayal of a Southern Lady also digresses from the archetype.

Even though the Southern Belle was, in contrast to her Northern sister, never orphaned, both Birdie and Blanche form the departure from this rule. Their respective attitudes to their lost families greatly differ, though. Whereas Birdie cherishes her ancestors and condemns the behavior “that her Papa didn’t like,”¹¹⁰ Blanche scorns them for their ostentatious acts of debauchery. However contrasting their familial love perspectives may be, Blanche’s and Birdie’s desperate need for protection is of the same nature.

¹⁰⁶ Hellman, 222.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 174.

¹⁰⁸ William, Sharp, “An Unfashionable View of Tennessee Williams” in *The Tulane Drama Review* 6.3 (Mar., 1962), pp. 160, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1124941>>, 15 June 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, 55.

¹¹⁰ Hellman, 180.

“I guess you’re hoping I’ll say I’ll put up at a hotel, but I’m not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be *near* you, got to be *with* somebody, I *can’t* be *alone!*”¹¹¹ By means of emotional outcry, Williams lets Blanche reveal that she does not separate herself from the Southern Belle tradition and is still in active search for both protection and a husband; for a life without a husband means a life of poverty. Blanche continually desires a male authority in her life. Her reasons spring from two specific causes; not only does she struggle to regain her economic stability but she also “want[s] to rest”¹¹² and stop “that polka tune that [she] has [...] caught in [her] (...) head.”¹¹³ Her relief that her potential suitor Mitch is gentle, though he “dance[s] like an imitation of a bear,” further accentuates her preference for chivalry.

Unlike Birdie, who is “usually nervous and timid,”¹¹⁴ Blanche is granted a voice and, furthermore, mobility. This liberation on Williams’s part permits Blanche to effortlessly travel and hence challenge the well-established passivity and domestic sheltering of the Bellehood stereotype. In contrast, 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”¹¹⁵ her good, it is merely a mockery or ridicule on her part. The concept of free movement is crucial for Blanche, for thanks to her mobility, she is able to visit her sister in New Orleans. As Blanche later explains to Mitch, her family was part “French by extraction [...] French Huguenots,”¹¹⁶ which irreversibly “marks her as an aristocrat”¹¹⁷ and thus traps her within the Old South diaspora. Her arrival to New Orleans proves, therefore, detrimental to her psyche, as Stella’s home starkly contrasts with Blanche’s expectation from her upbringing. “They mustn’t have—understood—

¹¹¹ Williams, 23.

¹¹² Ibid, 81.

¹¹³ Ibid, 113.

¹¹⁴ Hellman, 168.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 181.

¹¹⁶ Williams, 55.

¹¹⁷ Oklopčić.

what number I wanted...This—can this be—her home?”¹¹⁸ When she can’t see “a great big place with white columns”¹¹⁹ or anything similar to the picture of Belle Reve, and her worst fears are confirmed, Blanche remains skeptical. As she presses Stella with further inquisitions, she desperately seeks explanation to her question of “what what are you doing in a place like this,”¹²⁰ referring not only to her sister’s residence but also to Belle Reve and, symbolically, to the Old South for which “she bled [and] almost died.”¹²¹ This particular question of hers is likewise echoed at the end of the play. Like Birdie, she insistently searches for authenticity; for Birdie, this authenticity is symbolized by her desire to reestablish her “pretty picture”¹²² of Lionnet and, in Blanche’s case, by her wish to regain her life at Belle Reve. This notion is what makes Saddik think of Williamsian characters as “fugitives [...] who crave the stability and [...] a return to origins (read Old South) [...] never resting, despite their desperate, romantic need to cling to an unattainable ideal, a core of Truth,”¹²³ which is a point that one can definitely agree with.

Since Blanche was raised on the 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?”¹²⁴ and, later, with Stanley “Would you think it possible that I was once considered—attractive.”¹²⁵ As the elemental concept of Southern Bellehood mostly comprised of the quality of being “beautiful or potentially beautiful,”¹²⁶ Blanche regards herself as a “beautiful object, which has to be properly

¹¹⁸ Williams, 15.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹²¹ Ibid, 26.

¹²² Hellman, 180.

¹²³ 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.

¹²⁴ Williams, 47.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁶ 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.

decorated in order to sell well.”¹²⁷ As a proper Southern Belle, she dotes on her outer appearance. And, despite her limited audience “of a mixed lot,”¹²⁸ she dresses “as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail,”¹²⁹ and since she “brought nice clothes (...) [she proclaims to] wear them.”¹³⁰ This capricious nature of Blanche’s character could be justified on grounds of other quintessential characteristics associated with the archetypal Southern Belle that Williams decides to preserve: vanity and whim.

The whimsical nature can be also easily detected in Birdie’s character. Birdie is equally wistful but, unlike Blanche, she does not concern herself with the dress code. This is clearly evident when she “burst in [...] wearing a flannel kimono [...] her face flushed and excited.”¹³¹ She does not enjoy being the centre of attention and can hardly recognize a compliment, even when she is given one. Her modest innocent personality thus perfectly illustrates her complete passivity but, simultaneously, greatly clashes with the traditional Southern Belle concept of self-love.¹³²

Blanche, on the other hand, is genuinely vain. She “love[s] to be waited on”¹³³ and “serve[d]” cokes.¹³⁴ 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.”¹³⁵ Blanche also intentionally fishes for compliments and desires attention, which only complements the Southern Belle stereotype even more. However, as the scene five shows, when she tells Stella that she “want[s] to deceive him

¹²⁷ Oklopčić.

¹²⁸ Williams, 23.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 15.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 23.

¹³¹ Hellman, 205.

¹³² As Flora 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.

¹³³ Williams, 79.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 97.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 31.

[Mitch] enough to make him want [her],”¹³⁶ 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.”¹³⁷ This particular statement clearly demonstrates that her recurrent enquiries regarding her appearance also denote her implicit acknowledgment of her fading beauty.

According to the Southern myth a traditional Belle “is rarely engaged in non-courtship conversations with other characters and, if she is, the conversation is always centered on her narcissistic opinion about herself or her physicality.”¹³⁸ However, there are few instances when this otherwise strictly followed rule doesn’t apply.

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!¹³⁹

[...] BLANCHE:

-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!¹⁴⁰

Since a Southern Belle 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. Her feigned ignorance only exposes to what extent she concerns herself with the issue; as a girl who is “still ‘going out’ at 30,” she is left with two possible choices: “a lonely spinsterhood [...] or garish indiscretions.”¹⁴¹ In addition, the perpetual sense of nostalgia, with which Blanche and Birdie are permanently fraught, relate not only to their lost youth but evoke their ideal lost past as well. Blanche’s choice of dress pays homage to a similar concept with her ensemble of “white suit with a fluffy

¹³⁶ Williams, 81.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 79.

¹³⁸ Petrušová, 25.

¹³⁹ Williams, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 81.

¹⁴¹ Popkin, 55.

bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat,”¹⁴² which starkly contrasts with Stanley’s “blue denim work clothes.”¹⁴³ As much as the Old South opposes the New one, Blanche manifests her standpoint; her clothes and demeanor impersonate the old life she so hopelessly clings to, yet which is no longer valid.

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. Secure by her family the Belle was relieved of any need to work, which enabled her to focus more on the cultivation of her own skills.¹⁴⁴ Whether it was sewing or singing, all her accomplishments were motivated by one common goal: the search of her husband.

Following the example of her parents who “went to Europe for the music,”¹⁴⁵ Birdie displays a strong fondness for art and, especially music, “plays [the piano] just wonderfully.”¹⁴⁶ The artistic traits are also retained 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”¹⁴⁷ is rather peculiar though, for, as opposed to 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,”¹⁴⁸ and his rebukes that Birdie was “very excited, the whole evening,”¹⁴⁹ Stanley takes his crudeness to another level when he “without oath tosses the radio out

¹⁴² Williams, 15.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Wyatt-Brown, 173.

¹⁴⁵ Hellman, 168.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 172.

¹⁴⁷ Watson, Jr., 64.

¹⁴⁸ Hellman, 169.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 180.

the window.” Both the male characters strongly disapprove of women’s fondness of art, specifically music: Williams’s Stanley doesn’t “let the girls have their music”¹⁵⁰ and, in Hellman’s case, music makes Oscar “nervous,”¹⁵¹ which makes him to discourage Birdie from playing the piano. The obvious lack of appreciation merely attests to Stanley’s and Oscar’s inner fears; their preference for the solely masculine sports, such as bowling or shooting, thus seems only natural. This inability to understand the aesthetic value proves crucial, 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.

¹⁵⁰ Williams, 51.

¹⁵¹ Hellman, 222.

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.¹⁵²

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,”¹⁵³ she often suffered from the fear of displaying either too much ignorance or intellectuality. As Goodwyn Jones notes that:

[...] where the ideal woman was a repository of culture and the arts, her actual ignorance of worldly reality (which the image called innocence) was maintained by the low quality of education available for women in the South.”¹⁵⁴

And, since a Belle’s primary focus of life is based on being beautiful, it was believed “that a girl need not have the education”¹⁵⁵ and the best preparation for a woman's life is ignorance. In actuality, women’s intelligence distressed more than in pleased.¹⁵⁶ 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 to 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 patriarchal society. One can therefore say that Williams presents this phenomenon in an interesting paradox, for Blanche is both well-educated and, at the same time, completely dependent.

¹⁵² Hellman, 170.

¹⁵³ Oklopčić.

¹⁵⁴ Goodwyn Jones, 27.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 24.

Since Stella has obviously “forgotten [...] of [Belle Reve] (...) [and their] bringing up,”¹⁵⁷ 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; since Blanche and Stanley represent the contradicting ideologies,¹⁵⁸ the Old South and the New, she has no choice but to regard him only in the plebeian-aristocratic terms, as “the Kowalskis and the Dubois have different notions.”¹⁵⁹ 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!*¹⁶⁰

As this section plainly indicates, Williams is not interested in the archetypal submissiveness. Stylized into the “strong-minded woman,”¹⁶¹ 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, scheming within” the other.¹⁶²

If Williams depicts Blanche as an arrogant aristocrat who treats everyone around with contempt, Birdie is her opposite. Unlike Blanche, she is rather “stupid.”¹⁶³ Yet her

¹⁵⁷ Williams, 74.

¹⁵⁸ Oklopčić.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 72.

¹⁶¹ Goodwyn Jones, 38.

¹⁶² Ibid, 14.

¹⁶³ Hellman, 226.

stupidity merely echoes the “harmful innocence,”¹⁶⁴ since contrary to Blanche, her education follows the conventional Belle protocol. When she explains that “everybody knew”¹⁶⁵ why Oscar married her, she is genuinely sad but, at the same time, completely aware that “she would lose respect if she settled herself as a burden on a brother, or even a father.”¹⁶⁶ By not providing Birdie with any intellectual power, Hellman increases her “marriage desirability,”¹⁶⁷ for as innocent as Birdie was at her age, she did not, and still does not, constitute any danger for the money-oriented Oscar. As a proper Southern Belle, Birdie displays a strong sense of submission as she lets Oscar decide for her. However, this lack of control inevitably results in Birdie’s utter deprivation of any psychological autonomy and character depth. She portrays a victim of her time - and yet, she is condemned for her behavior that Hellman does not sympathize with. As a result, 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,”¹⁶⁸ 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 desperately strives to fit in, but, since she was “babied so much,”¹⁶⁹ it is not possible. Passive, weak and frightened by her husband Oscar, who exercises full control over her

¹⁶⁴ Seidel, 32.

¹⁶⁵ Hellman, 226.

¹⁶⁶ Goodwyn Jones, 14.

¹⁶⁷ Oklopčić.

¹⁶⁸ Hellman, 174.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 189.

body, she is the epitome of the slave in what Goodwyn Jones sees as a “Lord-Master relationship.”¹⁷⁰

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],”¹⁷¹ only reinforces 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 has to 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.”¹⁷² This “sheep’s clothing” or “public persona,”¹⁷³ 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 but also about the inevitable hypocrisy involved in concealing it.¹⁷⁴ Both Birdie and Blanche wear this mask and, similarly to the archetype, they likewise blame their failures upon

¹⁷⁰ Goodwyn Jones, 8.

¹⁷¹ Hellman, 192.

¹⁷² Goodwyn Jones, 24.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

themselves. Despite the fact that their respective guilt stems from different sources, their means of dealing with their troubles prove fairly similar, which shall be later discussed.

According to Williams, “a character that isn’t ambiguous [...] is a false character, not a true one.”¹⁷⁵ Judging solely on this basis, it seems obvious that Williams negotiates the meaning and introduces a modified type of an archetypal Southern Belle, with unprecedented subversive potential. Blanche is a modified Belle, but her image resembles more a caricature that conflicts with the archetype associated with the era of the plantation South. Whereas Hellman’s Birdie follows tradition and, with an almost shocking transparency, demonstrates the pedestal of pristine purity, despite the fact that her name translates as “white woods [...] like an orchard in spring”¹⁷⁶ Blanche is “no lily.”¹⁷⁷ It is through her sexual promiscuity that Williams provides the most dominant deviation from the archetypal Belle figure and subverts the given stereotype.

As the norm had it, a Southern Belle embodied virtue and her goodness depended predominantly on her innocence. It was thus 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.”¹⁷⁸ This contradiction led to one simple outcome: the forcibly “desexed” Belle was rendered completely asexual. Blanche breaks from the traditional concept, as instead of exhibiting sexual purity, she is attracted to it. This is continuously reflected by her choice of countless suitors ranging from seventeen-year-old boys at school, to the not yet fully matured “he-man mama’s boys,”¹⁷⁹ and even to death fantasies in terms of a “ship’s doctor, a very young one.”¹⁸⁰ Through concealing her body behind the white garments and her face against the glaring light, Blanche strains to systematically

¹⁷⁵ Da Ponte, 263.

¹⁷⁶ Williams, 55.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 99.

¹⁷⁸ Oklopčić.

¹⁷⁹ Popkin, 54.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, 136.

neutralize the pain of her past with physical desire. This pain that hinders 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 her husband's death, Birdie hides her discontent of actually having one. As Goodwyn Jones notes "the Southern lady marries the Northern charmer,¹⁸¹ then persuades him to agree with her political ideas [...] and thus preserves the culture of the South."¹⁸² Since marriage constitutes the main goal in Belle's life, Birdie considers her marriage to the nasty "commercial plutocrat"¹⁸³ 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, similar to Blanche, searches for the flaws in herself.

When she opens about her troubles, she is conscious of her what many see as very unsouthern-like behavior. In a similar manner, she is ashamed to like Alexandra more than her own child, since it contradicts the notion of family devotion; she is scared to

¹⁸¹ In this case, "Northern charmer" carries the same meaning as "Southern gentleman," as Goodwyn Jones suggests that the Southern Belle eradicates the flaws and/or ambivalences of any man's character through her charm and beauty.

¹⁸² Goodwyn Jones, 14.

¹⁸³ Watson, Jr., 63.

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 notion can be located in the abusive relationship between Blanche and Stanley, metaphorically described when he “crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb [and] she cries out as if the lantern was herself.”¹⁸⁶ Birdie’s and Blanche’s 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 escape their Southern identities and, paradoxically, the more deviations they profess, the more they cleave to them, they both exemplify the “hypersensitive, tragic woman” whose uniqueness forced her to create her own little world.¹⁸⁸ They take refuge in these little worlds from the constant harassment committed by men like Stanley Kowalski and Oscar Hubbard and indulge in their “romantic evasions,”¹⁸⁹ based on their idealizations of their (by this point crumbled) 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

¹⁸⁴ Goodwyn Jones, 22.

¹⁸⁵ Popkin, 62.

¹⁸⁶ Williams, 140.

¹⁸⁷ Goodwyn Jones, 23-4.

¹⁸⁸ Oklopčić.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

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 also “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.

Birdie’s downfall, however, 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 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 reinforce their shared archetypal

¹⁹⁰ Oklopčić.

¹⁹¹ Saddik, 77.

¹⁹² Hellman, 192.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 178.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 169.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 225.

plead for protection, because as much as Birdie “like[s] people to be kind,”¹⁹⁶ Blanche is also dependent “on the kindness of strangers.”¹⁹⁷

The last challenge to the Southern Belle stereotype 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 as, she “pours a shot of whiskey into it.”²⁰² These lines also emphasize her attempt to hide her loneliness and unhappiness through alcohol.

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, Birdie’s drinking habit is widely-recognized and adopted as a legitimate excuse, whenever the environment sees it fit. 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

¹⁹⁶ Hellman, 225.

¹⁹⁷ Williams, 142.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 30.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 54.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 79.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid, 80.

²⁰³ Hellman, 172.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 226.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 170.

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. With her reputation thus 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.

²⁰⁷ Williams, 115.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As shown in this paper 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 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"²⁰⁸ Belle into a victim of her time, Williams's New South Belle is a satire on the Old South values. This obvious difference in time and attitude proved crucial for my thesis, for a deeper, more comprehensive analysis could be composed and the fluid nature of the Southern Belle archetype chronologically dissected and demonstrated.

Hellman's Birdie Hubbard is the last relic of the plantation past; abandoned and ostracized by her abrasive Hubbard in-laws, Birdie falls victim to 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 essential; despite her passive contribution to the making of Southern ideology, her literal presence constitutes its most integral element.²⁰⁹

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 archetypal wife.

²⁰⁸ Lillian Hellman; Jackson R. Bryer, *Conversations with Lillian Hellman* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1986): 35.

²⁰⁹ Goodwyn Jones, 9.

Her contempt for Oscar and Leo is evident, as is her awareness of her very Southern Belle misconduct. Yet, since Birdie follows the archetypal pattern of dependency and helplessness, her situation cannot be changed. Without Oscar, she wouldn't be able to exist, for the very quintessence of her existence resonates solely around Oscar, her husband and, at the same time, her absolute master.

In connection to this point, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* declares that “one is not born [a woman], but rather becomes one.”²¹⁰ 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 credos; a woman is not offered “a role”²¹¹ but rather given 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 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.²¹²

A woman's servility formed a pivotal part of the Southern Belle concept, as a complete submission to the Cavalier was imperative.²¹³ A Southern Belle's domain was rather limited, as she could serve only three roles: a mother, daughter and/or a wife.²¹⁴ Birdie's persona is codified by those roles; she starts as a daughter and, later, becomes dominated by Oscar as his wife and Leo's mother; she is “devoid of meaning without reference to male”²¹⁵ and, therefore, defined not through her own capabilities, but her relation to him.

²¹⁰ de Beauvoir, 14.

²¹¹ Ibid, 111.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ 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.”

²¹⁴ Goodwyn Jones, 12.

²¹⁵ de Beauvoir, 26.

Her position as a Southern Belle is, as Goodwyn Jones notes, vastly inferior and her only salvation stems from embracing this fact and abdicating herself.²¹⁶

As Beauvoir further clarifies “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.”²¹⁷ The identity in terms of becoming versus the fixed reality is crucial for Beauvoir’s conjectures. In *The Second Sex*, she subjects the notion of gender inequality to test and examines what humanity (read men) made of a woman.²¹⁸ Her observations suggest that femininity should be considered as an aspect of gender identity which is gradually cultivated with age. In this respect, gender is viewed not only in terms of cultural concept that a woman is inflicted with, but likewise as a manner of constructing her individuality.

Judith Butler in her own observations 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

Being a faded Belle, Williams’s Blanche Dubois is a perfect example of a soft individual juxtaposed against the rough world whose rules she is unable to follow. Though Williams preserves some characteristic archetypal traits, he debunks and alters the others, which provides the stereotypical Bellehood with unprecedented subversive potential. His most

²¹⁶ Goodwyn Jones, 23.

²¹⁷ de Beauvoir, 25.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 27.

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.

prominent deviation is Blanche's promiscuous sexuality through which she defies the "chaste heroine/whore dichotomy."²²⁰ And, it is in this respect that she shall be linked to Butler's concept of gender identity.

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. Her character disintegration thus corresponds to what Butler terms as "the fall from established gender boundaries."²²¹ 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" for the Southern womanhood; a woman was expected to completely mask her feelings under the marble statue as well as to suppress her sexuality under a block of ice,"²²² which, as Goodwyn Jones asserts, required a certain degree of creativity and persistence. However, as opposed to Birdie, whose feminine qualities are mostly intact, Blanche and, consequently, her gender existence alike, is astray. Even though she resists the archetypal role of ornamental wife,²²³ to which the patriarchal society reduced its women, Birdie including, she is unable to operate by herself. Her desire to be beautiful links her to the archetypal Belle but her fading beauty disrupts her Bellehood image. Similarly to Birdie, "her wings are cut" (i.e. she is not able to leave the house) but, since Blanche is allowed to move freely, only she is explicitly "blamed for not knowing how to fly"²²⁴ (i.e. where to go). Blanche no longer engages herself in the archetypal innocent flirting. In fact, she

²²⁰ Oklopčić.

²²¹ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*." *Yale French Studies*. Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century. No. 72 (Winter 1986), 41-42.

²²² Goodwyn Jones, 13.

²²³ As Goodwyn Jones further notes 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.

²²⁴ De Beauvoir, 713.

expresses her femininity in such an exaggerated manner (see scene 2) that even though it aids in masking her repressed feelings, it, simultaneously, undermines the general constructiveness of gender roles as a whole. Her conscious seduction and manipulation of males around her directly brings us to the discussion of Butler's theory of performativity.

As Butler notes gender is "a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start."²²⁵ This notion suggests that Butler's 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. By providing his Belle with such an ambiguous behavior, Williams enables Blanche to challenge the well-defined roles of womanhood and manhood. To conclude, in Butler's own words: "A man who reads effeminate may well be consistently heterosexual, and another one might be gay. We can't read sexuality off of gender."²²⁶

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; to substantiate how (and if) they modified the archetypal Southern Belle myth; in which manner these Southern Belles both echoed and digressed from its traditional form and environment that produced them; and how the Southern Belle phenomenon was redefined by these two different Southern writers. This thesis also employed archetypal feminism and gender theories in order to provide a notion of how

²²⁵ Judith Butler in *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for the Interdisciplinary Performer*, ed. Experience Bryon (Routledge: NY, 2014): 29.

²²⁶ Judith Butler, "The Difference Between Sex and Gender, big think, 2015, <<http://bigthink.com/in-their-own-words/the-difference-between-sex-and-gender>>, 30.7. 2016.

the Southern Belle myth 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 in both of the aforementioned works. It is within my best conscience that other disciplines, 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 quite aware of the possibility of further research not only with the help of different perspectives but likewise by incorporating different texts; for, as Goodwyn Jones believes, the pertaining image of the Southern Belle figure persists up till today,²²⁷ which is something one can find in both modern literature and also American culture.

²²⁷ Goodwyn Jones, 17.

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