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BACHELOR THESIS

Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* as Reflections of their Time

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis presents how two selected plays by two equally prominent 20th-century playwrights – *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) by Tennessee Williams and *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952) by Terence Rattigan – reflect the time in which they were written with a particular emphasis on the post-war standing of women as well as on the prevailing social attitudes towards sexuality in its various forms of manifestation.

Key words

Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Rattigan, *The Deep Blue Sea*, Blanche DuBois, Hester Collyer, post-war period, sexuality

Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je představení toho, jak dvě vybrané významné hry 20. století – "Tramvaj do stanice Touha" amerického dramatika Tennessee Williamse a "Temně modré moře" britského dramatika Terence Rattigana – reprezentují dobu, kdy byly napsané, s obzvláštním důrazem na poválečné postavení žen a na převládající postoj společnosti vůči sexualitě v jejích různých projevech.

Klíčová slova

Williams, "Tramvaj do stanice Touha", Rattigan, "Temně modré moře", Blanche DuBois, Hester Collyer, poválečná doba, sexualita

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1. Introduction

The present bachelor thesis deals with two selected dramas of the twentieth century – *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams and *The Deep Blue Sea* by Terence Rattigan. The objective of the current academic paper is to explore how the two focal works reflect the time in which they were written. Special attention is devoted to the issues of the post-war standing of women and social attitudes towards sexuality at the time.

The choice of plays is based on a number of factors. Of the utmost importance in selecting the plays was a fact of discovering two dramatic pieces that reflect the issues of the post-war time – despite the works in question being produced on different continents, the matters tackled by their authors happened to overlap. Either Rattigan's or Williams's play indicate the acute economic and social issues of the period: the post-war living conditions with deprivation on the one hand, and a promise of a brighter future on the other hand; the pertaining negative attitude towards homosexuality, and the ever-stereotypical ideas of gender roles.

Another reason for selecting the two introduced plays was their prominent female characters, each being a representative of their culture respectively, in a critical life situation. Williams and Rattigan, each being celebrated for introducing their complex female protagonists to literature, implemented disparate devices of leading their heroines throughout the course of action, not least due to the authors' own life circumstances. It happened to be so that both plays were written at approximately the same time and their authors' lives were similar in a few respects. Both Tennessee Williams and Terence Rattigan were distinguished playwrights, whose success underwent both dramatic rises and sudden falls within their lifetime. The playwrights were contemporaries, with the same year of birth and approximately the same duration of life. Despite having been born and having lived on different continents, either Williams or Rattigan explored the topic of suppressed sexuality, which was their everyday concern and the focal issue in their works. Playwrights' homosexual preferences along with the society's prejudice in regard to the latter also united the personae of Tennessee and Rattigan.

The present bachelor thesis consists of four chapters, some of which are further divided into sub-chapters. The first chapter sets the objective of the bachelor thesis and

presents the reasons for selecting the topic of the current work. The second chapter, which is the theoretical part of the thesis, focuses on the post-war situation in the USA and Britain as well as presents the outline of the two plays. Chapter Three, being the practical part of the thesis, addresses the post-war situation reflected in the plays, especially from the point of view of the two female protagonists. Of special interest here is the analysis of how the plays focus on the reflection of sexuality and the social attitude towards it at the time when the works in question were created. It is also in the practical part of the thesis where the reader is presented with the concept of plastic theatre, which was of paramount importance for the Williams's play. The playwright used plastic theatre techniques – visual aids and music – to convey the psychological states of his characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as to accentuate the importance of certain events in the plot. Finally, the fourth chapter summarises the observations made throughout the analysis of the two focal plays.

In order to accomplish the objective of this work, various sources of information, including biographies (*Critical Lives: Tennessee Williams* by Paul Ibell, 2016; Geoffrey Wansell's *Terence Rattigan*. *A Biography* published in 1995), documentary films ("The Rattigan Enigma" produced by BBC and hosted by Benedict Cumberbatch) and articles (Glenn Loney's "Tennessee Williams: The Catastrophe of Success", 1993) have been consulted and studied. An invaluable source of information on the post-war situation in the USA was found in *An Outline of American History* by the United States Information Agency published in 1994, and Paul Johnson's *A History of the American People* (1997), whereas the majority of the information on social, economic and cultural background in the post-war Britain was obtained thanks to *The People's Peace* by Kenneth O. Morgan published in 1990. *Sex and the British: A Twentieth-Century History* (1993) by Paul Ferris provided the author of the present thesis with information concerning the post-war attitude of the British towards sexuality.

2. Theoretical part

2.1 The post-war situation in the USA

2.1.1 The economic situation

Closely after the end of the Second World War the United States enjoyed its dominant position in the world. As Paul Johnson, an English journalist and author, points out in his voluminous work *A History of the American People,* while Europe was immersed into fervent fighting, its people dying because of the cities being bombarded, or in the concentration camps, with starvation and debris all around, American life was largely following its regular course.

Having not undergone damage to its homeland territory, the country boosted its political influence and economic growth by providing its war allies with weapons, food supplies, as well as loans. Willing to "maintain the democratic structure they had defended at tremendous cost" (United States Information Agency 8), American government representatives strived to strengthen it and make it flourish. For the next 20 years Americans reaped the benefits of the welfare state concept that was first outlined at the beginning of the 1930s and which was based on the high level of social spending by the state as well as its cooperation with the citizens. The basis for the social security in the USA was built upon the Social Security Act signed by Roosevelt in 1935. The document outlined a plan of two nationwide social security programmes – one for the ripe-aged support, and the other one – for the destitute. The former programme laid the foundations of the federal system granting exemption to retired citizens who worked in the industrial or trade sector, and the latter included the creation of the social security system for the unemployed (Constitutional Rights Foundation).

The Second World War contributed to the national wealth growth of the United States and its consequent transformation into an economic and politico-military leader of the capitalist world. The nature of the internal development of the American capitalism (rapid capital accumulation and productive forces explosive advancement) encouraged the country to lead the policy of political influence extension. The changed balance of power in the world only fostered this situation. The USA's main opponents in the face of Germany and Japan temporarily withdrew from the political arena,

whereas France and Great Britain became dependent on the American financial aid. The USA took advantage of the situation in order to seize new markets, increase its export of goods and capitals – mainly by providing loans, and create a vast "empire of the dollar", which was in accordance with the results of the Bretton Woods Conference, which took place in 1944 – that is even before the end of the Second World War – in order to establish the post-war financial adjustment.

Providing equal economic opportunities and social stability became the focus of the American post-war government in terms of its in-country course of politics. To achieve the latter, it was considered necessary to make a transition towards the peacetime economy. Given the fact that military purposes production constituted up to two thirds of the overall industrial products during World War II, the task was not very simple. The issue of reconversion covered a number of aspects: financial, manufacturing, economic, which manifested themselves in an unemployment crisis, inflated prices and tariffs, and unused military produce, to mention a few. Harry S. Truman, the president of the United States from 1945 till 1953, ensured that the minimal wages were increased, affordable accommodation options were created, and the demobilised were granted access to education and employment (Johnson 634).

While the world was plunged into the Cold War, the United States' economic strength was growing. This was possible due to several reasons: automobile industry development, housing construction, big businesses' further expansion, and the general trend of the country to transit towards massive urbanisation with an emphasis on the service sector. The aforementioned circumstances had profound implications for the post-war development course of the United States – its war-time enrichment, while other capitalist countries' economies were severely damaged, considerably reinforced the share of the USA's influence in the world economy.

2.1.2 The social situation

Despite the fact that the wartime practically equalised American men and women, as the latter worked as hard as the former in order to manufacture the necessary military supplies, the traditional gender-stereotypical roles almost immediately came back to life in the post-war time. Men were seen as breadwinners, whereas women, even the ones that were employed, were responsible for the household. The image – housewives whose sole life purpose lay within childcare, housekeeping and cooking – was largely re-enforced by television, the start of the popularity of which fell within the post-war years.

According to the author of *The Philosophy of the Beat* Generation, John Clellon Holmes, the decade of the 1950s could be characterised as a period of conformism that was typical for both young people and representatives of older generations. Expressing one's individuality was not among one's priorities – people preferred to adhere to group norms. However, not everybody followed the prescribed standards: the Beatniks, the first countercultural movement of the post-war time, praising the ideals of freedom and spirituality, criticised the existing American culture focused on materialism and conservative values. The Beatniks movement is above all known for its literary input: Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg became idols for the youth of the time. They were among the first in the post-war period who turned their eyes to the issue of excessive consumerism as well as potential dangers of technocracy, which, according to the representatives of the Beat Generation, is malevolent in itself, should the spiritual component be neglected (228-238).

A characteristic trait of the 1950s' American social life was socio-political build-up: black part of the American population led by Martin Luther King, a young Baptist pastor from Alabama, commenced its fight for their civil rights. Basing his tactics on the principle of nonviolence, King's organised protest activities raised the issues of harassing and discrimination on racial grounds.

The Second World War and the economic boom caused numerous social changes in the country – people were generally starting to reconsider the former values, which were in many ways rather outdated in that they were too puritan for the dynamically developing post-war society. For instance, extramarital sexual intercourse was still regarded a crime in the eyes of the 1950s' American society, and those women who

dared to practice it were practically gambling. The lack of proper contraceptive methods created an aureole of danger around sex – above all due to the much-feared procedure of abortion, which was still illegal at that time. Generally, the attitude towards sex and sexuality was ambivalent: one the one hand, it was forbidden fruit that was strived for; on the other hand, it was associated with punishment and suffering.

Similarly to extramarital sexual relations, same-sex relations were also unacceptable for the majority of the 1950s' Americans. As Hettie Jones, an author of twenty-three books for children and adults, wrote in her memoir *How I became Hettie Jones*, "the homosexual life seemed the hardest and riskiest, almost certain to drive people crazy at some point" (63). Unlike Britain, which had been exercising persecution and imprisonment of homosexuals until the Wolfenden Report (1957) was implemented, the United States of America was generally more liberal towards the latter (Weeks 242). Even though it was still not unheard of homosexuals' arrests executed on the basis of the state sodomy laws, there was no equivalent of the British Lord Chamberlain's office in America, which allowed gay people to participate in creation of films, music and literature. It was only the level of readiness of the audience to embrace homosexuality reflected in art and media that defined how far the artist could go when creating their work.

2.2 The post-war situation in Britain

2.2.1 The economic situation

Unlike its transatlantic partner, USA, Britain could not boast with its prosperity. By the mid-1940s, "the increasingly outdated nature of the British economic structure was painfully apparent", emphasises Kenneth O. Morgan in his volume on British history in years 1945-1989, *The People's Peace* (10). The Second World War did not deplete as many human resources of the country compared to other countries in Europe, but it significantly weakened the country' economy – Britain lost half of its national wealth. Many British cities were bombarded and largely destroyed, British trade and military fleet resources were seriously impoverished, and country's domestic, as well as public, debt was unprecedented.

After World War II, Britain had to abandon its dream of world supremacy, as its position on the world scene shattered – Britain found itself performing the role of the USA's poor relative. The post-war British economy was far behind the post-war American economy: with the former's industrial output of 20% and the export rate of only one third of the latter's. During the war years the taxes per capita had increased by more than three times, and the cost of living almost doubled.

Severe damage to British economy was caused as a result of its international markets loss. During the war some of the Commonwealth countries were occupied by Japanese and German troops, other countries developed the liberation movement so that closely after the end of the war Burma, India and Ceylon gained complete independence, which became a catalyst for the acceleration of the movement in the 1950s – 1960s. For Britain, whose economic potential had largely depended on its colonies, the disintegration of the empire meant that its days of glory were gone (Morgan 45-47).

Based on Professor Jeremy Black's outline of the post-war state of Britain, the shortage of housing, continual rationing of "some basic commodities like butter, meat, tea and coal" (bbc.co.uk) along with high taxation and various state regulations were the legacy of Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Right after the end of the Second World War, there was parliamentary election held on 26, July 1945, with the Labour Party winning it. Apparently, the defeat of the

Conservative Party was caused by the latter's attempt to gather votes by emphasising the Party's role in the victory over fascism. However, at that time the country chose to look to the future, not to the past, by opting for the programme of the Labour Party, which aimed at the welfare state creation. For the first time in British history the Labour Party represented the majority in the House of Commons. Its leader, Clement Richard Attlee, eventually becoming Prime Minister of the UK was only logical.

The new ruling party started its activity by implementing Sir William Beveridge's plan, which involved the creation of a comprehensive social security system as well as an introduction of free health care, and which is to be described in more detail further in the thesis. In order to strengthen its economy, in the period between 1945 and 1951 British liberal government put into action the policy of nationalisation that simultaneously was the core of social changes. Thus, coal and gas industries, metallurgy, transportation systems and even the English bank – all became nationalised. The Labour's political course, however, led to tax increases, and, with the government seeing its inability to control the situation, the Labour Party was compelled to give way to its main opponent, the Conservative Party. The Conservatives did not cancel the social insurance programme, but launched denationalisation of manufacturing and transport, which helped with tax cuts (Morgan 42-43).

In the 1950s Europe was generally experiencing universal economic growth, which was enjoyed by the United Kingdom as well, however its pace of development was much slower compared to the other advanced European countries, such as France or West Germany. The economic stagnation observed in Britain was connected with the disintegration of the British Empire, which had allowed the country to flourish in its prime time. British colonies served as a point of supply of cheap resources, which Britain had accumulated for decades, and which now had to be acquired on less favourable terms. In regard to the changes in the political structure of the world, the UK had to adjust its economy to the new circumstances, whereas other European countries did not have to deal with this issue.

2.2.2 The social situation

After the war ended in 1945, British people were exhausted – austerity and rationing contributing to the situation. The key concept of life being family, "there was a lot of forgiving and forgetting; or, where this proved impossible, of making fresh starts" (Ferris 148). This tendency of letting go of the past became typical of Britain at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. At first the formerly mentioned break with the gone time, along with the revision of the dominant moral and aesthetic principles, was just a subtle sentiment in the changing public mood that was characteristic of young people mostly; however, by the mid-1950s it found its expression in various spheres of cultural life. The considerable change in the public mood was clearly noticeable in the new theatre it brought about.

8 May, 1956 was marked by the rise of the new theatre, a representative of the so-called kitchen sink realism, introduced by John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger*. The latter almost immediately marked all that preceded as old-fashioned, according to the British dramatist Dan Rebellato, who expresses these ideas in the introduction to *The Deep Blue Sea* in Nick Hern Books edition. The younger generations' eccentric way of life, as well as the tendency of the latter to disregard the past, which was explicitly expressed in the culture of the time, along with extravagant hairstyles and clothes, was heavily criticised by the older generations' representatives.

The Second World War left a contradictory legacy. One the one hand, there clearly were elements of national unity present, the most powerful symbol being the wartime British Prime Minister Churchill, who, even in the gloomiest times, embodied resolve and determination. One the other hand, the unity that Churchill's image represented was "traditional and highly limited" (Morgan 11). It was obvious that the slogans of war-induced class dissolution were just a myth (Morgan 17). "The purpose of wartime social policies was, no doubt, to promote a genuine sense of solidarity" (Morgan 18), however the reality was often very different: flourishing of the black market, bombed houses looting. In practice the war actually accentuated the distinctions rather than put an end to them.

Despite the inclusion of women in manufacturing and other manual work during the war, it was supposed that they would return to their regular lives, i.e. household chores and childcare, when "peace and normality returned" (Morgan 18). After the war,

it was indeed very challenging for women to find a job, and equal pay was out of question. Similarly, prudish notions of sexual restraint imposed upon both men and women were ever-present in spite of the contradicting reality of widely spread prostitution, partners' unfaithfulness towards each other, and abundant pornography. The spread of contraception resulted in a more frivolous attitude of the youth towards sexual relations and their responsibility towards their partners. The number of divorces also increased, even though the importance of family was still acknowledged by all classes of British society (Ferris 151).

The importance of monogamous heterosexual love rooting from the Welfare State programme's orientation towards increasing the reproduction level, emphasised in the Beveridge report of 1942 mentioned previously, contradicted the idea of a "nature-given normality" (Weeks 232) of homosexual relationships. Back in the first half of the 20-th century homosexuality was generally viewed in Britain as something "completely unnatural" (Wansell 24) on top of being legally prosecuted – especially so in the 1950s with the purges of homosexuals being in full swing. The 1950s saw a sharp enthusiasm of seeking out and making homosexual activities practised by the "Evil Men" public, of particular interest were men in heavy-duty positions (Rebellato XIV). Sexual minorities were so thoroughly searched for and arrested that they had to elaborate "a highly sophisticated system of gestural and dress codes, words and phrases that could be used to indicate one's sexual desires" (Rebellato XIII). Quite regrettably, one's sexual orientation defined if the person could lead a satisfactory social and professional life. People whose preferences deviated from the heterosexual norm had to conceal it by all means; otherwise they would become victims of not only social, but also legal persecution (*History Today*).

2.3 The "Social Insurance and Allied Services" report and its relevance

Even before the beginning of the Second World War the socio-economic situation in Britain required that social security system regulations should be modified. In 1942 Britain already started to elaborate plans for the after-war reconstruction. It was at that point when Sir William Beveridge, a progressive British economist having gained authority "during the Liberal Government of 1906 – 1914" (BBC Historic figures), and finishing his career as Baron Beveridge in the House of Lords, proposed his programme commonly referred to as the Beveridge report. Not only did it contain suggestions and recommendations aimed at how to maintain and increase the income level of his fellow citizens through the social security system in the country, but it also proposed a detailed plan on social politics transformation in the post-war Britain (Morgan 36).

Sir William Beveridge had accepted to preside over the administration of a "comprehensive survey of existing schemes of social insurance and allied services" (Beveridge 2). The survey had to detect the problems that were in the way towards the eventual post-war reconstruction and to suggest potential solutions as to how they could be eliminated.

After a careful examination of the field of social insurance and allied services had been held, Beveridge pinpointed in his "Social Insurance and Allied Service" report of 1942 that Britain's level of intervention in financially difficult situations connected with "need through interruption of earnings and other causes" was truly "unsurpassed" when compared with many other European countries (Beveridge 5). On the other hand, a major drawback of the British social security system, according to the economist, lay within the government's failure to cater to the needs of those requiring medical treatment as well as to provide a sufficient "provision for maternity and funerals" (Beveridge 5-6). The system for workmen's compensation was also not without its defect, Beveridge claimed.

Beveridge's ideas were accepted favorably due to the society being ready for changes. The reformation plan that Beveridge suggested was based on the principles of absolute employment and advanced medical services supply in the country. According to the economist, it was of paramount importance that, alongside with the social security system general improvements, the society would reach the state of the so-called universal welfare. The Beveridge report laid the foundations of a new model of the

state - the model which excluded the possibility of existence of the five "giants on the road to reconstruction: Squalor, Want, Idleness, Ignorance and Disease" (Beveridge 6). The latter references appear in the "Social Insurance and Allied Service" report for a reason: according to Beveridge, the aforementioned flaws were typical of the socio-economic situation prevailing in Britain during that particular historical period. The uncontrollable distribution of population as well as large-scale urbanisation combined to what the economist called Squalor, while deprivation of food and housing arouse to mass Want. The unemployment rates along with the insufficient remuneration resulted in the phenomenon of Idleness, and the exclusivity of education (neglecting less bright working-class children) made Beveridge talk about Ignorance. Last, but not least Sir William Beveridge underlined the need to combat Disease in that both prevention and cure should be considerably improved.

The ideal target that the economist pursued was full employment, and a sufficient number of social benefits guaranteed by government and available in equal measure to every society member: "This Report takes abolition of want after this war as its aim" (Beveridge 8). The key notion of social justice presented on the pages of Beveridge report was intended to become illustrated by the example of the post-war Britain.

The timely introduction of the Beveridge model was accepted with great enthusiasm, especially by the youth craving for a better after-war world: as a British historian and political biographer Ben Pimlott accentuates in his "Giants of poverty yet to be slain…", "from now on Beveridge is not the name of a man, it is the name of a way of life, not only for Britain, but for the whole civilised world" (*The Independent*). The influence of the Beveridge report became especially apparent after the Second World War had ended when other countries faced the same problems that Britain had to tackle. The Beveridge model was also a harmonious fit for the post-war concept of human rights that was explicitly emphasised in the 1948 Universal Declaration by the Organisation of the United Nations – one of its articles establishing the universal right to social security.

2.4 Otherness in the playwright's lives and work

The post-war time brought need and insecurity to Britain on the one hand, and general prosperity to the United States on the other hand, but what these two cultures had in common was their preoccupation with welfarism as the embodiment of the post-war state organisation. With its notions of fundamentally traditional values at its core, there is no wonder that any "anomalies", such as civil marriages, divorces or different sexual preferences were eagerly discouraged (Weeks 235). This intolerance towards otherness is expressed in both *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Deep Blue Sea* in the form of the main heroines' conflict with society as well as in introduction of homosexual characters, be it only implicitly.

The "otherness" introduced in the previous paragraph could be encountered not only on the pages of the playwrights' works, but also in their lives – both T. Williams and T. Rattigan were outcasts in their own way.

According to Paul Ibell, a writer and lecturer on theatre, Tennessee's family represented "perfect material for a playwright who specialised in the damaged and the doomed" (13). Cornelius, playwright's father, with his brutal behavior towards both his wife and children combined with hard-drinking was far from being an exemplary father. On the other hand, Edwina, Tennessee's mother, was a mentally unstable and sexually repressed woman, which hardly makes anyone wonder Cornelius's interest in extramarital affairs (Tennessee Williams – Wounded Genius). What is more, playwright's sexual orientation added to his feeling of isolation.

Rattigan's homosexuality was also the source of his "peculiarity" in the eyes of society. Rattigan recognised his "nascent sexuality" (Wansell 24) and learnt he had to conceal it. The latter was something he did throughout the rest of his life, and he only disclosed his sexual orientation to a few intimate friends. The fact that the playwright himself could not openly express his sexuality was reflected in his plays, which are, according to M. Tyrrell, "full of figures who are tortured by their sexuality" (The Rattigan Enigma). *A Deep Blue Sea*, one the two focal plays of the present bachelor thesis, is a bright example of Rattigan's drama containing characters burdened with their sexuality, and is to be dealt with later in this work.

2.5 Tennessee's and Rattigan's plays' setting and plot

2.5.1 *A Streetcar Named Desire.* Setting and plot

A Streetcar Named Desire was the writer's major work for which Tennessee Williams received one of his two Pulitzer Prize awards and which is perhaps his most famous piece of writing not the least due to the film version released in 1951. The play is a wonderful reflection of the time when it was written: in the face of its main characters, the writer presents not only a struggle of classes, with the working class taking a prominent position in the post-war world, but he also shows the male-female social standing issues, where the woman has to be fully dependent on the man.

The action of the whole play, as indicated in the extended scene setting in Scene One, takes place in a tenement building in a poor quarter in New Orleans. It is where Stella DuBois, an originally well-bred woman, and her husband of a working-class origin, Stanley Kowalski, reside. Even though Stella and Stanley Kowalski live in a tiny flat that they rent in a poor area, the Kowalski family appears to successfully get by with what Stanley earns as a factory salesman, and Stella is rather confident that her husband has a "drive" (Williams 50) that might lead him somewhere.

Born into a once wealthy family, Blanche, Stella's sister, who is now left impoverished after having lost the family property while her younger sister was settling down in New Orleans, comes to stay with Stella. As Blanche explains in Scene Three, Stella's and her ancestors were "French Huguenots" (Williams 55), which can be traced in her name too: Blanche DuBois, she points out, means "white woods" (Williams 55). "The snapshot of the place with the columns" (Williams 112) Stanley recalls in a conversation with Stella, the DuBois' family home, Belle Reve, accounts for their family's once being well-off.

From Blanche's confession to Stanley in Act Two one learns that Belle Reve was lost due to their ancestors' "epic fornications" (Williams 43) combined with a long succession of deaths, which she, "with my pitiful salary at the school" (Williams 27), could not afford. Left without means for existence, Blanche comes to New Orleans, as she has nowhere else to go, and flings herself upon Stella's and Stanley's mercy. "Past her sell-by date", with her beauty fading and no financial means at all, Blanche's only hope to settle down in life is finding a suitable husband (Ibell 54-55). One of the

potential candidates at hand is Mitch, Stanley's colleague and friend. However, Blanche's marriage dreams are not about to come true owing to her brother-in-law's efforts to discredit her.

"Having sensed a challenge to his robust manhood from the moment he met Blanche" (Gassner), Stanley goes out of his way to undermine the reputation of Blanche in his wife's eyes. Unfortunately for Blanche, her persona's past endeavors are far from being as noble as she suggests. The conflict of Blanche and the world around her is mirrored in her name (Blanche – "white" in French) as well as in her manners as compared to the reality. In spite of her exquisite fox-pieces and dresses, elegant bearing and a name implying her purity, Blanche is not as innocent as she would have desired to appear. As the story progresses, one is enlightened on the life story of Blanche DuBois, and the gap between what one sees and what one learns seems too large to be true.

The outward squalor explicitly described in the play matches with the impoverishment of Blanche's lifestyle, which becomes apparent despite her numerous pretensions and attempts to disguise herself in a veil of fantasies. Based on the former conclusion, it seems possible to assert that not only is the physical world that Blanche faces full of deprivation (in terms of financial possessions in the current working-class environment of Stella as well as of sensitivity of the past for which Blanche longs), but so is her own world of "social position and financial security", which John Gassner labels as "a Paradise Lost" (Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration). Being "incongruous to this setting" (Williams 15), Blanche is a misplaced individual in the world of Stella and Stanley – the world, which perseveres despite its outward squalor unlike that of shattered Bellehood decorum of the Old South.

2.5.1.1 Elements of plastic theatre in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

The method of plastic theatre is a technique first implemented by Tennessee Williams when he was working on *The Glass Menagerie* in the early 1940s. Apart from traditional acting, plastic theatre incorporates various non-literary elements, such as music, light and theatrical props in order to enhance the action on stage. According to the playwright, "expressionism and all other unconventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth" (Williams, 7). Only through transformation of real-life practices, believed the dramatist, can the audience grasp a state of affairs the playwright intends to communicate.

Thus, one of the most significant elements of plastic theatre in the play is the Varsouviana Polka which Blanche hears every time the memory of her deceased husband is triggered and which always stops only after a revolver shot is heard. Another prominent melody heard within the course of the action is that of blues music. The blue piano creates the dreamlike atmosphere, as it is mostly heard at reminiscent moments, such as Blanche "recalling the unfortunate fate of Belle Reve" in Act One (*Plastic Theatre*). The playwright believed in the ability of music to convey feelings and emotions to add to the atmosphere of the moment. It is by the means of music in *A Streetcar Named Desire* that the author accentuates Blanche's "mental instability" that she has in common with the playwright's own sister, Rose, whereas her guilt is shared with the playwright himself (Ibell 57).

Another powerful means of plastic theatre used in the play is that of light. Blanche, concealing the truth about herself and her past, never appears in the direct light and is only exposed to it at the end of the play when Mitch confronts her with the facts he has learnt about her. Thus, light, or rather its absence, helps to create the atmosphere of understatement and of the unresolved problems remaining in the shade.

2.5.2 *The Deep Blue Sea.* Setting and plot

Terence Rattigan is often referred to as a "master of the well-crafted play of upper-class manners and forbidden sexuality" (bbc.co.uk). Despite his characters always belonging to the upper class, the way Rattigan himself did, the issues raised in his works are universally applicable, no matter the class, the gender or the race.

The Deep Blue Sea (1952), one of the two focal works of the present bachelor thesis, is a three-act play, the most famous piece of work by a British playwright Terence Rattigan. Set in the post-war Britain of the early 1950s, it represents, according to Charles Spencer, a "small-scale domestic piece" (telegraph.co.uk). However, the play is much more than that at least due to the author's personal experience projected in the piece of work in question. Not only was *The Deep Blue Sea* "the hardest of my plays to write" (Rebellato XVIII), it was also the product of the tragic, by cause of its suddenness, suicide committed by Rattigan's ex-lover, Kenneth Morgan.

The Deep Blue Sea is in many aspects the reflection of the playwright's own private life and one can find the dramatist himself, as well as his former lovers, in the characters of the play. On the one hand, the relationship between the main heroine, Hester Collyer, and her husband William is suggestive of that between Rattigan and Kenneth Morgan, who "left a wealthy and successful playwright for a younger man" (Wansell 216). On the other hand, it is possible to see part of Rattigan in Hester while Sir William Collyer could represent another Rattigan's lover, Henry 'Chips' Channon, who was known to have gained playwright's liking by showering the latter with expensive gifts.

Rattigan's original concept was to write a "one-act play about a successful suicide attempt" (Rebellato XIX), however he revised it while working on the play in order to make it both more complex and, in its special manner, drearier, as it features the main protagonist embracing the choice to live against all odds. The opening scene of the play stays true to the Rattigan's initial scheme – the body of a woman found on the floor in front of a gas-fire in a "sitting room of a furnished flat in the north-west of London" (Rattigan 3) – however, instead of letting her die, the playwright makes her live and combat the hardships of her life.

The play opens with Hester having tried to take her own life, like Kenneth Morgan, by gassing herself. She is later discovered in such condition by her landlady and a couple from the same house. Luckily, the heroine is alive and, as the story unfolds, the reader learns about both the past and the present situation of Hester. A "clergyman's daughter, living in Oxford, marries the first man who asks her and falls in love with the first man who gives her an eye" (Rattigan 36). Hester abandons her husband, the reputable "Mr Justice Collyer", in order to pursue happiness with Freddie Page, a flying ace once, a succumbing semi-alcoholic in the present. As Dan Rebellato, Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, contemplates in his introduction to the National Theatre's *The Deep Blue Sea*'s edition, Rattigan's placement of the heroine between the three men (her father, her husband, and her lover) each exercising or having exercised some power is not coincidental: "Hester's sexuality is policed by a repressive triad of church, law and the army" (XXIV).

The reader follows Hester, whom one only sees in her living-room, within the course of one day, thus constrained by space and time. Moreover, the composition of the play is also symmetrical. After Freddie accidentally discovers the suicidal note that his lover addressed to him and was intending to leave to be found after her death, he realises that he is incapable of staying in this relationship any longer, knowing that "he's driving the only girl he's ever loved to suicide" (Rattigan 58). The fact of Freddie deserting her leads Hester to the second suicide attempt which is timely prevented by Doctor Miller, another tenant of the house where Hester and Freddie live. It is Mr. Miller whose words appear to be crucial in guiding Hester to the decision to live, even without hope. At the end of the play the image of the gas-meter emerges again, but this time the main protagonist uses it to light a fire, which could be interpreted as a new beginning, a sparkle of life flickering in the world of darkness.

As a *Guardian* critic Michael Billington highlighted in his obituary published after the death of Rattigan, all the work of the playwright is "a sustained assault on English middle class values: fear of emotional commitment, terror in the face of passion, apprehension about sex" (The Guardian). All of these are the focus of attention in *The Deep Blue Sea*, where, with the implementation of only a few characters, the playwright demonstrated the impossibility of healthy amorous choices under the ever-daunting social pressure.

3. Practical part

3.1 Post-war standing of women reflected in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Deep Blue Sea*

3.1.1 Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Tennessee Williams placed his heroines in the post-war world in situations when women had to face certain difficulties, such as loss of their social status and financial means, and to make decisions as to how to cope with the situations in which they had found themselves. The dependence of women on marriage, and thus men, discussed in the theoretical part of the current work is especially traceable in the story of the main female protagonist of the dramatic piece, Blanche DuBois.

In Williams's drama one is exposed to a fading Southern Belle, Blanche DuBois, desperately trying to cling to her evaporating beauty in a hope of finding a providing husband while staying with her sister, Stella, along with the latter's husband, Stanley Kowalski. Blanche's longing for the lost past as well as her graceful demeanor is juxtaposed to Stanley's down-to-earth approach to life combined with his brutish manners. Thus, metaphorically, Blanche's defeat against him represents "determination of modern age" striving for success by all means it possesses (Ibell 61).

As Biljana Oklopčić, a senior lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages at University of Osijek in Croatia, defines in her article "Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois", "the figure of the Southern belle is founded on a canonised discourse, resting on a cultural and social *personification* – a description, a code, a stereotype – which legitimises and authorises the interpretation of culture and nature" (Americana). Such a figure rests upon several very strictly specified requirements, mostly taking their roots from the Victorian notion of a "woman as an angel in the house". Thus, the Southern belle stereotype presupposed a white woman figure of an aristocratic origin whose range of hobbies and interests would not go much further beyond reading and writing and whose main ambition in life was "finding and marrying a real Southern gentleman" (Oklopčić).

As Blanche notes in a conversation with Stella on a poker night at their place, Mitch appeals to her due to his being "superior to the others" (Williams 49). Blanche's open manifestation of willing to "*deceive* him [Mitch] enough to make him – want me…" and the following romance between them (Williams 81), as well as her social background, make the main protagonist seem to correspond to the image of a Southern belle. However, emphasising the incapability of such a character to survive in the world comprising people like Stanley, Williams portrays Blanche as a regular drinker leading a promiscuous life resulting in madness – all of the characteristics that do not fit into the Southern belle stereotype, and thus "exemplify the downfall of the Southern Belle" (Oklopčić).

From the moment Blanche, who is the prominent female character in Williams's dramatic piece in question, is introduced in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, there is certain tension in her behaviour which manifests itself in the heroine's drinking problem along with long baths that she takes in order to calm her nerves: "Oh, I feel so good after my long, hot bath, I feel so good and cool and – rested!" (Williams 105).

The means of plastic theatre that the playwright implemented in his art and which are particularly outstanding in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, also emphasise the state of mental instability of the main protagonist. As it has been mentioned previously in this work, a very powerful means of conveying emotions and feelings in the play is music. The Varsouviana polka that Blanche hears every time when forced to recall her failed marriage and the sound of the dreamy blue piano contribute to understanding the heroine's perception of the reality around her.

Heroine's desperate wish to create magic in order to avoid reality eventually reveals a veil of lies behind which Blanche was hiding: the fact that she had been dismissed from her school teaching position, not granted a holiday; her numerous encounters with men after her husband's death; her real age. All of this naturally makes one wonder whether the story about how the DuBois' family home had been lost is legit or whether Blanche aims at representing herself as a victim of circumstances entirely groundlessly.

Having lost her job in Laurel, Blanche comes to stay with her sister and brings "some nice clothes to meet all your [Stella's] lovely friends in" (Williams 23). Despite finding herself in a difficult financial situation, Blanche never expresses her intentions

of obtaining a solid job with a steady income. On the contrary, in accordance with the Southern belle myth Williams implements when building up the main protagonist, Blanche heavily relies on men as her saviours. Thus, in Scene Four, she comes up with an idea that she and Stella must get away from New Orleans and tries to send a wire to Shep Huntleigh, with whom Blanche "went out […] at college and wore his pin for a while" (Williams 66). Then in Scene Ten Blanche boasts to Stanley that she has "received a telegram from an old admirer of mine" (Williams 123), thus in her imagination escaping from the reality to the world of strong men wanting her companionship just for the sake of it.

Blanche's final line addressed to the Doctor at the end of the play – "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams 142) – is not just an indication of Blanche's good manners or persevering in her role of a noble aristocrat. "Depending on the kindness of strangers" has become her lifelong necessity, as her family has proved "wholly incapable of giving her the support, shelter or kindness she needs" (Ibell 58).

In regard to what has been said earlier, it is possible to say that Blanche's means of escapism while she is still balancing on the verge of fantasy and reality seems to be reliance on other people's presence in her life: "I want to be *near* you, got to be *with* somebody, I *can't* be *alone*!" (Williams 23). While waiting for the right person to come and save her, though, she does not seem to make any efforts of arranging her own future.

Blanche's eventual loss of touch with reality, however cruel, seems completely justified. Not only is her madness a logical consequence of her attempts to escape the reality, but it is also a defeat against the modern era represented by Stanley and imposed on Blanche, despite her barricade of illusions, in the form of physical violation which brings her down and leads the heroine to the asylum.

3.1.2 Hester Collyer in *The Deep Blue Sea*

Given the diverse social, economic, and political factors which are described in the theoretical part of the current work and which have prompted the circumstances in which the protagonists find themselves, Rattigan implemented his individual archetypical images and characters. To contemplate on the character's actions in response to the reality around them, one needs to refer to Hester, the prominent female character in *The Deep Blue Sea*, and her lover Freddie, the relationship with whom becomes almost deadly for the heroine.

A Royal Air Force pilot in the past, whose life "stopped in 1940" since he left the RAF (Rattigan 51), a basically unemployed drinker in the present, Freddie cannot find his place in peaceful world and idles with his air force friends playing golf at weekends. Freddie's "live for the moment" strategy (wsws.org), which helped him go through the war, can explain Freddie's "immediate response to Hester's awakened passion" ("The Deep Blue Sea: Love and emotional truth in post-war Britain"). It is quite reasonable to conclude that such an attitude can hardly represent the basis for a deeper attachment, thus making the moment of crisis imminent.

Deeply affected by the war, which greatly shaped the context in which the action takes place, Freddie is "emotionally damaged" (wsws.org) and is unable to return the passion Hester almost, in his point of view, imposed upon him: "A clergyman's daughter, living in Oxford, marries the first man who asks her and falls in love with the first man who gives her an eye" (Rattigan 36). From the conversation between Freddie and his friend, Jackie Jackson, in Act Two of the play, the reader learns more about the love-story Freddie was "tangled up" in (Rattigan 36) – a story of a middle-aged woman suddenly discovering an insatiable striving for shattering emotion when she meets a younger man who seems to express some interest in her. Unfortunately for the both protagonists, their idea of love proves to be very different. Freddie has given Hester all he is capable of, which Hester knows but cannot be content with due to her nature. Her feeling devours her completely and requires explicit manifestation of the reciprocal feeling, whereas Freddie, who, according to his own words, "can't be a ruddy Romeo all the time" (Rattigan 36), even though he claims to be in love with Hester, is a less devoted part.

It is remarkable to see the main heroine's transformation within the course of action in the play. Due to her boundless love for Freddie – the feeling in which she lost herself – Hester was practically deprived of all her spiritual strength and was determined to end her suffering once and for all. It could not be a coincidence then that the play is filled with the images of disease and impairment. As well as some physical afflictions named in the play (Mr. Elton's arthritis, infantile paralysis – Doctor Miller's specialisation), Hester's, as well as Freddie's, sore state of mind could be considered an unhealthy condition the protagonists have to endure. Mr. Page tries to drown out his suffering by turning to alcohol; Hester seeks salvation in death. The realisation both characters gradually come to becomes the ultimate solution: in order to live on, they have to go different ways, since, as Freddie succinctly puts it at the end of Act Two, "we're death to each other, you and I" (Rattigan 59). Freddie's decision to leave Hester, and final determination of the latter to let him go becomes the aforementioned point of the woman's spiritual transformation, in which she finds the strength to persevere.

3.2 Sexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Deep Blue Sea*

3.2.1 Sexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

3.2.1.1 Stanley's and Blanche's sexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Even though Tennessee Williams's works usually conjure up in one's mind images of the American South with its sun and heat, it is not the world of joy and celebration of life that they describe (Ibell 11). Themes that recur in the playwright's works are those of sexual desire, longing for lost youth and beauty along with the importance of money. The latter three components, in writer's opinion, formed a "secular trinity", and their loss devastated one's life, which Tennessee so distinctly presented in his art (Ibell 7-8). His plays deal with the wrecked individuals, even though they do contain a promise of hope, as is the case with *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

As it has been emphasised in the theoretical part of the present work, despite a popular interest in pornography and widespread prostitution, sex and sexuality were still not publicly discussed, and the phenomenon of female sexuality, i.e. desire or longing, in particular outside marriage, was considered to be almost a crime in the eyes of society.

The notion of desire seems to stand out in the title of *A Streetcar Named Desire*; however, its nature varies from character to character. Blanche's idea of desire is at odds with that of Stanley's, her brother-in-law, whose attitude to life in general, as well as to its pleasures, sex being one of them, is rather a simplistic one, but the one that proves to be more beneficial in the end. Whereas Blanche's fragile mind cannot endure the hammer of fate she is exposed to, Stanley appears to not only successfully adapt to the changing environment of the modern world, but to a certain extent to also control it. Stanley's rape of Blanche paving Blanche's way to a mental hospital can thus be regarded both as a means of his demonstrating superiority in the Kowalskis' household and at the same time as establishing the rule of the strong in the new social order system.

From the first moment Stanley is introduced in the play, one sees him as someone quite primitive – which is exactly what Blanche will appeal to when trying to convince her sister to see Stanley for what he is:

> **Animal joy** in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. […]
> **He sizes women up at a glance**, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and **determining the way he smiles at them** (Williams 21).

Williams's comment concerning Stanley's attitude to women in the opening scene of *A Streetcar Named Desire* hints at the events about to follow. The only kind of smile that Stanley would address to his sister-in-law within the course of action is a grin, a mimic expression of contempt. It is easily traceable that Stanley grins at Blanche at those moments when he either mocks her or wants to express his superiority as, for instance, in Scene Four, when Stanley overhears Blanche's plead to Stella addressing his "animal's habits" (Williams 72), but pretends he does not know about anything. In Scene Eleven of the play Stanley uses his signature grin immediately after the idea of violating Blanche has come to his mind.

Blanche, on the other hand, being, according to Stella, "tender and trusting" (Williams 111) in her childhood, represents a very sensitive person in her adulthood, too. For her desire is not just a regular pleasure of life, it is her means of escaping from the reality in which she is lonely and not so young anymore. An English teacher at high school in the past, Blanche was dismissed from her job on the grounds of child molesting. The latter fact, however terrifying, accounts for and can be explained by an even deeper psychological issue that the woman has – her ever-growing paranoia of getting old completely alone.

After her husband's, Alan's, tragic suicidal death caused by her unwillingness to face the newly discovered reality of the former being a homosexual, Blanche was looking for solace in her "many intimacies with strangers" – a fact that she eventually admits is true – including a "seventeen-year-old boy", an episode after which she was dismissed from her teaching position on the grounds of being "morally unfit" for it (Williams 118). Thus, Blanche comprehends desire as a cure against loneliness, against her haunting memories of the past and reality of the present.

Williams clearly demonstrates Blanche's fixation with her age within the course of the play: first, when she lies to Mitch that Stella is her older sister: "Just slightly. Less than a year" (Williams 55), then mentioning turning twenty-seven on the day of her birthday (Williams 110). The climax of Blanche's maladjustment to the reality of being a woman over thirty gradually getting farther from her prime years is reached in Scene Nine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, when Mitch suggests he take a look at Blanche in a bare lightbulb's light. Blanche "utters a frightened gasp" at Mitch tearing the paper lantern covering the lightbulb, frantically "crying out" and "covering her face" when the man turns the light on (Williams 117). Blanche's exaggerated preoccupation with her appearance is also demonstrated with her insistently repetitive question of "How do I look?" addressed to different people. By introducing the main female protagonist the way she is in the play, Tennessee Williams in fact reviewed the so-called Southern belle stereotype, which was briefly reviewed earlier in the practical part.

Stella, the younger of the sisters, seemed to adjust to her new living conditions as well as the people – representatives of the "new world" America – around her rather painlessly, whereas Blanche's new state of being left without means to provide for herself made her only want to withdraw from the world around her, which she eventually did by the means of abusing alcohol and even succumbing to madness in the end. Williams purposefully depicts Blanche as "the last representative of the old aristocracy" (Oklopčić) endowing her with the characteristics making it impossible for such a character to survive in the modern world.

3.2.1.2 The elements of non-traditional sexuality in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Tennessee Williams, for whom homosexuality was an essential part of his life, was well aware of the impossibility of crafting an essentially homosexual play. Thus, each of his works directly or indirectly introduces gay characters, but all of them end up "dead or crippled" (Ibell 82). A typical example is Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* with its gay character Alan who, as one learns in Scene Six, commits suicide. Blanche's ignorance towards her young husband's situation is gradually replaced with understanding: "He came to me for help. I didn't know that" (Williams 95), and then – with guilt.

The guilt that Blanche feels towards her deceased husband is her constant companion now. What is more, the memories of Alan are often triggered by various coincidental situations: Stanley's question whether she was once married, a pack of Alan's letters that Stanley notices and snatches from her paper box, a young man that comes to ask for a donation. As Paul Ibell pinpoints in his book *Critical Lives: Tennessee Williams*, Mitch's eventual dismissal of Blanche is in some ways "a mirror image of her treatment of her husband" (57).

From a monologue Blanche utters when on a date with Mitch in Scene Six, one learns details of the heroine's personal life. She fell in love at the age of sixteen with a boy, Alan, who was dedicating her poetry and was very soft and tender in general. Later on, after they had got married, she by chance discovered that he was gay: "By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty – which wasn't empty, but had two people in it… the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years…" (Williams 95). Pretending nothing had happened, all three of them went dancing, however Blanche was not able to tolerate her husband's newly revealed sexuality and confronted the boy. As a result, Alan ran out and committed suicide due to the inability to face the fact that his wife, a woman who, he had hoped, could understand him, rejected him so harshly (Williams 96).

3.2.2 Sexuality in *The Deep Blue Sea*

3.2.2.1 Female sexuality in *The Deep Blue Sea*

The fact of finding the couple of Hester and Freddie in the atmosphere of general deterioration could metaphorically be referred to the interpersonal situation happening between the protagonists: having abandoned her husband to follow a sudden fit of desire, Hester finds herself living, in fact, with a succumbing alcoholic, who cannot implement himself in the peacetime world, and the whole situation is dragging the woman down.

The narration reveals that Hester met Freddie in Sunningdale, at a golf club which she and her husband attended 10 months prior to the situation witnessed by the reader. According to Hester, she "had never paid much attention to him [Freddie]. I didn't think he was even particularly good-looking, and the RAF slang used to irritate me slightly…" (Rattigan 51). It was a matter of a few, as Hester puts it herself, "conventional" phrases, a touch of a hand, a laugh of a "guilty small boy", and she "knew then in that tiny moment when we were laughing together so close that I had no hope. No hope at all" (Rattigan 52). Despite all the numerous logical cons of making such a decision, such as displeasure of the 1950s' society she lives in, difficulties in obtaining divorce, financial problems, unfavourable living conditions, Mrs. Collyer resolves to go after passion. The desire she feels is not a purely physical issue, though. As Hester exclaims in a conversation with her husband, "it's all far too big and confusing to be tied up in such a neat little parcel and labelled lust. Lust isn't the whole of life – and Freddie is, you see, to me" (Rattigan 50). Unfortunately for the main protagonist, the deep blue sea of emotion in her soul is not reciprocated in exactly the same way.

Given the wartime deprivations and the postwar economic situation described in the theoretical part of the present work, it should not come as surprise that one of the key notions of the time was want. On the one hand, there was the post-war want that implied people's wish to meet a certain standard of living, to be sure that there is a future more positive and wealthy for them. On the other hand, there has always been room for another type of want in people's lives: craving, longing, appetite, or desire. Hester Collyer in *The Deep Blue Sea* seems to be combating both, with the latter type devouring her more vigorously, though. It is this invincible desire she feels that forces

her to leave her loving – in his own way – upper-middle class husband in order to pursue a relationship more passionate and ardent with an ex-pilot living in a working-class flat. In order to understand what effect Hester's decision brings about, one needs to take a closer look at what Britain's moral was at the time.

As far as marriage and sexual expression are concerned, the fervency with which the former was guarded and the latter reprehended is unimaginable for the present-day time. Even though the laws addressing divorce were somewhat softened during the 1940s and the divorce rate noticeably escalated when compared to the years prior to the war, divorce itself was still frowned upon in many circles (*History Today*). In addition to becoming target of social disfavour, the woman opting for divorce undertook the risk of being left with no financial means for existence rather than those that she could provide for herself. As the Welfare State model that was created in Britain in the 1940s heavily relied on the traditional notions of family and motherhood, "the allowances for deserted, separated or divorced wives […] were only to be paid if the woman could prove she was the innocent party" (Weeks 235).

Given the morals of the epoch, Hester's choice of leaving her bleak marriage in order to go after feeling makes her pray of social condemnation. When renting a flat in Mrs. Elton's house together with Freddie, Mrs. Collyer becomes known as Mrs. Page, and it is not until the very moment of her attempted suicide that other tenants learn her real name, as well as her being in fact married to another man. Hester's landlady, Mrs. Elton, discloses how distressed Hester was after Mrs. Elton had picked up her ration book and had seen her real name: "Poor lamb – she thought Mr. Elton would turn her out. I found her that evening packing her things" (Rattigan 11). To Hester's advantage, her landlady proved to be an understanding person, who silently guarded her secret and Hester's dignity along with it.

Hester's choice in favour of feeling over duty cannot be accepted by the society she lives in. What is more, the heroine herself considers her actions socially wrong, unworthy of a respectable woman. Anger, hatred and shame are the emotions she admits to be feeling throughout the course of action of *The Deep Blue Sea.* According to the heroine, her upbringing was conventional and she "was brought up to think that in a case of this kind it's more proper for it to be the man who does the loving" (Rattigan 26). The situation in which Hester finds herself – emotionally starved, unable to obtain

the depth of feeling flaming within her from her beloved – results in her lacking respect towards herself, and that fills her with self-hatred. As Doctor Miller notes in Act Three, even the trite "I tried to be good and failed" (Rattigan 80) can be a just excuse in court "if the judge is fair – and not blind with hatred for the criminal – as you are for yourself" (Rattigan 80). Hester's refusal to respect herself culminates in her pleading the Doctor to present her "one extenuating circumstance – one single reason why I should respect myself – even a little" (Rattigan 80). As the play comes to its final, the one sees Hester opt for life, even though she knows it will considerably differ from her previous experience, as she purposefully eradicates the presence of Freddie next to her, even when given a chance to retain him during his visit for a bag on the last pages of the play. The latter fact along with the heroine's earlier open confession about the nature of her love towards Freddie in front of her husband could most probably serve as the basis on which Hester might build the feeling of self-respect for which she yearns so much.

3.2.2.2 Elements of non-traditional sexuality in *The Deep Blue Sea*

As it has already been pinpointed in the theoretical part of the thesis, sexual minorities' love was not only subject to legal persecutions, which were carried out with particular zeal in the 1950s' Britain, but it was also something deviant in the eyes of public (Weeks 238-239). The brightest example in the play that demonstrates how much an abnormality homosexuality was considered back then is perhaps the situation with Dr. Miller, or rather an ex-doctor. According to Mrs. Elton, after the "bad trouble" in which Miller had once been, his name was eliminated from the Medical Register with no hope to obtain his qualification back again.

By all accounts, Miller was a talented doctor, who "was working on some sort of treatment" for infantile paralysis, and the reader can almost hear how Mrs. Elton bitterly proclaims: "There's waste for you if you like" (Rattigan 64). One never learns what exactly it was that Miller did which resulted in such grave consequences for his career. However, Mrs. Elton's insinuations such as the one that "ordinary normal people" can never forgive Miller's mishap, or her remark about "all sorts of people it takes to make a world" followed by an unfinished story about a couple that once lived in flat eleven, suggest that Miller's "crime" might have been him having been involved in a homosexual relationship (Rattigan 64-65).

As it is correctly accentuated in the Terence Rattigan's biography section of the Nick Hern Book's edition of *The Deep Blue* Sea, "the 1950s were a difficult time for homosexual men", which is vividly reflected in the Rattigan's play: a letter Mr. Miller received one day, the case fervently discussed in newspapers, Doctor's honest commentary about his time in jail, a petty position of a bookmaker's clerk he had to accept after the scandal and his voluntary work at hospital at night (Rattigan 64). Public's reluctance to accept people like Miller, that is people unlike them, once announced corrupted, is clearly voiced in Hester's neighbour's, Ann Welch's, repeated statement of Miller not being a doctor, which she keeps asserting even in a situation when a person's life might be at stake (Rattigan 6). Mrs. Welch's narrow-mindedness was typical of the British society of the time – a period well known to the playwright himself, the one in which he placed his protagonists. Intolerant to unfamiliarity, still curing its wounds after World War II, it could be called impaired in regard with its inability to accept the realities of the present-day moment.

4. Conclusion

Taking into consideration the observations pinpointed earlier in this thesis, it is possible to assert that *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Deep Blue Sea* both reflect the specifics of the epoch when they were written as well as the concerns of their authors.

When analysing both dramatic pieces, it was noticed that either *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *The Deep Blue Sea* touch upon the most burning issues of the post-war time, which was taken as a setting for the focal works. The authors managed to depict the post-war atmosphere of poverty and disillusionment, on the one hand, and a general feeling of hope for a better future, on the other hand. Either Williams or Rattigan portrayed the attitudes prevailing in the society of the time towards the gender roles, which stayed highly conventional, and towards the otherness exhibited by sexual minorities. A special focus of attention of the playwrights are undoubtedly the plays' prominent female characters, each representing their particular culture and implementing disparate coping mechanisms in critical life situations: whereas Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* opts to avoid the collapsing of her world by withdrawing from it, Hester finds enough inner strength to combat the hardships of life and her changed circumstances.

Through the opposition of Blanche's world fraught with illusions and self-deceiving lies and the down-to-earthly brutal demeanor of Stanley, Tennessee Williams depicted a fatal clash of the old America and the new, post-war one where noble aristocracy has no more use or even space. Similarly, Terence Rattigan's characters in *The Deep Blue Sea* "sum up to a portrait of the British society of the time" (Billington): a middle-class couple of Peter and Ann Welch, a working-class landlady, upper-class Mr. Collyer, a social outcast in the face of Dr. Miller. The appearance of the latter in the drama is not coincidental: the character, whose implied crime in the play is being a homosexual, embodies Rattigan's own fear of being deprived of his social status should his own sexual orientation become disclosed in real life. Similarly, Williams employs a homosexual character in his play as a means of resonating his crucial theme of suppressed sexuality which he introduces with the character of Blanche. Alan, once Blanche's husband, is discovered with another man and is eventually rejected by his wife, which leads the young man to suicide. The bitterness and dismissal from society in the case of either Dr. Miller in *The Deep Blue Sea* or Alan in *A Streetcar Named Desire*

emphasised by the dramatists were a type of reaction homosexual people were treated with in both Britain and the United States of America in the 1940s – 1950s.

At the time, when women's welfare largely depended on men, seeing a woman struggling to persevere on her own, let alone, pursuing her desires, was rather exceptional. In the case of Hester Collyer in *The Deep Blue Sea* one sees a strong individual who, despite having attempted to commit suicide due to the inequality of feeling in her and Freddie's relationship, manages to find strength to live even after her lover has deserted her. Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, however, proves to lack the inner strength present in Hester and is defeated by the overwhelming scale of her life's tragedy. Having lost her husband, as well as her family heritage, and succumbed to promiscuity and regular drinking, Blanche cannot come to terms with reality and eventually loses touch with it.

A Streetcar Named Desire and *The Deep Blue Sea* were the biggest hits that brought their inventors the laurels for which both dramatists yearned so much. Both playwrights worked hard to become recognised dramatists and dedicated their whole lives to the art of playwriting. The means of plastic theatre introduced by Williams – visual aids and music used for the purposes of conveying the psychological state of individual characters, thus allowing the audience to experience the wretchedness of one's circumstances more closely – along with Rattigan's depth of passion revealed on the pages of his dramas earned fame and fortune for their authors as well as copious revivals for their works.[1] Although the playwrights lived and created more than half a century ago in circumstances considerably different from nowadays, there is a particular matter of interest explored in their dramas that remains topical and thus sparkles interest of the modern audience – human soul – deep, mysterious, containing a lot of dangers unbeknown to their own possessors.

[1] Among the most recent Rattigan's work revivals is that of *The Deep Blue Sea* staged at the National London Theatre in 2016 starring Helen McCrory as Hester Collyer. Tennessee Williams's legacy, in its turn, is commemorated at an annual five-day New Orleans Literary Festival.

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