

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