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**SOCIAL OUTCASTS IN *A STREETCAR NAMED
DESIRE* AND *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* BY
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Resumen

El objetivo principal de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado es analizar a los “outcasts”, los marginados de la sociedad, en dos de las obras más célebres del escritor Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire* y *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Williams fue uno de los pocos autores que dio voz e hizo visibles a estos personajes, que siempre habían estado silenciados, convirtiéndolos en protagonistas de sus obras y dotándoles de profundidad psicológica, así como de cuestionar ciertas normas sociales y clichés. Proponiéndose así denunciar la sociedad de los años 40 y 50 en la que vivía, basada en el sistema patriarcal y la persecución a los homosexuales, mostrándonos el efecto devastador que pueden tener las convenciones sociales en las personas a través de sus personajes, los cuales se veían obligados a mentir y a aparentar, causándoles un gran sufrimiento, para seguir los estereotipos tradicionales de lo que un hombre y una mujer deberían ser, ya que en esa época ser diferente a los demás era realmente peligroso. Esto se conseguirá estudiando especialmente a los personajes femeninos y homosexuales, como Blanche, Maggie o Brick.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this essay I am going to analyse the figure of the social outcasts in two of the most important plays by Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), focusing especially on the women and homosexual characters, relating their most salient features to the historical context of the time. My main aim is to show that Williams's portrayal of outcasts had the purpose of denouncing the society in which he lived, where the strict rules of traditional and Southern patriarchal society that were imposed caused a lot of suffering and pain to these outcasts for being different and considered inferior to the American heterosexual white man.

Regarding the structure of this dissertation, it will be divided into the following sections: first, this introduction, including a brief biographical account on the author of the plays that will be analysed and the autobiographical elements that can be found in them, as well as a note on the historical context of the time of their publication and a brief summary of the plot of both plays. Then, I will elaborate on the textual and ideological analysis, starting with the role of women as outcasts, firstly in *A Streetcar named Desire* and secondly in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, followed by an analysis of homosexuals as outcasts in both plays. Lastly, the essay will end with some conclusions and bibliographical references.

1.1. Biographical note

Thomas Lanier Williams, best known as Tennessee Williams, was born in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, then moved with his family (which included a brother and a sister, Rose) to St Louis, Missouri, living all his life in the South of the United States. He died at the age of 71 in 1983, in New York city. He is one of the most highly recognized and prolific American playwrights of the twentieth century, together with Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller. He

received two Pulitzer Prizes for the plays that will be analysed in this essay, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which suggests how successful and influential these plays were. (Adler 1 - 5)

Williams is one of the authors that have included more autobiographical elements in his plays, which are really important to be familiar with in order to achieve a deeper understanding of his texts. Both plays have in common many references to homosexuality, alcoholism and mental instability, which played an important role in Williams's life. In addition, as he was born and raised in the South, the majority of his plays are set and developed in there and traditional Southern values taught by his mother can be appreciated in both plays, although their decadence is also shown. Furthermore, some characters are closely related to some members of his family, such as Stanley, who might reflect the brutish and violent attitude of his father, and also of a rude Mexican lover that Williams had in his youth; Blanche, with similar features as his mother (a Southern Belle) and his sister Rose (who was mentally ill). In addition, with the exception of Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, characters such as Mae and Big Mama also represent these Southern traditional ladies. Lastly, Allan and Brick can be related to Williams himself because of his homosexuality and the suffering that this sexual condition caused to them because of the society of their times, which forced them to hide it and repress themselves and even internalize homophobia, which was so widespread in those days because of the "Lavender Scare".

Williams presents cases of the alienated, marginal and dysfunctional outcasts of society, misfits who became a favored subject throughout all his works, and whom he termed in an early poem "the strange, the crazed, the queer" (Leverich 419). He showed an empathic connection to them, because he himself can be considered an outcast of his times being a gay writer whose homosexuality had to remain hidden due to commercial and political reasons. In

fact, he stated that “At the age of fourteen I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge” (In Woods and Day, 106).

Because of this empathy and understanding to all outsiders who were marginalised in some way because of sexual, gender or racial issues (women, homosexuals, immigrants), he showed his concern for their suffering in a brilliant way, which according to critics such as Boxill and Leverich contributed to the lasting popularity of Williams's plays. By doing this, Williams's purpose was to denounce the society he lived in, when the communist and homosexual prosecution took place, and to give voice to the typically silenced, to the outcasts.

1.2. Historical context

It is very important to examine the historical context of the works in order to understand profoundly the society in which Williams lived and the two texts that will be examined. Women in the 1950s, around the dates of their publication, were going through a difficult time: this was because women, during the Second World War, entered the labour market because men were fighting in the war and there was no workforce in factories. Therefore, women occupied men's jobs, which caused an expansion at all levels in women's lives, while women became more independent from their husbands.

However, this situation changed radically when the war finished and soldiers returned home, as most women had to abandon their jobs to just look after the house and become what an ideal American woman was expected to be: a good mother and wife. This caused in women an existential crisis; they felt there was something missing in their lives and felt really depressed because they had to abandon their professional aspirations to be completely devoted to their families.

This widespread unhappiness of women was very well explained in *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963) –this work, among others, initiated the Second Feminist Wave. Friedan refers to it as “the problem that has no name”, and consists in a feeling of emptiness, a lack of desire and the need to cry. Despite enjoying material comfort and having a marriage with children, many women lived in misery because they were so weary of their routines, locked at home, and because if they complained about it they were labeled as bad mothers, and were sent to psychiatrists and given tranquilizer pills. In Friedan's work, it is suggested that one of the causes of this depression is that their husbands could not satisfy their increased sexual demands. Women being sexual demanding, as it is the case of Maggie as will be analysed later, caused men to question their own capabilities because they had to satisfy their wives for the first time, which provoked a threat to the stability of the patriarchal system and to men's ego by showing men's insecurities. Insecurities that they had always wanted to hide considering themselves as superior and women as inferior, as “the other”. Furthermore, in those days, the publication of Kinsey's report gave visibility to women's sexuality and established a comparison between the problems of housewives and the ones suffering sexual repression. <<http://culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com.es>>

Concerning homosexuals' situation, in the mid 1950s, there was what is known as the Cold War, between the capitalist block, led by the USA and the communist block led by the Soviet Union. This was not a direct military conflict but an economic, social and ideological one in which they tried to impose their model upon the whole world by waging wars on satellite countries like Korea and Vietnam. In the struggle for this objective, the American government considered all communists a threat to the US and a prosecution or “witch hunt”, known as the second “Red Scare”, started against American citizens who were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers. This historical period was also known as

McCarthyism since Senator Joseph McCarthy was the first to start this process.

The main targets of this prosecution were government employees, who suffered aggressive investigations by several committees. As the government required no evidence for the accusations to be accepted, many accusations were false and thousands of Americans were incriminated. All these people, including many remarkable people such as actors and writers, were included in the black list, condemned to prison sentences or not allowed to continue working or to publish their books. It is important to bear in mind that the power of naming was overwhelming at that time: it did not matter whether you were really a communist or a homosexual or not: if one person thought so and accused you it was enough for people in general and the government in particular to believe that.

Simultaneously, homosexuals, who were already considered to be perverts and a menace to the patriarchal system and family values, were prosecuted too, because they were thought to be more easily blackmailed by communists, because of the secret status of their sexuality, into spying and revealing American government secret information. For this reason, many homosexuals were fired from their jobs and lost their properties or even their lives because some of them committed suicide for this injustice. This was later known as the “Lavender Scare” (Johnson). Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why Williams had to remain silent about his sexual condition in order to continue writing and having his books produced since the fear amongst the population to be in that black list was huge because of this highly homophobic society.

1.3. Summary of the plays

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a play that consists in 20 scenes, the main plot revolves around Blanche duBois, a Southern thirty-year-old lady who is haughty and with delusions of

grandeur, whose beauty and money are in decay and has to confront the urgent need to move to her sister Stella's house in a slum of New Orleans. Stella is married to Stanley, a very virile immigrant man belonging to the working class. Blanche cannot stand the fact that Stella is married to that man because she is full of prejudices and considers immigrant workers inferior. Her arrival in the house causes a lot of trouble in the family and many disputes between her and Stanley. This situation and the fact that she is raped by Stanley will eventually lead to her breaking down and going insane.

On the other hand, the three act play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* deals with Big Daddy and his Southern family. He has a terminal disease and has to appoint an heir to his plantation. Whereas one of his sons has many children, the other one, Brick, married to Maggie has no descendants because he is not able to have intimate relations with his wife, since he is depressed and feels guilty of the death of his close friend Skipper. In order to forget about this fact, together with his problems with his sexual identity, he has become an alcoholic.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS

2.1. Women as outcasts

Women are represented as outcasts in diverse ways in Williams's plays. *A Streetcar Named Desire* shows this through the characters of Stella and Blanche, the classic and traditional kind of women in the 1940s and 1950s, who have to stay at home and be totally devoted to their family and home. They are victims of the patriarchal system, being abused by their husbands but in exchange being provided for and being conformist, convincing themselves that this is the role that belongs to women in marriage, being submissive and subservient to their

husbands. Therefore, women are depicted as the weaker sex, dominated by men: in this case, Stella and Blanche are dominated by Stanley, the typical macho type. Both protagonists are dependent on a supporting man that provides them with money and nourishment, which can be clearly seen when Stanley throws at his wife a piece of meat, this meat being a symbol of the food that Stanley supplies for the family. The notion of women as fragile, even ornamental can also be noticed in Blanche, who is presented as a Southern Belle, with great lyricism in a stage direction at the beginning of the play:

Blanche comes around the corner, currying a valise. She looks at a slip of paper, then at the building, then again at the slip and again at the building. Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than Stella. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth. (*Streetcar* 3)¹

Williams makes clear that she is different from the rest of the people in that cosmopolitan neighborhood by means of this lyrical description that depicts her as the old Southern lady imbued with traditional values who does not fit in that place. Furthermore, with this poetic depiction, Williams tries to cause a positive effect on the reader about Blanche, giving her psychological depth and suggesting that she is somehow better than the environment that surrounds her in New Orleans.

Blanche is desperate to find a financially sound husband who can support her and their family: in this sense, Stanley's friend Mitch becomes her target. Her mental stability seems to depend on being able to fulfill her expectations of how a proper Southern lady should live.

¹ Throughout this essay, the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* will be cited as *Streetcar*.

However, Blanche is different in this aspect because she does not accept Stanley's abuses. Stanley's abusive attitude and his wife Stella's deference can be seen when he hits her while arguing; she prefers to forget about it while Blanche reacts drastically, saying to her sister that she has to abandon him for what he has done. But Stella still keeps defending him, saying to her sister: "Blanche, you saw him at his worst last night" (71) and it can be appreciated how submitted to Stanley she really is. However, the reader does not know if Blanche has this reaction because she wants her sister to leave her husband, because of her prejudices on his being a low class Polish immigrant or because she would not really allow that kind of improper behaviour in any man, even though it was her own husband.

Following with this traditional stereotype of women, in the Old South the ideal woman was perceived as morally pure and innocent. Southern belles were raised as overprotected and chaste daughters who should be faithful, obedient and completely devoted wives and mothers of rich plantation owners. They are expected to fulfill all wishes of the superior male, being attractive and alluring, but at the same time innocent and pure, which places women in a difficult position in many cases. This implies that if a woman is not pure enough before marriage she is no longer valid and will be discarded. This stereotype of women supported by the Old Southern society is clearly reflected in the relationship between Mitch and Blanche, which works perfectly well with Mitch's engagement intentions until Blanche's promiscuous past is revealed by Stanley. Then, he immediately decides to leave the relationship, alleging that she is not pure enough and that he is not able to introduce someone like that to his mother, stating: "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother" (131). The play also shows how women have internalized all these stereotypes of how a respectable woman should behave, as Blanche tries to pretend when she is with Mitch that she is a decent and demure woman, hiding her promiscuity, only giving a kiss to Mitch and saying to him:

“But, honey, you know as well as I do that a single girl, a girl alone in the world, has got to keep a firm hold on her emotions or she'll be lost!, I guess you are used to girls that like to be lost. The kind that get lost immediately, on the first date!” (91) expressing all these conceptions of how a proper lady has to behave. This can also be perceived when she asks Mitch to behave like a gentleman because she has old-fashioned ideals, and explains to her sister that Mitch has only received a goodnight kiss because she wants him to respect her and a man does not respect a woman and loses interest in her if he is able to get things too easily. When she is talking to her sister Stella, it is clear that Mitch is being tricked by Blanche, as she claims: “he thinks I'm sort of—prim and proper, you know! [...] I want to deceive him enough to make him—want me...” (85). However, her deception as well as all her lies will be discovered by Stanley, bringing about the end of her relationship with Mitch, which will lead her more quickly to madness, as will be analysed later.

In addition, Blanche moves in the world of appearances, not only for her deception to Mitch but also for other reasons. First, she is lying and pretending throughout the play in order to seem that she is another person that lives in a different world. This is so because many Williams's characters live in an unreal world, in a past time mostly, because they are afraid of facing reality and unhappiness. In the same way, the fear to see reality as it actually is will produce serious mental disturbances, especially when the loss of economic and social status has to be assimilated, which is the case of Blanche. She is not willing to accept that her life is not the same as it was before when she lived in Belle Reve, the family plantation that she has lost, and her decision to live in a dream world to protect herself from the hard reality will lead her to madness. Blanche refuses to accept that the Old South world has disappeared as well as its traditional values. For a good-mannered lady like Blanche it is so hard to face the fact that she no longer has servants that obey her orders, or gentlemen that court her, and

also that elegance and politeness is not what predominates in society. Furthermore, it is very difficult for her to see that immigrants and workers, those who she disliked in the past, now live with people of her class. Therefore, she does not like Stanley and his friends at all because they are low class immigrants. She also is shocked to realise how small the house is and that her sister does not have a maid.

This refusal to accept the actual reality Blanche lives in and her tendency to hide in the past can be noticed in many examples: she hides her promiscuous past in the Laurel, and conceals her real age to everyone. For this purpose, she asks Mitch to put paper in front of the light so that wrinkles will not be visible with low light: “I bought this adorable little colored paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! Will you, please?” (54). She also meets Mitch in the evening for the same reason. Moreover, she is always dressed in expensive clothes and does not dare to meet anyone without any make up, and she has an arrogant attitude with Stella and Stanley even though she has nowhere else to go, just to pretend she is the upper class lady that she was before. Blanche's deception and pretending are meant to avoid becoming even more an outcast, to feel more accepted in society.

However, this dreamlike world goes a step further and she actually believes her own lies like that of an old lover, Shep, giving her money or that a former admirer that will take her on a cruise to the Caribbean when her relationship with Mitch is over: “I received a telegram from an old admirer of mine. [...] A cruise of the Caribbean on a yacht!” (133). All these hallucinations will lead her to madness and to the asylum eventually, increased by Stanley's attempts to get rid of her from the moment she arrives in his house.

But the reason why Blanche becomes completely insane is that Stanley rapes her near the end of the play. This act can be considered as a symbolic way for Stanley to prove that he is the one who owns power, that he is the dominant one. He needed this victory, to rape

Blanche, in order to vindicate his masculinity because as Blanche is a woman, an outcast in society, he feels justified to do to her whatever he pleases. This is so because in fact both Stanley and Blanche are fighting for Stella and also he feels attacked by Blanche who treats him badly with her arrogant attitude. This serves to demonstrate to what extent women were victims of this patriarchal system as the horrible act of rape is considered as the worst atrocity of men's abusiveness toward women.

Another important problem that these tormented Williams's characters have to face is alcoholism. Several characters, such as Blanche, drink as a way to escape from reality: alcohol is a refuge for characters who do not accept things as they actually are. In this case, Blanche drinks to forget about what her current situation is, that she is totally broke and with her youth and beauty in decay. Obviously, in front of the rest, she pretends not to be an alcoholic to keep up appearances, as she says to Stella and Mitch respectively “Just water, baby, to chase it! Now don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty! [...] I'm not accustomed to having more than one drink” (9, 53).

In spite of the fact that the characterization of women as outcasts in this play follows very traditional and patriarchal stereotypes, it draws attention to what both female characters feel because they express their sexual desire towards Stanley, feeling attracted to him. This fact may be considered as an act of rebellion of both sisters, becoming even more outcast for being different, since, traditionally, women are the ones who are eroticized and objectified and men are the ones who express their sexual desire toward them. This can be noticed in the following dialogue between the sisters: Stella — “But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant”, to what her sister replies: “What you are talking about is brutal desire — just — Desire!— the name of

that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another.[...] This is how I look at it. A man like that is someone to go out with — once — twice — three times when the devil is in you. But live with? Have a child by?” (72-73). Here sexual desire is explicitly referred to and Blanche admits that she feels attracted to Stanley due to his masculine bravery and that having a sexual fantasy with him would be fine, but not marrying and having a child with such a rude specimen of nature, who is even compared to a wild animal and related to forces of nature.

However, Blanche realises that Stella has to accept all his abuses, violence and hostility in order to be protected and have a husband and a father for her baby because she knows that becoming a single mother would be much more complicated. This can be further appreciated when Blanche's rape occurs and she has to decide whether she believes Stanley or her sister as she states: “I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley” (144) and following the advice of her friend Eunice: “Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on” (144), she decides to believe Stanley's lie in order to avoid the poverty and misery that life would offer her if she were a single mother. Needless to say, being a single mother implied earning a very bad reputation in those days, and she would have been much more excluded from society without her husband's financial support.

Regarding the issue of women as outcasts in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, a significant difference in the portrayal of women can be noticed in the character of Maggie. This is due to the fact that although Big Mama and Mae are depicted with the traditional role of women, devoted wives and mothers, Maggie is represented as a new type of woman, independent, active and sexually demanding, features traditionally associated to men.

She is firstly described by her voice: “Margaret's voice is both rapid and drawling. In

her long speeches she has the vocal tricks of a priest delivering a liturgical chant, the lines are almost sung, always continuing a little beyond her breath so she has to gasp for another. Sometimes she intersperses the lines with a little wordless singing, such as "Da-da-daaaa", (*Cat* 3)² showing that she is a very active woman, she is moving all the time, she cannot be still and that she is nervous and even anxious because she has to gasp, becoming breathless because of her anxiety. This anxiety comes from the fact that she is sexually demanding because her husband Brick shows to her nothing but indifference.

Williams also describes her voice as having “range, and music; sometimes it drops low as a boy's and you have a sudden image of her playing boy's games as a child” (5). The musicality in her voice reinforces her sensuality, but what is more remarkable is that she is directly compared to a boy, meaning that she is an active woman, full of energy and independent, which are typically male characteristics. However, what is more shocking is that although she is compared to a boy, she is also depicted as a very feminine woman, who is worried about her physical appearance and about being sexually appealing. This can be easily noticed because she looks at herself in a mirror several times, mirrors being a very important prop in the play. She is always showing off and primping herself in order to seduce Brick, telling him that Big Daddy has a “leech” on her and that a bachelor was after her. Therefore with this girly/boyish dichotomy that Maggie embodies, the play shows that no stereotypes can be applied to Maggie, that she is different, a new kind of woman.

In addition, an interesting dichotomy in Maggie's personality can be related to mirrors: the fact that she is constantly looking at her reflection on the mirror is also associated with the idea that she is concerned about her own identity. When she is in front of the mirror she asks herself “who are you?” (22) because she realises how much she is pretending by using her appearance and how different she is in front of people, when she is very ironical and cynical,

² From now on, the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* will be referred as *Cat*.

assertive and even aggressive. But actually, when she is alone, she is a woman that just looks for her husband's affection and feels frustrated and with a “bitchy” humour because she is not able to achieve it because he only rejects her. This split personality may be explained because she feels she does not belong to that group of people who are from an upper class, since she comes from a lower one.

Furthermore, it is important to establish a comparison between Maggie and her husband Brick, since there is a reversal of traditional gender roles, which contributes to the portrayal of both characters as social outcasts for being different to the traditional stereotypes of men and women (Kundert-Gibbs 245-46). This is because whereas Maggie is active, sexually demanding and full of energy, Brick is described as passive, showing indifference, especially to Maggie and everything that she says to him: “A tone of politely feigned interest, masking indifference, or worse, is characteristic of his speech with Margaret” (*Cat* 3). He seems detached from the rest of the world: “he has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle” (4), being stuck, hiding several times in the bathroom or in the balcony, and not being always visible to avoid confronting his family. He is inactive for his behaviour and also physically, being slow and hidden many times, because he is injured and has to move with a crutch, an object that metaphorically stands for his passivity. This can also be clearly noticed because Maggie is always overheated, sweating because of her activity and Brick is cold all the time for his passivity. Consequently, with these subverted roles Maggie becomes the “man” in the relationship instead of Brick.

Another important issue regarding Maggie as an outcast is the fact that she comes from the working class, unlike Brick and all his family, who belong to a high class because Big Daddy is the owner of a plantation. Big Daddy has to choose the heir for his plantation

since he suffers a terminal disease and his favourite son is Brick but the problem is that his son and Maggie have no children. Maggie, whose basic difference with Mae, who is considered “a monster of fertility” by her and a “good-breeder” by Big Daddy with five children and another on the way, is that she is childless and she is not the traditional mother of a big family as her sister-in-law is. This causes her many problems because an heir is necessary in order to inherit Big Daddy's plantations, so she will try to have sexual intercourse with her husband to achieve that much desired pregnancy because she does not want to lose her current privileged position and go back to the working class because of her childless condition.

Nevertheless, she not only cares about the money, she gives priority to having a good relationship with Brick and have a normal marriage with children, because she really needs affection and an intimate relation with her husband because she loves him deeply. Therefore, having this baby would have two objectives, the sentimental and the economic one. In this sense, she is more concerned for the fact that her husband might end up without his father's inheritance just for not having a descendant, which she considers highly unfair, and for the sentimental aspect that this money represents than for the mere economic reason.

Furthermore, being childless is extremely hard for her because she feels the social pressure of having children and being the traditional and stereotypical woman like Mae and even her marriage, her fertility and her status as a wife and woman are put into question, a fact that will also be determining in her condition as a social outcast. As she complains: “It goes on all the time, along with constant little remarks and innuendoes about the fact that you and I have not produced any children, are totally childless and therefore totally useless!” (4). In addition, Big Mama blames her for not having children and for the alcohol addiction of her son: “Fair or not fair I want to ask you a question, one question—D'you make Brick happy in

bed?" , "Something's not right! You're childless and my son drinks!" (21), when the real fault is Brick's, who refuses to have sexual relationships with Maggie. This can be explained because in a patriarchal society if something goes wrong in the marriage it is always the woman's fault because they are supposed to obey and please their husbands with anything they want. Maggie protests about this replying: "Why don't you ask if he makes me happy in bed?" [...] That's-not-fair..." (21) showing that she finds this situation highly unfair.

To finish with the analysis of Maggie it is important to establish some connections between her and other characters in these plays. On the one hand, she is compared with Big Daddy because of their similarities. Both characters are defenders of life and have endured the hard situation of poverty in the past and currently they live at ease, Big Daddy because of his plantations and Maggie thanks to her marriage with Brick, which saved her from that precarious situation of the past and which she is not willing to fall into again. Furthermore, they have no problem in accepting reality as it is and do not live entrenched in the past as most of Williams's characters. On the other hand, she can be set in opposition to Stella, due to the fact that, whereas Stella is totally passive, Maggie is unable to stay quiet and her constant nervousness makes her resemble a cat on a hot tin roof. Furthermore, Stella has gone from living comfortably in the plantation of Belle Reve to live in a slum in wretched conditions while Maggie has the opposite trajectory.

It also calls the reader's attention the fact that Maggie is a special, unique character. This is because she is completely different from the rest of Williams's characters since, although she faces a very negative family environment because of many factors such as the alcoholism of her husband and his sexual identity doubts, the inheritance issue and being the target of Big Mama's criticism, with a lot of pressure, she manages to handle it and she stays optimistic without getting depressed, which would have happened to other Williams's

characters such as Blanche or Brick. Instead of breaking down she keeps fighting at all time to prove to every member of Brick's family that she is right. Maggie is certain that she will win since her strength indicates so as she claims: “But one thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win!” (11) and this will mean bringing Brick round to her point of view as he stands for the weak part of the relationship. Once this balance is achieved, she will conceive the human being that will symbolise her triumph over death and poverty since a child with Brick will guarantee her position forever.

Concluding Maggie's analysis, it is also significant to draw attention to the end of the play and Maggie's performance. She takes a very important decision: to tell a lie and announce to the Pollits that she is pregnant: “Announcement of life beginning! A child is coming, sired by Brick, and out of Maggie the Cat! I have Brick's child in my body, an' that's my birthday present to Big Daddy on this birthday!” (114). She decides to tell them this lie in order to stop being an outcast, because if she is pregnant this means all her problems will disappear. The criticisms from Big Mama and Mae will stop because she proves that she is “a real woman” that is able to bring a child into the world and she and Brick will receive the inheritance because they will have a legitimate heir at last.

2.2. Homosexuals as outcasts

Regarding the analysis of homosexuals as outcasts, the characters of Brick and Allan will be studied. Brick for having sexual identity doubts and Allan for being clearly homosexual. Firstly, it is relevant to notice how both characters are described. Allan is depicted as “a boy” as can be appreciated when Blanche answers Stanley about her past and says anxiously: “The boy — the boy died” (*Streetcar* 25) referring to Allan. Allan is not a man or a husband, he is just a boy and in 1947 a widow did not refer to her dead husband as a boy. This might mean

that the word “boy” is used because he was very young when he died, he was just a teenager and was not completely developed or more likely because the intention was to express that he was less than a man because of his sexual condition. This helps to establish the comparison that Williams wants to express between Stanley, “the man”, “the macho” and Allan “the boy”, the homosexual.

Allan is also defined by Blanche in the following way: “There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's” (102), reinforcing this idea of him being different and with some clearly feminine traits such as being soft and tender; and by Stella: “This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate” (110). In this last quotation, Stella shows her homophobic tendencies, which were so generalized in those days, calling him a degenerate only for his sexual condition.

Other resources to express this comparison between both characters occur when Blanche says about her husband: “Poems a dead boy wrote. [...] I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was [...]” (38), making clear that he was a vulnerable person, and that he wrote poetry too. Being a vulnerable person who writes poems is evidently opposed to Stanley's brutal and virile strength. It is also remarkable how Williams relates poets and creative, artistic characters with extravagant, gay men or strange women like Allan and Blanche respectively, as is clearly reflected in this play.

The character of Allan has a tragic ending: Blanche discovers him having an affair with an older male friend of his in their room and as a result Allan ends up committing suicide. This happens because of the pressure of the homophobic society and what triggers this fatal outcome happens when Blanche faces him about his homosexuality saying to Allan: “You disgust me” (103). At that time, it was better to be dead than to recognise in public that you were homosexual because of the gay prosecution.

In contrast to the effeminate description of Allan, Brick is defined as the prototype of masculinity. He is a sports man with an athletic body, who played in a sports team called Dixie Stars and has later become a sports commentator. Furthermore, he is young with a “virile beauty”, belongs to a rich Southern family and is married to a beautiful lady who adores him. This is why, for the reader, he is the embodiment of the successful, ideal American man, who has everything that all men would long for. This is why the fact that he has sexual identity doubts is so shocking and merely posing the possibility that Brick is gay was considered subversive at that time, as Shackelford explains: “With Brick, Williams subverts traditional representations of the male and places homosexual desire, and the possibility of Brick's being an unresolved gay man, before the audience as central concerns” (73); especially because he has all the prototypically masculine virtues such as comradeship with other masculine men, drinking alcohol frequently, sexual skills with women (apparently at least), emotional control and athletic success (Shackelford 75). This can also be considered subversive because Williams calls into question the traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity as well as heterosexuality and homosexuality, blurring their distinction, making clear that they are merely constructed norms, not realities. Moreover, Brick's characterization might make heterosexual men question their own assured sexual identity (Adler 94).

In addition, Brick is clearly eroticized as can be appreciated when he comes out of the shower: “drying his hair with a towel [...] slim and firm as a boy [...] he has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment” (*Cat* 4). He appears wearing a dressing gown, half-naked, showing his good physical condition, and with silk pyjamas later. Furthermore, Maggie is constantly expressing her desire for him, making reference to his good looks: “I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see you! Why don't you get ugly, Brick, why don't you please get fat or ugly or something so I could stand it?” (16) making

obvious that she is really frustrated because she is not able to achieve Brick's affection, especially because he is so good-looking.

Therefore, Brick is objectified by Maggie and he is the one who is gazed at. This was also really surprising in those days because traditionally, as Mulvey points out, all authors' works focus on the subjectivity of men and the male's gaze on the female body (426). On the contrary, in this play, Maggie's attraction to Brick's body and her desire for sexual fulfillment with her husband place the male body before the audience's gaze (Shackelford 72).³ As a character who lacks a well-defined, firm heterosexual identity, he is relegated to the object position traditionally allotted to women. This, together with his passive and cold attitude contrasting with Maggie, who is all the time active and full of energy, reinforces their reversed genre roles. Consequently, because of all these facts, Brick is a social outcast who at the beginning embodies the ideal virile man and ends up being the antithesis of American masculinity.

Another very important issue related to Brick is his alcoholism. He is permanently holding a glass of liquor in his hand. Brick, like many other Williams's characters, drinks to forget about his unhappiness and his impossibility of facing reality. In this case, Brick drinks to forget about both the death of his best friend, Skipper, who committed suicide, and the doubts about his own sexuality triggered by Skipper's confession. Brick and Skipper had a very close relationship, as Brick describes it: "Skipper and me had a clean, true thing between us!--had a clean friendship" (*Cat* 64), he is really upset with society because people could not understand that two men were intimate friends, because they think they are something else

³ In addition, this male objectification has been considered related to gay subjectivity by some critics like Shackelford, who states: "an appreciation of masculine beauty is often associated with gay subjectivity (gay subjects gaze upon male objects)" (73). Maggie creates the effect of eroticizing Brick, with her constant references to his attractiveness, to all types of audience: male or female and heterosexual or homosexual as well. Moreover, Shackelford adds that Williams, as a homosexual writer, projects his own desire onto Maggie, so that her gaze becomes his own gaze and that of the gay audience (72).

because that kind of relationship is not normal as Brick wonders: “Why can't exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship! between two men be respected as something clean and decent without being thought of as—” (64).

However, his sincere friendship with Skipper means much more than his marriage to Maggie and he has some doubts about his feelings towards him because of this. Skipper, thanks to the insistence of Maggie, believed that he was homosexual and decided to tell Brick about his feelings on the phone but Brick hang up because he was not ready to answer him, which later will cause him a lot of remorse. As a result, Skipper commits suicide because of his sexual condition and because Brick rejected him, leaving him alone. Skipper, as well as Allan, prefers to be dead rather than recognise in society that he is a homosexual, which is related to the fear homosexuals had at that time due to the “Lavender Scare”.

Brick, unlike his friend Skipper, is unable to show his feelings and express his deep emotional connection with his lost friend and the doubts he feels about it. He is so scared not because of his likely homosexual condition but because if his sexuality was discovered it would involve a social scandal, even though it was not proven, because of all social norms and conventions, which are the ones who destroy Williams's characters. Furthermore, in his mind the only acceptable behaviour is the heterosexual one and for a man of his status it is impossible to accept his being homosexual. In fact, he is even homophobic and labels homosexuals as degenerates and refers to gay men such as Straw and Ochello as “A couple of fucking sissies, Queers...”, (63). According to Shackelford, Brick refers to them in this way because denying their masculinity enables him to reassert his own masculinity (76). His homophobia is also appreciated when Big Daddy suggests that Brick might be gay he answers: “You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men?” (*Cat* 63) relating homosexuality to something dirty.

Another important concept in the analysis of Brick is “mendacity”. For Brick, this term comes up because of society: he has to conceal and repress his sexual doubts, not to become a social outcast; and the reason for his sadness because he just cannot explain that Skipper was not like any other friend because that would cause a scandal. Therefore, he must lie to everyone and pretend that he and Maggie enjoy a happy marriage, when the truth is that he rejects her because he considers her guilty of Skipper's death, in order to keep up appearances. So this is another reason why he has to drink, to “kill his disgust” because of mendacity, the system they have to live in, and stay away from it and from “lying and liars”.

Concerning the connections with the gay prosecution in the cold war and how homosexuals were investigated, Brick is also spied and controlled by other members of the family. These people are, Gooper and Mae who, as Margaret ironically says: “Sister woman! your talents are wasted as a housewife and mother, you really ought to be with the FBI” (35), they resemble The House Committee of American Activities. Furthermore, when Big Daddy is talking to his son, Mae is listening to them and Big Daddy complains: “I want some privacy here, while I'm having a confidential talk with my son Brick ... Because I hate eavesdroppers, I don't like any kind of sneakin' an' spyin'. [...] the walls have ears in this place” (41-43).

Lastly, it is relevant to establish a parallelism between two Williams's characters who have very similar characteristics as outcasts. These characters are Blanche and Brick: both of them take refuge in alcohol to forget reality and how unhappy they are. They are unable to face reality and with the help of alcohol they live in the past. In the same way, the cause of their sorrow is the same: the loss of a loved one because they were homosexuals (Allan and Skipper) and the guilt they suffer because neither Blanche nor Brick did anything to support them, due to their homophobia, eventually triggering their suicides.

3. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude this dissertation, it has been shown that Williams wanted to denounce the society he lived in and how social norms and conventions can cause the destruction of someone's life just for being different from the rest. Furthermore, he also puts into question American views of masculinity and homosexuality implying that the concepts of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality are just constructed norms by society, not realities. The author carries out all this thanks to some of his most remarkable characters such as Blanche, Maggie and Brick. On the one hand, with Blanche and Maggie, he condemns the fact that women were social outcasts because they were considered inferior to men and relegated to a secondary place in the patriarchal system. In addition, it can be clearly appreciated how stereotypes are called into question with these female characters, because both of them show sexual desire, especially Maggie who is also active and full of energy, which are typical male features. On the other hand, with Allan and Brick he denounces the hard situation that homosexuals like himself had to bear because of the "Lavender Scare" of those days, in which they were prosecuted. Moreover, Brick, who apparently embodies the prototype of masculinity, puts into question the constructed concept of virility, due to his sexual identity doubts. In order to avoid being labeled as outcasts these characters are compelled to lie and pretend being someone different from whom they actually are, which will cause them a lot of torment and suffering, and even death to weaker characters such as Allan and Skipper. Therefore, Williams, with these brilliant plays, tries to explain what he himself said in an interview, "Society rapes the individual" (in Devlin 146).

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