"It's just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire":
Implied Homosexuality and the Representation of the Southern Plantation
in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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**Introduction**

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), we can find Tennessee Williams’s clear emphasis on setting throughout the play, and one central location in particular: "the bed-sitting-room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta" (15). Though the play’s time frame is described in a very simple and ambiguous way as "... precisely the time of its performance" (15), the description of the bedroom and the plantation is very detailed and emphatic, for example, in his "NOTES FOR THE DESIGNER" (15-6). Such prominent descriptions about the place include its historical heritage, the furniture, the properties, the color tone, and even a description of how we (the viewers and the text readers) are supposed to feel.

Regardless of Williams’s obvious emphasis on the place of the main setting, it has received surprisingly little attention. Michael P. Bibler also remarks that "Despite all the criticism and response provoked by Cat's textual slipperiness, sexy content, and general popularity, no one has bothered to address the play’s plantation setting in detail" (382). In considering the mystery of Brick’s ambiguous homosexuality, however, I will also insist on the importance of Southern plantation home and the bedroom, because we can find Williams’s various attempts to depict homosexual identity indirectly but emphatically through the dramatic and textual effects in the representation of Brick’s bedroom and plantation home. As John M. Clum concludes in general, "Tennessee Williams . . . paradoxically managed in his most successful work to make homosexuality an insistent presence while keeping it an absence" (122). Thus, we can clearly say that Williams’s emphasis on the representation of the Southern plantation home and the bedroom is a skillful and effective strategy depicting homosexual identity in the homophobic society and theatre of the Cold War period.

**I. The Southern Gentlemen and Implied Homosexuality on the Plantation**

First, it is necessary to analyze the play’s implications of homosexuality in relation to the cultural aspects of the Southern plantation. Michael P. Bibler, a representative critic in this area, has investigated Brick’s mysterious homosexuality by focusing on the masculine economics and the cultural system of the Southern plantation, but I will insist that Brick’s Southern gentleman heritage inherent in the plantation setting, particularly his qualities as a Southern aristocrat and a Cavalier in the Old South, functions as an effective indirect representation of male homosexuality.

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1 Williams, Tennessee, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. 1955, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams* vol. 3. New York: New Directions, 1971. 1-215. All quotations from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are from this edition and are indicated by page numbers in parentheses. Regarding Act Three, I chose the original version over the revised version in order to examine Williams’s original intentions in suggesting Brick’s homosexuality.

2 Some material in Section I was presented in *Kyushu American Literature* in 2011, but the argument has been revised and expanded greatly to focus on a new topic, the relation between implied homosexuality and the representation of the Southern plantation.

3 Bibler’s research focus in this play is to "offer clear examples of how white male homoeroticism and homosexuality are actually consistent with the structure of the plantation as long as the patriarchal hyper-valuation of white masculinity remains intact" (382).
As Dean Shackelford indicates, "Brick . . . is the quintessental male ideal in American culture" (109), and he is a rich, good-looking muscular ex-football star, symbolizing "the all-American hero" (Arrell 67). However, masculine Brick also has things in common with Williams’s delicate female characters, such as Laura in The Glass Menagerie and Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire. As Laura did, he evades his job, shuts himself away from society, and confines himself in the bedroom. He also excuses himself for his parasite situation by saying “I’m crippled” (70). Brick is "alcoholic" (98) and suffering from guilt for the suicide of his friend Skipper, a suspected homosexual, and so he reminds us of Blanche, who suffers her guilt after her homosexual husband’s suicide. He abandons his familial and social responsibilities as a breadwinner, and greatly depends on his family, leading to the impression that hyper-masculine Brick also displays certain aspects of gender-reversal, at times becoming an almost effeminate figure. Such effeminacy can be understood as an effective implication of homosexuality on the stage, as John M. Clum has pointed out: "On the [repressive] American or British stage [before the 60s] . . . homosexual characters and relationships could be inferred from the behavior of the actors, though it could not be discussed openly" (77). Accordingly, "effeminacy" and "sensitivity" (77) can be important visual signs of stereotypical homosexuality, suggesting Brick’s implied homosexuality.

Brick’s effeminacy and dependence is exaggerated by his position as a Southern aristocrat on the plantation. As Thomas E. Porter indicates, "Life on the plantation is easy and gay, a round of lawn parties, dress balls and visiting . . ." (157), and such an easy-going aristocratic life is epitomized by the Pollitt family of this play dressing up and getting together for the patriarch Big Daddy’s birthday party. Specifically, Brick “. . . turned down wonderful offers of jobs in order to keep on bein’ football heroes” (58) and now, he is jobless and completely depends on Big Daddy and his expensive alcohol, “Echo Spring” (53). Thus, compared to Big Daddy, a rude social climber who “hasn’t turned gentleman farmer . . . [and] is still a Mississippi redneck” (53) and first son Gooper, a pragmatic aggressive lawyer, it is clear that Brick is the most and indeed the only male character exemplified as a decadent Southern aristocrat in his family. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has suggested that the "aristocratic-style, ascriptively feminine, ‘tragic,’ and affluent or apolitical male homosexual stereotype . . ." (217) can be a mark of homosexuality, although it is kept secret, and we can say that Brick’s qualities and his status as a Southern aristocrat clearly evoke such a reaction.

Thomas E. Porter provides a useful description of the plantation myth: “The owners of the big house are aristocrats with the appropriate chivalric virtues and patriarch vices. The master is autocratic, prideful, gallant . . .” (157). Obviously, Brick is an autocratic, prideful husband, and a gallant ‘conquering [Football] hero’ (152) as well as the next heir of the rich plantation, so we can say that the Southern aristocratic Brick also can qualify as a Cavalier4 of the Old South, and such a Cavalier image can also be understood as an implication of Brick’s homosexuality in this play.

Cavalier loyalties, in the original sense of intimate male-male bonds, are shown in the devoted relationship of the previous plantation owners, who are supposed to be a homosexual couple bound by “tenderness” (15). As Big Daddy explains, “When Jack Straw died—why, old Peter Occhello quit eatin’ like a dog does when its master’s dead, and died, too!” (117), and their strong emotional relation suggests "the mythical Cavalier’s loyalty, symbolizing deadly devotion to the master Straw by the knight Occhello, (because his status as a ‘bachelor’ (15) hints at the archaic meaning of a knight as well as an unmarried man)”5 (Okaura 60). Such a relation also exists between Brick and Skipper, and it is represented as "the deadly devotion of the bachelor/knight Skipper to the master Brick, suggesting that Skipper’s suicide is designed to protect Brick, to deny ultimately ‘the dirty, false idea’ (123) of his unconscious desire, or if considered from the opposite point of view, it synchronizes with Brick, who seems to be a mourning master, alcoholic after his knight Skipper’s suicide” (Okaura 60).

Actually, the male bonding between Skipper and Brick is much idealized as part of the Cavalier myth, and the

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4 The Cavalier originally derived from “the elements of English squirarchy, feudalism, and aristocracy,” and “began to emerge as a mythic character in plantation novels” (Durant 1131), leading to the idealized image of Southern chivalry in the United States.

5 See bachelor in OED (second edition). Even if the meaning of knight is archaic, it is apropos for considering the mythical loyalties of Cavaliers beyond time.
"evil" aspects such as homosexual desire are excluded, as would be appropriate for a play in the 50s. Maggie says their relation is like the "beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends" (57). Brick also emphasizes it was "a clean friendship" (120), although the emphasis itself makes us wonder why such a cleanliness of friendship needs to be insisted on. According to Eve Sedgwick, however, such strong homosocial relationships are essentially related to unconscious homosexual desire, and she argues: there is "... the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted" (1-2). Her argument is evidently confirmed in the relation between Brick and Skipper, as suggested by Maggie’s remark about Skipper’s "unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure between you two! [Brick and Skipper]" (58).

Represented by Brick’s intense homophobia, the fear of such "continuum between homosocial and homosexual" is especially prominent for the present-day Cavalier, Brick, who always respects male homosocial bonds in football games and fraternities, as compared to Big Daddy, who abuses these bonds: "Clubs!—Elks! Masons! Rotary!—crap!" (108), and Gooper, who is indifferent to emotional male bonds. As David Savran also indicates, "Homosexuality and homosociality are no longer represented as unmediated opposites but as fluid and complicitous states of desire" (101, 1992), and his claim is supported in the case of Brick, who is suffering from an inescapable hidden homosexual desire on the stage. As Thomas E. Porter points out, "The Southerner had a sense of identification with a given segment of the earth, of belonging on the ancestral estate..." (157), and thus Brick is clearly depicted as such a character influenced by the ancestral estate, the Southern plantation. Surprisingly, his Southern aristocratic background is associated with effeminacy and Cavalier loyalty with homosexual desire, creating a homosexual subtext, even without his coming-out.

II. Bedroom, a closet to secure homosexuality

It is also necessary to analyze the implications of Brick’s homosexuality by focusing on the description of the bedroom occupied by Brick and Maggie. From the opening, we consistently see an impressive double bed on the stage, and Williams also explains that "... the surface... should be slightly raked to make figures on it seen more easily..." (16). So, obviously, this most intimate space is considered worthy of the audience’s attention, and it offers a view of the private sexual activities of Brick and Maggie.

As represented by Big Mama’s impressive words; "—When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!" (47-48), the double bed symbolizes the couple’s sexual problem, Brick’s sustained rejection of his wife Maggie, and the associated issue of the lack of future heir of the plantation. In considering Brick’s lack of masculine desire and implied homosexuality, Douglas Arrell’s psychoanalytic point of view is helpful; "In fifties Freudianism, homosexual men have failed to pass through the oedipal phase and so remain perpetual children; terms like ‘arrested development’ and ‘immaturity’ can be code words for homosexuality in this period" (57).

In fact, Brick’s immaturity is prominent in his actions such as avoiding a steady job and his childish jumping hurdles at midnight. We should also notice that his lack of sexual desire for women, including his seductive wife, can be understood as his immaturity, suggesting Brick’s fear of being a mature male and father, thus making his sexual orientation suspect. Moreover, such an image is exaggerated by Big Mama’s over-maternal concern. She treats Brick like a child, for instance, saying, "you’re my bad little boy. Give Big Mama a kiss..." (66), suggesting his homosexuality may have derived from a mother obsessed with her son, if we accept the 50s thinking about origins of gay tendencies. Indeed, Brick’s bed is a reflection of the former owners, a homosexual couple, as he indicates with disgust: "... that pair of old sisters slept in a double bed where both of ’em died!" (115). Thus, the double bed visually symbolizes the connection between the homosexual former plantation owners and the immature present owner Brick, a suspected homosexual.

In Williams’s detailed representation of the bedroom, the readers of the plays—as opposed to viewers—can also find various metaphors of homosexuality, while the double bed offers visual implications for audiences.

It is Victorian with a touch of the Far East. It hasn’t changed much since it was occupied by the original owners of the place, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a
pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon. This may be irrelevant or unnecessary, but I once saw a reproduction of a faded photograph of the verandah of Robert Louis Stevenson’s home on that Samoan Island. . . . (15)

Interestingly, Williams explains in "NOTES FOR THE DESIGNER" (15-6) that there is "a touch of the Far East" in the bedroom, "Robert Louis Stevenson’s home on that Samoan Island". In 1928, the anthropologist Margaret Mead first introduced the free sexual lives of people living in Samoa, including homosexuality⁶. Thus, her famous book Coming of Age in Samoa must have evoked an image of heaven-like place for homosexuals in the homophobic American society of the 50s. Mead herself was suspected to be a homosexual; Nancy Lutkehaus suggests that Mead may have had "sexual relationships with Ruth Benedict and other women" (79).

Robert Louis Stevenson might even be seen as a trope for homosexuality, if we consider his famous novel, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Queer Theory finds that this novel is "... an exemplary text that demonstrates how the Gothic theme of the double works through what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls ‘homosexual panic’, where the desire of men for men is a possible meaning at once invited but also brutally suppressed by a text" (Luckhurst xxvi). Such a reading corresponds with the inner conflict of Brick, who seems to be suffering between his homophobia and hidden homosexual desire for Skipper.

In Williams’s description of the bedroom, we can also find what Judith J. Thompson calls "symbols of transcendence"⁷, which remain invisible but are "beyond the time and space of the particular dramatic situation of the play" (142), in particular the ex-owners’ spirits haunting the bedroom. After the plantation became Big Daddy’s, "the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger!" (77), but the bedroom is still home to the ex-owners’ spirits, which evoke "some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon" (15). Such eternal tenderness clearly corresponds to the close friendship between Skipper and Brick, typified by pure and mythical "Greek legends" (57) or Cavalier loyalties in the Old South. Thus, Brick’s present desperate situation, confinement in the bedroom, can be reappraised as his being haunted by Skipper’s ghost-like tender spirit. As John M. Clum points out, "the positive image the love of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello provides is presented only in the stage directions. . . ." (127). Thus, it is clear that the bedroom of the Southern plantation home is full of an invisible tenderness of homosexual spirits, and it functions as a closet, a safe place to preserve homosexual mythical love eternally. In the bedroom, various symbols and metaphors implying homosexuality are mixed together to create a subtle but inescapable homosexual atmosphere. As a result, the bedroom tenderly envelops the present occupant Brick, who is physically immobilized with a broken leg, and exaggerates his image as a homosexual kept in the "closet."

III. Visual effect of confinement in the bedroom

Alice Griffin indicates that "The injury to Brick . . . is also a theatrical device to confine all of the action to a single setting" (147), and accordingly, we can see various people continually enter Brick’s bedroom for celebration of Big Daddy’s 65th birthday. However, it also succeeds in creating a negative visual image/impact for the bedroom, as a prison-like place for Brick, by emphasizing his state of confinement and surveillance as a suspected or hidden homosexual.

As Big Daddy says to Mae: "You listen at night like a couple of rotten peekhole spies. . . ." (82), Gooper and Mae are always checking on what’s happening in Brick and Maggie’s bedroom. Their five noisy children also frequently intrude into the bedroom without knocking. Big Mama often bursts into the bedroom, and interferes in the couple’s sex life, for example by saying to Maggie: "D’you make Brick happy in bed?" (47). Even Reverend Tooker, a party guest, surveys the situation in the bedroom intently, so that Big Daddy says sarcastically "What’re you lookin’ for, Preacher?" (116).

Originally, people’s continuous interests in the bedroom
are related to their disputes about the inheritance. Brick’s sexuality, whether he is a fertile heterosexual who will create a future heir or an ineffectual homosexual, directly relates to their disadvantage or advantage in the inheritance of the plantation. However, such frequent intrusions also effectively visualize social interventions in individual sexuality; in other words, they constitute attempts at heterosexual compulsion in the conservative Cold War period. As a result, we can say that the continual intrusion into the bedroom by the Pollitt family symbolizes family intervention, and the lawyer Gooper and Reverend Tooker’s intrusions also can be understood as legal and religious interventions in Brick’s suspected homosexuality.

In fact, homosexuals were treated as criminals in the American society of the day. Referring to Neil Miller’s notes in Out of the Past, Dean Shackelford indicates that “homosexuals in the 1950s faced the growing influence of Senator McCarthy and his ‘witch’ hunts. Gay men and lesbians were considered security risks…” (103). Shackelford also indicates that “…gay men and lesbians were considered mentally ill…” before “1971, when the APA8 officially removed homosexuality from its list of mental disturbances…” (104). Thus such social facts emphasize the necessity of confining the suspected homosexual Brick as if he were a criminal or madman.

Thomas Szasz broadens the definition of madness apart from the psychiatric disease, and explains that “we call people mentally ill when their personal conduct violates certain ethical, political, and social norms” (17). Making use of this definition, Jacqueline O’Connor says, “Williams’s plays work as spectacle… the play presents to the public characters whose behavior makes them unfit for societal interaction. We are able to view those who must be confined out of sight in the mental institution” (18). Actually, Brick is not sent to a mental institution as Blanche was, but according to Maggie he is also “a perfect candidate for Rainbow Hill” which “…is famous for treatin’ alcoholics an’ dope fiends in the movies!” (21). Thus, O’Connor’s analysis can be obviously applied to Brick, who seems to violate many socially idealized norms for the American male, such as his effeminate dependency, inadequacy as a male breadwinner, alcoholism, and possible homosexuality, all leading to inevitable confinement in his bedroom.

O’Connor also indicates that “Williams’s plays dem-onstrate his preoccupation with images of entrapment, and he uses the theater space to convey the constricting nature of the characters’ worlds” (17). Such an analysis clearly suggests through visual effects that Brick’s bedroom is like a jail or an asylum. His desperate words to Big Daddy offer solid verification of these effects, too: “Oh, you think so, too, you call me your son and a queer. Oh! Maybe that’s why you put Maggie and me in this room that was Jack Straw’s and Peter Ochello’s….” (115). In reality, of course, Brick is neither a criminal nor a madman, and he can escape from the state of confinement, if he wants. But his “broken, plastered and bound” ankle (19) and his addiction to alcohol physically deprive him of the opportunity to escape from his bedroom with its “liquor cabinet” (16), and as a result, his image as a helpless homosexual jailed by a homophobic society is dramatically conveyed both visually and verbally, as well as in the stage directions.

IV. Searching for imaginary freedom in the Southern plantation home

In a discussion of Williams’s Memoirs, David Savran argues that Williams “…conceives his homosexuality in extremely conflicted ways, as a locus of desire and scandal, ‘freedom’ and ‘crime’” (46, 2002). Such conflicted representations of homosexuality as “freedom and crime” are surely reflected in Brick’s suffering, which suggests his hidden inner conflicts, inescapable homosexual desire and intense homophobia. However, as mentioned before, the bedroom also provides contrasting images: a safe closet for shelter and a jail or asylum, and thus we can say that such contradictions are also reflected in the representation of Brick’s bedroom. More specifically, they are transformed into the images of “sky and jail” in depicting the plantation home.

A peaceful sky image, “the cool (white and blue) tones of the gallery and sky” (16), is exaggerated as part of the setting, and sets up a contrast to “a house on fire…” (31) in a world of inheritance dispute and “mendacity” (106). Williams also explains that “I think the walls below the ceiling should dissolve mysteriously into air; the set should be roofed by the sky; stars and moon suggested by traces of milky pallor…” (16). Thus, the description of sky evidently symbolizes peaceful and serene freedom, that is, the salvation for Brick, apart from his jail-like confinement on
the earth. The sky as a metaphor of freedom is also found in Big Daddy’s words of relief: “The sky is open! Christ, it is open again! . . .” (92), when he came to believe that his fatal cancer is just a spastic colon.

In concordance with the emphasis on the peaceful image of sky, Brick with a broken leg is also associated with the image of a bird with a broken wing, which is deprived of a means of movement and confined in a cage. Maggie also says “We occupy the same cage” (35), and it suggests helpless confinement for injured bird-like Brick and herself. In fact, Brick’s strong association with flying can be typified by his “Jumpin’ hurdle. . . .” (21) on the high school athletic field and his famous “aerial attack” (122) with Skipper in football games. Brick’s birdlike image is also prominent in his singing “By the light, by the light, Of the sil-ve-ry mo-oo-o-n. . . .” (140), especially frequent in the original version of Act Three. Thus, it is clear that his singing suggests his desperate searching for a free and open sky like a bird. Perhaps that is even why Brick often goes to the gallery, linked to the sky, for his one temporary escape from the confinement in the bedroom.

Commonly, birdlike images are seen in connection with Williams’s female characters, and symbolize their powerless and moneyless dependence. For example, in The Glass Menagerie, Amanda worries about Laura’s future as a spinster, who is seen as “little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!” (10). Jobless and helpless Blanche also frequently sings, and she is also called a “canary bird!” (367) by Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire. Even “catty” (37) Maggie calls herself a poor “Job’s turkey” (53) before she marries the wealthy Brick. In this play, however, such birdlike images are also notably associated with Brick, in an interesting case of gender reversal, suggesting his powerless and desperate situation.

In addition, it is possible to associate Brick’s injured birdlike image with the image of an angel with a broken wing, who wishes to fly back up to heaven. The name of the athletic field of “Glorious Hill” (22) High School, where Brick tries to jump hurdles, hints at his wish for a sacred retreat like heaven. His addiction to the symbolically named liquor, “Echo Spring” (53), also suggests his wish for heaven, because of the name of the manufacturer, Heaven Hill Distilleries, Inc. Actually, angels are not always related to female figures. As Eugene Stiles indicates, “Angels have not always been represented as soft, feminine, winged figures. In the Bible, angels often appear as men and without wings. Three messengers who tell Abraham that his wife is going to have a son are men. Likewise, two of the four Gospels describe as ‘a young man’ or ‘two men’ the angel or angels…” (8), thus reinforcing the possibility of Brick’s image as an angel.

Specifically, Brick’s angel-like “spiritual” existence is intensified by his pure male–male “real, real, deep, deep friendship!” (120) with the deceased Skipper, and by the fact he desperately rejects sexual union with the vicious Maggie, who wants Brick just for her sexual satisfaction and the inheritance, not out of pure affection. Sadly, the Southern plantation home on the earth is full of far–from–pure heterosexual couples scorned as mere “Pre-tenses!” (108), not to mention the loveless marriage of Big Daddy and Big Mama, and “Frig Mac and Cooper, frig all dirty lies and liars!” (120) as well as Brick and Maggie themselves. It is clear that such heterosexual couples on the plantation may symbolize fertility (production of progeny), as exemplified by Big Daddy’s growing plantation after his heterosexual marriage, “the richest land this side of the valley Nile” (86). However, spiritually, these loveless relationships are declared “mendacity” (106) by Big Daddy. Gooper and Mae’s five children (products of heterosexual marriage) are also represented as vicious “no-neck monsters” (17). Therefore, we can say that only male–male relations, typified by Brick and Skipper’s friendship and the former owners’ relation, are mythologized as “beautiful, ideal things” (57) and “a clean, true thing” (120) unrelated to any interests or tactics; rather, “it was a pure an’ true thing an’ that’s not normal” (121) on the earth, thus leading to the image of Brick as a fallen angel.

If Brick is a fallen angel on the earth, we can understand why Maggie is characterized as a vicious catty woman. As represented by Maggie’s words, “I destroyed him [Skipper], by telling him the truth that he and his world . . . yours and his world . . . could not be told. . . .” (59), Brick’s transcendent status is also found in Maggie’s words: “you—superior creature! you godlike being! . . .” (56), which emphasize the image of Brick as a man fallen from heaven.

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9 Act Three was revised for New York production based on the instructions of the director, Elia Kazan, so we can say that Williams’s intentions are more directly reflected in the original version.

10 Brick’s transcendent status is also found in Maggie’s words: “you—superior creature! you godlike being! . . .” (56), which emphasize the image of Brick as a man fallen from heaven.
she brought Brick and Skipper down from heaven, and thus she becomes like Eve, who led Adam to his downfall. Moreover, Maggie is also symbolized as a cat, a natural enemy of bird-like Brick and Skipper, suggested most emphatically when during her rape-like attack on Brick she is described as "a big circus cat" (41). She assaults "cock robin" (59) Skipper too, as represented in her words: "Who shot cock robin? I with my — 1 — merciful arrow?" (59).

There is considerable evidence then to support the case that such angelic images of Brick create effective implications of homosexuality in this play. Angels sometimes have become symbols of homosexuality on the stage, as typified by Tony Kushner’s play, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* in 1991, and the character Angel (a drag queen) in *Rent* in 1994. It is clear that Williams himself uses references to angels for discreetly indicating homosexuals; James Fisher points to Williams’s poem "The Angels of Fructification" in 1956 "... in which his angels provide a vision of homosexual eroticism comparatively rare in his dramas" (13). Since the stage before the 1960s was strictly censored, Williams could not have represented homosexual desire openly as Tiny Kushner did, but we can say that Williams used angel images subtly in this play in order to suggest Brick’s homosexuality by emphasizing his adherence to a pure male relationship which could not exist on the earth, so that he desperately wishes to fly back to a glorious heaven. Brick can then be seen as an angel wishing for heaven, where his dead friend Skipper has become an angel and lives forever. His suffering wishing for heaven can be shown in his birdlike singing: "Show me the way to go home. . . ./Wherever I may roam. / On land or sea or foam" (153-4), and it emphasizes Brick’s dual images of a bird and an angel11, desperately searching for the open sky and a heaven, apart and above his confinement on the earth.

In some ways, Brick’s addiction to alcohol also suggests his desperate searching for sky-high freedom. As C. W. E. Bigsby indicates, "all of Williams’s characters are crippled in one sense or another . . . and out of that imperfection there comes a need which generates the illusions with which they fill their world" (48). For example, such illusions are represented by glass animals for Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, and Blanche’s performance as a Southern Belle in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Brick’s alcohol also reveals the need for such illusions to compensate for his confined and desperate situation.

Brick’s words, "Switching clicking off in my head, turning the hot light off and the cool night on and—" (98), clearly suggest that his heavy drinking brings him sudden visions of a quiet and cool night sky full of stars, symbolized by the shining... liquor cabinet, bearing and containing many glasses and bottles... a composition of muted silver tones, and the opalescent tones of reflecting glass..." (16) in the bedroom. The "huge console" alongside the liquor cabinet is also emphasized as "a chromatic link, this thing, between the sepia (tawny gold) tones of the interior [in the bedroom] and the cool [white and blue] tones of gallery and sky" (16), and the site of his drinking becomes the transformation zone between the jail-like confinement of the bedroom and an imaginary open sky.

In addition, we can say that Brick’s alcoholism may be linked to the satisfaction of his hidden homosexual desire in other ways. In his study of drinking on the stage, Geoffrey S. Proehl analyzes "the function of alcohol" in some plays "as an analog for sexual activity" (32). He continues that "Alcohol often serves as a release mechanism, in this instance, not of words or emotions, but of sexual inhibitions. Furthermore the act of drinking itself is inherently sensual in its employment of hands, mouth, and lips— in the processes of filling, warming, and loosening" (32). Thus, Brick’s addiction to alcohol can be hypothesized as another compensatory activity, and perhaps as a more or less direct means to fantasize about sex with Skipper. Mark Royden Winchell also points to the possibility of Brick’s fantasy sex with Skipper, but through Maggie’s body; "by sleeping with Maggie, Brick may be vicariously establishing a sexual bond with his dead friend" (710) in the ending. Though his analysis is perhaps unconvincing, it is useful provocative, and it might be possible, when considering the efficacy of alcohol as an analog for sexual activity, release mechanism, and the state of unconsciousness.

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11 Not only angels but also "birds" sometimes become the symbols for homosexuality. As Ed Madden indicates, "In Western literature, birds have often been used as a symbol of transcendence or aspiration; in gay literature, such an association may have roots in Plato’s Symposium, in which pederastic love is tied to the ‘heavenly’ or Uranian Aphrodite. . . . More recently, bird imagery. . . . has been reduced to simple stereotype: the flamboyant plumage and flightiness (and perhaps refined lunacy) of drag queens in the film The Birdcage. . . ." (333).
Actually, in "NOTES FOR THE DESIGNER" (15-6), Williams emphasizes the importance of the "huge console" (16) full of bottles of liquor in Brick's bedroom as well as the double bed directly suggesting sexual activities. He explains that the console is "a very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with..." (16), and this quotation might be taken as evidence of Brick's eagerness to fulfill the desire he normally hides, his hidden homosexual desire for Skipper through alcohol. As shown by Maggie's words: "we were blissful, yes, hit heaven together every time that we loved!" (58), Brick's drinking until the sound of the click and the subsequent sexual activity with Maggie evidently bring him an imaginary heaven-like joy and freedom, perhaps because of a fantasized sexual union with Skipper, his angel in heaven. Brick finally finds a temporary route back to the heaven through Maggie's body, even if he remains confined ultimately in the bedroom, closeted with his unspeakable desires.

Conclusion

In the conservative and homophobic American theater of the 1950s, homosexual characters were taboo and could not be depicted directly on the stage by legislative censorship such as Wales Padlock Law, which penalized theater owners who allowed the presentation of homosexuality. We can also imagine Williams's fear as Michael Paller indicates: "He [Williams] may have feared, if he was entirely honest about homosexuality, losing the fame and wealth that came with being his country's leading playwright" (109) in homophobic society. However, Dean Shackelford insists that Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, first performed in 1955, is understood as "the first major American play to confront the taboo subject of homosexuality directly and without apology" (104-5). We can surely agree with him, and as I have argued, Williams's courageous attempts to depict homosexual identity can be found clearly in the representation of the main setting, even if he avoids direct expression of the coming-out.

As John M. Clum indicates, "In the 1950s, Broadway was still a [sic] the venue for serious drama..." and "Williams, Albee, and Inge had to negotiate between their experience as homosexual men and the conventions of popular, realistic drama" (122). Thus, we might say that such negotiations by Williams are effectively transformed into a strategy: creating a detailed representation of the Southern plantation home and the bedroom, effectively implying homosexuality, but also creating a play which is acceptable to society and within the conventions of realistic drama. In conclusion, we can say that the representation of the Southern plantation home and the bedroom evidently represents Williams's clever and innovative strategy for depicting homosexual identity indirectly in the homophobic society of the Cold War period.

Works Cited


