

“Tom Wingfield as a Southern Outlaw”

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Tom Wingfield as a Southern Outlaw

Tennessee Williams featured in a Southern Outlaws conference? Out of place? Probably, or at least it would seem out of place. This idea, however, came from a book I stumbled upon recently, entitled *Eminent Outlaws, The Gay Writers Who Changed America*. In this book, Christopher Bram devotes Chapter 6 to Tennessee Williams.[1]

No one today, of course, would think of a gay writer as an outlaw. Yet, and as historian Jacqueline O'Connor explains, starting at the end of the 1930s, "existing laws legislating sexual behavior multiplied" (6).[2] The gay population had to face "increased scrutiny, restriction, and attack in the years prior to and following World War II" (O'Connor 8).[3]

If modern playwrights and film-makers have treated *The Glass Menagerie* as a kind of coded version of William's gay experience,[4] most critics, however, have recognized that, because of

[1] Read page 6: "Homosexuality isn't the theme of my plays. I have nothing to conceal".

[2] As both Eskridge and Chauncey make clear, homosexuals coming of age in the 1930s, as Williams did, found themselves entering a public sphere in which gay culture was already highly developed, on the one hand, but was coming under increased scrutiny, restriction, and attack in the years prior to and following World War II" (O'Connor 8). In these years, "gay men ha[d] to contend with the threat of vigilante anti-gay violence as well as with the police" (Chauncey, qted. in O'Connor Law and Sexuality page 7). Georges-Claude Guilbert, in "Queering and Dequeering the Text" Cercles 10 (2004): 85-116, recognizes that "in the 1940s and 1950s, America was not particularly liberal, to put it mildly, and definitely not "gay friendly" (185).

[3] At the same time, and as Frederick Suppe writes, "[The] cultural and artistic contribution of queers were decidedly subversive, countering attempts to smother gays and lesbians into cultural invisibility" (14, qtd. in Guilbert). Suppe exemplifies that "most of Tennessee Williams' plays, especially Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and ASND, focus on struggles with homosexuality in a very straight society" (14, qtd. in Guilbert). Guilbert finds that Williams does so in plays that "constantly speak of gender, and almost as constantly of sexuality and sexual orientation" (85). I'd like to show that *The Glass Menagerie* does not.

[4] On that note, read http://www.playbill.com/article/a-patch-of-gay-in-the-glass-menagerie-com-191491. Movie adaptations of the play, in particular, have heavily accentuated the possibility of reading Tom Wingfield as a gay character. See: John Malkovich gave him a lavender tinge in the 1987 Joanne Woodward movie remake, which was directed by her husband, Paul Newman. In a recent resurrection of The Glass Menagerie, director Gordon Edelstein chose to give more weight to the homosexuality of Tom/Tennessee in this 2010 version. "I didn't want to overemphasize his gayness," director Edelstein says, "but it always seemed to me when Tom was going to the movies — what was he really doing? We all know there was a gay subculture then. It seems likely, to me, he was

social prohibition, Williams was plainly unwilling and unable to disclose the truth, at least on stage, about sensitive topics such as gendered identity, homosexuality or race relations (Crandell, qted. O'Connor *Law and Sexuality* 20). David Savran explains that Williams wrote "under a number of screens and covers" that allowed him "to represent his homosexuality in other guises" (83).[5] Georges Claude Gilbert recognizes that, "without claiming that Williams'

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going to gay clubs." Darragh took this cue and ran with it. "It's not explicit in the text, but, the more I worked on it, I thought, 'That's an important part of the puzzle of Tom Wingfield.' It's not the only thing eating at him — there're other things — but it's important. Why else is that drunk scene in there, except to take the mask off and say, 'Here I am'?"

In "Tennessee Williams's Dramatic Charade: Secrets and Lies in *The Glass Menagerie,"* Gilbert Debusscher wonders why "In view of […] the progressive public revelation of Williams's homosexuality culminating in the David Frost interview in 1970 and C. Robert Jennings's article in *Playboy* in April 1973, it is surprising how little attention has been paid until recently to the sexual orientation of Tom Wingfield, the author's alter ego in the play. In fact, it is not until the film version of Paul Newman in 1986 that Tom's homosexuality is taken seriously into account. It took the premise, as stated in Stewart Stern's useful account *No Tricks in my Pocket: Paul Newman Directs* (11), that both as narrator and character "Tom is meant to be the messenger of Tennessee's experience of that period" and John Malkovich's insistence on exploring the acting possibilities from that vantage point, that brought homosexuality into the mainstream of the play's criticism".

In the new Broadway production of Tennessee Williams' 1945 play The Glass Menagerie at the Booth Theater (2015), director John Tiffany reads Tom (Williams' nickname) as "an archetype of the regret-filled gay youth who left his hometown behind yet can't escape his family ties and emotional obligations--memories of his club-footed sister Laura and effusive mother Amanda". (http://www.nypress.com/why-glass-menagerie-persists/).

[5] Many critics—focusing in particular on homosexuality as a metaphor of transgression— have attempted to identify these guises or disguises that Williams embraced. Corber, for instance, establishes that Williams (re)located the gay elements in his plays in their focus on the female experience (Corber, qted. O'Connor Law and Sexuality 18). For Jacqueline O'Connor, William's interest in and knowledge of laws regulating sexuality is reflected in the language of disgust being used obsessively in Williams' plays (Law and Sexuality 18). For Gilbert Debusscher, "[t]he nature of that "otherness" in the early 1940s had to be presented on the surface as a poetic disposition at odds with the industrial surroundings". Frederick Suppe writes, "[The] cultural and artistic contribution of queers were decidedly subversive, countering attempts to smother gays and lesbians into cultural invisibility" (14, qtd. in Guilbert).

In "Tennessee Williams's Dramatic Charade: Secrets and Lies in *The Glass Menagerie,"* Gilbert Debusscher explains that "Williams would attend a performance [of The Glass Menagerie] and either doze off or, more disturbingly, sneer incongruously at unexpected moments, finding reasons for loud exasperation where other members of the audience were provoked to quiet sympathy. Had Williams grown aware of pretense, sentimentality, "pseudo-poetic verbiage" (Krutch 424), or was he laughing at family secrets, truths implicit in the text which he, as narrator and stage magician, was concealing under the pleasant disguise of theatre illusion and which he now, in retrospect, found puerile to have even wanted to hide? Was he gloating at those aspects of his earlier situation which the times and his immediate human environment—and, not least, his own tendency to dissimulate—had forced him to relegate between the lines, to leave unspoken, but which his artistic integrity compelled him to include all the same? Could he then have been laughing at his own auto-fictionalizing strategies, his ingeniousness at dodging without eluding, at revealing without being explicit?

Quoting a 1966 interview in which Tennessee Williams was asked "if he would ever write "directly" about current political events, including the struggle of African Americans for civil rights and the Vietnam War", Michael Paller quotes: "I am not a direct writer," Williams replied, "I am always an oblique writer, if I can be; I want to be allusive; I don't want to be one of those people who hit the nail on the head all the time" (qtd. in *Conversations* 129). A Playwright with a Social Conscience, Michael Paller. The Tennessee Williams Annual

only aim was to discuss things queer, he certainly had an interest in 'finding ways for this silent majority to be allowed to speak'" (Miller 99, qtd. in Gilbert "Queering and Dequeering the Text"). As Michael Paller observes, Williams's best writing creates tension by juxtaposing two contradictory impulses: "his urge to conceal" and "the equally strong need to reveal" (20).

Because Tom Wingfield is often characterized as one of William's most autobiographical characters[6], and because this character repeatedly expresses a desire to embrace a life away from home into the world of banditry, today, I would like to explore whether the references to life as an outlaw, in particular life as a pirate, in *The Glass Menagerie* could be interpreted as one of these guises used by Williams to capture, reflect, and articulate (or even question) an experience (of sexuality, of masculinity, of gender) that many at the time deemed deviant and therefore illegal.[7]

Review, Number 10. 2009. (http://www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/journal/work.php?ID=95). Williams, Tennessee. *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Albert J. Devlin. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1986.

[6] Bigsby claims that "Williams invested himself in all of his characters" (Barnard 276). Barnard, Brent. The *Symbolism of Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie: An Inductive Approach*. Diss. U of Louisiana, 2007 UMI. Web. 23 Jan 2010. The Glass Menagerie is "Tennessee Williams's most autobiographical play, accurate to the imaginative reality of his experience even when it departs from facts in detail" (Parker 3) and that "No one who has reviewed even the bare details of his biography can overlook the obvious similarities between the record of his early life and the events described in *The Glass Menagerie*" (Presley 86); the playwright's official biographer also contends that "Tennessee Williams had still to prove that this was not a writer's single autobiographical (emphasis mine) success" (Leverich 585).

[7] Questioning sexuality and queering normative masculinity (specifically through piracy) is probably NOT the first thing that comes to mind when reading The Glass Menagerie. As Michael Paller puts it, in *Gentleman Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality and Mid-Century Broadway*, *The Glass Menagerie* is usually perceived as a "nice play" (33), "a pleasant non-threatening affair" and this perception "stems from the reaction of the newspaper and magazine critics who witnessed the first production" (qted. in Kenneth Krauss 12). Krauss argues that, as a consequence, readers or viewers "seem to miss the references that would lead them to an understanding of how the play comments on what at the time were considered not-so-nice subjects" (12). Certainly, the omission of the "screen device", namely the projected image of the pirate's vessel, from the Broadway production of the play (unlike the published text version) might explain why viewers may have missed some of what Michael Paller could call William's "not-so-nice" interpellations. (Nicholas Grene "Home on the Stage: Domestic Spaces in Modern Drama"). It is interesting that despite the continued popularity and fascination for the pirate, demonstrated by the hundreds of books published over the centuries, William's inclusion of elements of piracy in this play remains relatively unexplored. It is also important to note, in this regard, that *The Glass Menagerie* is not the only play featuring references to pirates. One such reference can also be found in *A Streetcar Named Desire* when Stanley wonders, after plundering through Blanche's chest's contents, whether Blanche possesses "the treasure chest of a pirate". With slides to direct our attention, the script of the play takes on another meaning and presents details that transform the desire for a life away from the Wingfield apartment into a desire to become a pirate. In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Maggie the Cat tells her stiffed-leg husband Brick that they are "two persons on the same boat", figuratively chasing after a treasure that they do not want Gooper or Mae to capture. Scholarly neglect of Williams's interest in piracy fails to acknowledge, I believe, the extent to which his work could address, if only indirectly, a society's attempts at containing deviant citizens.

David Savran remarks that Williams often "betray[ed] his sympathy with rebels" (135).[8] (He often defined himself in his memoirs as a fugitive, an outcast, thus revealing that he had a strong affinity with the outsiders and the disenfranchised). And this sympathy for the rebels is mapped onto characters portrayed as "transgressors who try to exit their worlds" (AlAqeel 403).[9] Characters often escape to imaginative realms, be it alcohol, death, or by embracing a life of adventure away from modernism and an industrialist capitalism.[10]

Tom Wingfield, in *The Glass Menagerie*, is one of these characters. From the very first scene, and as Michael Paller remarks[11]: "[w]e don't need knowledge of the [entire] play to understand Williams' attitude toward this world and the conformity it imposes on its citizens. It is a world to escape," one of suffocating closeness and stultification (37). [12] Tom, the aspiring poet, works in a warehouse, living a dreadful existence and temporarily forgets the boredom of everyday life in movie theaters, where he follows the move of adventurers and cowboys.

Tom also dreams of embracing a life of banditry. With the goal of enraging his mother, Tom states that he is "living a double life, a simple, honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic tsar of the underworld, Mother" (31). He even makes a list of several important places and figures belonging to the crime organizations of Saint Louis:

> I'm going to Opium dens! Yes, Opium Dens, dens of vice and criminals' hang-outs, Mother. I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case! I run a string of cat houses in the Valley! They call me

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[8] Tischler, Nancy M. "Death as a Metaphor," Critical Essays on Tennessee Williams. New York: G.K. Hall Company, 1997. 295-303.

[9] AlAqeel, Ohood Saleh. "Escaping Reality in Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie. (1944), A Streetcar Named Desire (1947), and Cat On A Hot Tin. Roof (1956)." IJELLH 4.8 (2016): 398-410. Aug. 2016. Web. 25 May 2017. This might not be surprising, knowing that Williams often conveyed in his own Memoirs the feeling of being a fugitive. He once told Joe Hazan, "I am always the fugitive—will be till I make my last escape—out of life together" (Leverich 132). Williams admitted his inability to adjust to the real world: "I don't care to adjust on the level of certain types that appear to be adjusted. No… I'd rather stay an outsider, even if it means an outcast" (Qtd. In Tischler 390-91).

[10] Williams' characters often exist "in the same no man's land" (Bigsby 90). Bigsby, C.W.E. A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century Drama. Vol.2: Williams, Miller, and Albee. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1984. 11.

[11] Michael Paller, *Gentleman Callers, Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth Century Broadway Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[12] Penner, James. *Pinks, Pansies, and Punks: The Rhetoric of Masculinity in American Literary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011. Print. Williams describes the Wingfield apartment as "one of those vast hive-like conglomeration of cellular living units that … are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism" (1). As James Penner remarks, "the notion of fluidity and individuality are concomitant with non-conformity and social rebellion" (104).

> killer, Killer Wingfield […] I go to gambling casinos, I spin away fortunes on the roulette table! (31)[13]

If Tennessee Williams presents the outlaws as a force of liberation from the constrained/contained existence of the shoe-factory worker and family provider, **redemption for Tom is also to be found at sea.**[14] **Tom's references to the pirates, or the outlaws of the sea, seem to highlight a clear fascination for the sea and the world of piracy.** In his stage directions, Williams chose to incorporate the picture of "a sailing vessel with Jolly Roger," (*The Glass Menagerie* 39) the flag of pirates, also referred to as "the banner of King Death" (Rediker, *Bandits at Sea* 140). It appears twice during the play[15]: it is first projected on the wall when Tom explains to his mother why he goes to the movies every night. The second time, Tom is outside the apartment, on the fire escape, with Jim his friend from the warehouse. Just before Tom confides in Jim about his plans to leave home via the merchant marines, the screen image of a sailing vessel with the Jolly Roger appears for the second time

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[13] **In "Tennessee Williams's Dramatic Charade: Secrets and Lies in *The Glass Menagerie,"* Gilbert Debusscher** (vol. 3; 2000. The Tennessee Williams Annual Review) reads this passage as clearly pointing to Tom's homosexuality. He argues that, "if we disregard as ludicrously exaggerated the overcompensation that makes him project himself in a series of grotesque macho figures (a hired assassin, Killer Wingfield, a dynamic czar of the underworld, El Diablo), the outburst nevertheless contains a reference to "a violin case" which unmistakably reminds us of the short story, entitled "The Resemblance Between a Violin Case and a Coffin." In this story, the narrator (easily recognizable as the young Tom Williams at the time when he was reaching puberty) describes his awakening passion for a Richard Miles, the musical companion of his sister. There is also mention of "a double life," presumably the mask that Tom Wingfield wears to meet the world, in particular the world of his mother and that of the factory, his diurnal personality; and finally a threat ("I could tell you things to make you sleepless") the exact meaning of which escapes the two interlocutors because of the exaggerated context in which it appears but which could well contain the oblique acknowledgment of his real nightly occupations, and hence of his nocturnal, hidden, closeted personality, the revelation of which, he surmises and maybe fears or possibly darkly wishes, would quite literally destroy Amanda's entire world and being".

[14] *Outlaw Heroes in Myth and History*, Graham Seal. Tom's fascination with Malvolio reinforces the purpose. Malvolio is a magician, an archetype often "transformed into a hero of cultural resistance, not unlike the role performed by many outlaws" (Seal 29). Able to get "himself out of [a nailed up coffin] without removing one nail?" (Scene 4), Malvolio is credited with shape-shifting powers, since he is able to make himself invisible or disappear. Like Tom, he is a trickster figure, one who has "tricks in [his] pockets, things up [his] sleeves (Scene 1, opening line). In this world, Tom celebrates the anti-heroism of the magician, of the hunters and fighters he sees on-screen at night, and he refuses the celebration of the Southern beau or the Gentleman Caller as the heteronormative hero of the South (at least through the romantic lens of Tom's mother).

The United States is a nation "bred on frontier heroes and the adventurous, sometimes vicious conquest of nature" (Slotkin Richard, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800, Middletown, Conn. 1973). The seaman, however, less studied than the cowboy, because such men "are perhaps the most elusive social group in early American history, because they moved from port to port with greater frequency than other urban dwellers, shifted occupations, died young, and (…) least often left behind traces of their lives on the tax lists or in land or probate records" (Nash 16 qted. in Redicker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea 5).

[15] Yet, it was not projected on stage during the Premiere.

and the stage directions tell us that Tom "looks like a voyager" **[/vwa.ja.ʒe/]** (Scene 6, qtd. in Single 80). Tom is not the only character who is linked to piracy in this play. Jim, the other male character on stage, had the lead role in his high school production of the operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*. Thus, the male characters on stage are subtle reminders of the ongoing theme of piracy in *The Glass Menagerie*. (I'll come back to Jim later).

If Jim performed as a pirate, Tom, by contrast, seems to have fully adopted the values and characteristics of a life of piracy. This is played out in Tom's outfit. Tom tells his mother that, in the underworld of Saint Louis banditry, he "wear[s] a patch over one eye and a false moustache," and adds "sometimes I put on green whiskers. On those occasions they call me—El Diablo" (31). The patch over the eye[16], the moustache, even the nickname are the stereotypical components of a pirate's costume. By referring ironically to "El Diablo" and "the underworld," Tom refers quite explicitly to Death and Evil, two characteristics of piracy as represented by the Jolly Roger.[17]

Piracy is also played out in Language. To rebel against his mother's wishes and education, Tom also uses many curse words, expressions like "in Christ's name" (28) or "God Damn" (31).[18] This swearing or "rough talk" (as Rediker calls it) is also characteristic of pirates' language. According to Marcus Rediker, "swearing had implied defiance of middleclass society and its ideals of gentility, moderation, refinement, and industry. Rough speech was thus essentially transgressive" (*Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 166). Gabriel Kuhn asserts that "buccaneers and pirates formed an exclusive community of high sea raiders [-ɛɪdə(r)] with 'their own slang and code words.' Among these, cuss words apparently featured prominently." (*Life Under the Jolly Roger* 56).

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[16] "Even though the presence of peg legs, hook hands and eye patches was certainly exaggerated by popular representations of the pirates in the 20th century, there are indications that they were a fairly common reality among buccaneers and pirates » (Life Under the Jolly Roger 80-81).

[17] Kuhn, *Life Under the Jolly Roger*: closeness to the devil of Pirates. "These anecdotes portray the pirates in a way in which many radicals fancy them: secular, sacrilegious, anti-clerical. Marcus Rediker suggests that some pirates indeed "embraced Lucifer, the most rebellious of angels," and Captain Johnson says of Blackbeard that "some of his frolics of wickedness were so extravagant as if he aimed at making his men believe he was a devil incarnate."31" (Qted. page 63).

[18] ""Rough talk" at sea had distinct social implications. Such language expressed clear opposition to the 'polite, bourgeois elements of society' […] blasphemy, cursing, and swearing […] implied defiance of middle-class society and its ideals of gentility moderation, refinement, and industry. Rough speech was thus essentially transgressive. It owed much to an all-male environment, to shipboard isolation and incarceration, and to the many frustrations and resentments engendered by a rough line of work" (Between the Devil 166).

So why, we could ask, would William choose the archetype of the pirate in his play? What would be the usefulness of these references to piracy?

Portrayals of pirates have often associated their aggression with unruly masculinity ill-suited to domestic spheres (*The Culture of Piray 1580-1630*, 141, Claire Jowitt). Consequently, one could say that piracy constitutes the perfect outlet for someone, like Tom, who dreams of a world of (male) adventures and who dreams of leaving a female-dominated home.[19] Indeed, pirates, Rediker explains, "constructed a social world where they had "the choice in themselves'" (*Between the Devil* 285). Pirates, Redicker continues, "constructed a culture of masterless men" (285) and used "the sea to distance themselves from the powers of the state", the church, the family, and disciplinary labor (*Between the Devil* 286). The symbols of piracy, like the adoption of the Jolly Roger as the pirates' truly national symbol, signified the rejection of any national allegiance marks. As Kuhn explains, "Some golden age pirates might have indeed 'no longer thought of themselves as English or Dutch or French but as pirates," and "as people without a nation." (qted. in *Life Under the Jolly Roger* 59). [20]

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[19] Claire Jowitt explains that portrayals of pirates "often associated their aggression with unruly masculinity ill-suited to domestic spheres" (The Culture of Piracy 1580-1630 141). The piratical subject is "a […] cultural transgressor who 'declares war against all mankind'" (*Rum, Sodomy* 29). Pirates are "defined by their transgressive cultural and economic defiance" (*Rum, Sodomy* 40). He "has renounced all the benefits of society and government […]" (W. Backstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, qted. in *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash* 28).

[20] Of course, and since Tom defines himself as a poet who wishes to turn back the hands of time, the outlaws certainly correspond to the search for times past, seen through the lens of a romantic past. Pirates, after all, "are among the most heavily romanticized and fabled characters in history". Read Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition. The lifestyle of 18th Century pirates has been romanticized to mythic proportions. It is hard to imagine this period in history without the flamboyant imagery of adventure and lawlessness that has saturated pop culture. Obviously, pirates, like the outlaw or the magician, represent the adventurous path that Tom wishes to follow. Marcus Rediker offers a definition of the typical pirate in his work Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age, describing him as follows:

He was born into poverty in a port city, he was experienced in the rough conditions of life at sea, in both the navy and the merchant service; he was apparently unmarried; and he was in his mid-twenties. These traits served as bases of unity with others when, in search of something better, he decided to become a pirate. And yet he, like the others, was not merely escaping oppressive circumstances. He was escaping to something new, a different reality, something alluring about which he had heard tales in his youth. (59) As Rosefeldt noticed it, "[Tom's] portrayal of himself as a gangster links him to the romantic world of outlaws perpetuated by the American cinema. The restless sons of absent fathers often see themselves as rebellious outlaws or compulsive petty criminals trying to beat the system" (42).

Rediker's *Between the Devil* "heroicizes the pirates from a Marxist perspective" (30). He argues that their "experience as free wage laborers and as members of an uncontrolled, freewheeling subculture, gave pirates the perspective and occasion to fight back against a brutal and unjust authority and to construct a new social order where King Death would reign supreme" (286).

Like the "[p]irates, [who] are often imagined as figures of resistance to all tyrannical power structures" (23, *British Pirates in Print and Performance*), the young Tom, we may safely argue, has decided to sail away, because he decides to acquire the adventures, which he has been denied for a long time.[21] Such is the argument defended by the few critics (who have looked at piracy in Williams), including Lori Single who claims that "on one level, the ship image represents Tom's desire to move from claustrophobic confines of the Wingfield's tiny apartment to the vast open spaces of the ocean" (79).[22] Single continues, "In contrast to the **stifling** /ˈ**staɪflin**/ world of female domination, the manly world of the Union of Merchant /ˈ**mɜː(ɹ)tʃənt/** Seamen represented by the image of a sailing ship seems like a breath of fresh air" (80).

Unfortunately, Single, by choosing to read the screen device of the sailing ship as representative of the manly world of the Union of Merchant /ˈ**mɜː(ɹ)tʃənt/** Seamen, distorts an informative slice of historical sociology.[23] The sailing ship that is projected twice on screen during the play is not that of the Merchant /ˈ**mɜː(ɹ)tʃənt/** seamen, but that of piracy /ˈpaɪr.ə.si/. The text reads "a sailing vessel with Jolly Roger" is projected on screen. Tennessee Williams, I am certain, knew too well the **difference between sailors and pirates**

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[21] That seamen should symbolize sexual freedom, mobility, the liberty of remaining unanchored, is nothing new. "Pirates appeared in all sorts of plays, everything from musical comedy and harlequinades to seagoing gothic melodrama" (*British Pirates in Print and Performance* 33). Pirates were often presented, as William Roberts has shown, as "sturdy sentimentalists […] elegant outlaws […] stately despisers of forms" (ibid, 59). Ajouter Redicker pages 285-286. Piracy, in the imagination of the general public, has certainly been romanticized […] By taking to the sea and living by their own rules, they hold the same kind of fascination—marked by a strange mix of both revulsion and admiration—we have with outlaws, gangsters, and the like" (The Real History of Pirates, The Artofmanliness.com). Pirates and bandits are a symbol and symbols matter. The Pirate as a symbol: "The bandit is not only a man, but a symbol" (Hobsbawn, qted. in Gabriel Kuhn, Life Under the Jolly Roger 125): the pirate, a symbol of freedom for "his elusiveness (…) the exotic location of his tales, the ideals of equality and democracy that he represents" (125).

"Pirate is a legal as well as social term: a true pirate is hostis humani generis, the enemy of all humankind, considered to have no nation or national protections" (British Pirates in Print and Performance 16). The incursions of pirates in fiction abound, often romanticized version of the outlaw, literature and art "redeploying the pirates to meet the aspirations, political and commercial' of the readers (Neil Rennie, Treasure Neverland: Real and Imaginary Pirates; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 33, dans British Pirates in Print and Performance, 20).

[22] Read in this light, "[t]he deep sea," in Steinberg's words, "bec[o]me[s] defined as a great void, idealized as outside society, a wild space of nature that [i]s antithetical to the social spaces on land that could be planned, controlled, and developed" (qted. in *American Sea Literature* 17). Single, Lori Leathers. "Flying the Jolly Roger: Images of Escape and Selfhood in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944)." *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review* (1999): 69-85. Web.

[23] Tischler encourages the same interpretative stance and commits the same mistake of interpretation as Single, arguing that Williams' "sailors, pirates, and buccaneers are the gallant figures who sail away from the dreary land to have adventures denied to most of mankind" (34).

to consider them as figures of equal degree on an outlaw scale (if the latter exists, of course). Contrary to what Single reads as escapism, Marcus Rediker's study *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* provides many examples of the sailor as a disciplined individual, when pointing out that,

> The seaman was confined within a spatially limited laboring environment, forced to cultivate regular habits and keep regular hours, and place in cooperative relationships with both other workers and the supervisors of his labor. In all of these ways, the seaman's experience foreshadowed that of the factory worker during the Industrial Revolution. New patterns of authority and discipline were crucial to the process of industrialization. [24]

"Unlike the pirate, […] seamen were bonded together within the structures of […] society. The maritime world replicated the values that could be found at home on land" (Turley 28).[25] By contrast, and as Kuhn remarks, "the organization of the pirate ship differed radically from the rigid regime on navy and merchant ships. Instead of disciplined sailors assigned to certain times, places, and duties, the pirates' regime was "relaxed and easy-going." Christopher Hill describes the difference as one "between a factory and a cooperative" (Gabriel Kuhn, *Life Under the Jolly Roger* 80).[26] Seen from this perspective, we must understand that, if Tom did escape at sea, Tom, however, has not escaped the claustrophobia he felt at home. Quite the contrary. Put it differently: Tom, claustrophobic in the shoe-factory, has substituted one factory for another.[28]

It is also important to remember that *The Glass Menagerie*, told through the perspective of Tom, is **not** the tale of a pirate, but that of a sailor who reminisces his life in an apartment that he wanted to escape from, an apartment in which he dreamed of becoming a

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[24] The pirate "has renounced all the benefits of society and government," […] the crime of piracy, or robbery, and depredation upon the high seas, is an offence against the universal law of society" (qtd. in Hans Turley *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* 28). No matter if the sailor were an ordinary seaman, a buccaneer, or a privateer, he still lived in homosocial camaraderie with his fellow sailors. W. Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, in *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash: Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity* 28.

[25] "One of the basic differences between life at sea and life on land is that there were few, if any, women on board" (Turley 28).

[26] Hill Christopher, « Radical Pirates? », Collected Essays, Ch. Hill éd., vol. III, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986

[28] The play is hydrophobic.

pirate (and yet, who never became one).[29] Tom has become not a pirate on a sailing vessel with the skull-and-crossbones flag of the Jolly Roger, but a sailor or to use Cardullo's words here, a "mock pirate on a merchant ship on which Tom merely will be furnishing food, clothing, and arms to other men and ships, not stealing such resources from them, as murderous pirates would do" (Cardullo 91).[30] The Jolly Roger has been replaced by the non-threatening and socially-sanctioned flag of the nation. If Williams certainly articulates unspeakable desires for disruption, the play also demonstrates that utopia can be figured only as incomplete completion, as an unfulfilled desire (Savran 168).[31]

Likewise, Jim, we learn, embodied a pirate for the span of three shows in the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operetta, *The Pirates of Penzance*. Of course, the performance in the Operetta serves to underlie the superficiality of the PIRATE disguise: piracy, it seems, is a figurative mask that can be stripped away at will. Like Tom, Jim is tamed and twice more than one, for indeed he performed the role of Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance*: a non-threatening pirate-in-love who makes it a duty (the full title of the operetta is *The Pirates of Penzance, or the Slave to Duty*) to remain faithful to a group of tender-hearted pirates.[32] Now that he has reached adulthood, Jim O'Connor is a very confident man, basing his future success as a self-made man on television and public speaking. "Jim's America remains the land of opportunity or perhaps opportunism" (Krauss *Male Beauty* 29). In both instances, the pirates' propensity for violence and transgression is tamed, pirates are rendered safe, and

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[29] "The sailing vessel that symbolizes Tom's escape is a pirate ship, a symbol rich in ambiguity" (Single 81). Single reads the pirate's ambiguity as "our culture's love/hate relationship with the pirate" (81) and sees a "boyish naiveté implicit in the pirate ship image […] indicative of Tom's arrested growth […] he thinks he longs for adventure, but he really longs for the childhood that he was never allowed to have" (81). Pirates as a symbol of Tom's boyish naiveté linking him to Jim, "the high school star of *The Pirates of Penzance*, an Operetta in which a group of unsuccessful pirates fall in love" (Lori Leathers Single, "Flying the Jolly Roger: Images of Escape and Selfhood" 81).

[30] Cardullo, Bert. "The Blue Rose of St. Louis: Laura, Romanticism, and The Glass Menagerie." The Tennessee Annual Williams (1998): 82-92.

[31] Tom's dreams of piracy (because these are only unsatisfied dreams) move toward an impossible fulfillment. One could therefore argue that, because he was an artist fighting for recognition, Williams knew well, however, that he had to remain, to quote David Savran, "complicit with the exigencies of the very history [that] he was struggling to overcome" (168). Williams admitted: "I also existed outside of conventional society, while contriving somewhat precariously to remain in contact with it" (O'Connor 5).

[32] The story concerns Frederic, who, having completed his 21st year, is released from his apprenticeship to a band of tender-hearted pirates. He meets Mabel, the daughter of Major-General Stanley, and the two young people fall instantly in love. Frederic soon learns, however, that he was born on the 29th of February, and so, technically, he has a birthday only once each leap year. His indenture specifies that he remain apprenticed to the pirates until his "twenty-first birthday", meaning that he must serve for another 63 years. Bound by his own sense of duty, Frederic's only solace is that Mabel agrees to wait for him faithfully.

offered only, we could argue, as romanticized outlaws for the imagination of the general public.

Has Williams failed to use the figure of the outlaw to its full potential? Since he leaves us with "mock" pirates by the end of the play, one could wonder why Williams would indeed choose to refer to pirates—considered by many as the archetypes of transgression and violence—? [33]

One could certainly argue that **Williams has failed to mobilize the outlaw as a figure of resistance.[34] Resistance indeed is certainly not (at least in the present of the play) the prerogative of rebellious individuals (even more so, as these have been tamed). Yet, this** resistance is offered as a latent **[/ˈleɪ.tənt/]** possibility, inscribed within the dramatic structure of the play as "a potential always ready" to unleash (Savran). If Tom is tamed by the end of the play, historians have remarked that most pirates actually started their careers as seamen (Rediker *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* 258), thus implicitly suggesting that Tom, the seaman/tamed-pirate, might eventually (one day) choose the life of a pirate over that of the seaman.

Two narratives, we could say, are battling within the threads of the text: one narrative (which Savran would call a "straight" narrative) that "articulates relatively orthodox and satisfiable longings" on the part of Jim, the aspiring business man, and Tom, the navy merchant. A second narrative, by contrast, as we have seen, invites "queer interpellation" (Savran 160). This one is evoked through stage directions, visual images, or memories that are far "more unstable and perilous" because they draw the readers or the spectators' attention to a detail, an image, a trope, a metaphor of disruption.[35] Mentions of the outlaws, of the underworld, and projections of the sailing vessel serve that purpose.

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[33] "Pirates are among the most heavily romanticized and fabled characters in history" (Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition). One could even argue, like Savran, that despite "deeply utopian impulses", Williams's writing "remain essentially complicit with the exigencies of the very history he was struggling to overcome" (Savran 168). *The Glass Menagerie* has often been referred to as a "nice play," maybe because "what The Glass Menagerie seems to lack, in fact, are Williams' characteristic ingredients of sex and violence" (in Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie, Bloom 53).

[34] Even more so if we consider the outlaw as a screen onto which Tom could project his own fantasies and ambitions.

[35] In the production notes, Williams explains that the screen device "will strengthen the effect of what is merely illusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly than if the entire responsibility were on the spoken lines" (9). The slides are thus an important detail of the play and accentuate the type of adventures Tom is looking for: dangerous and mythical.

Interestingly, *The Glass Menagerie* has usually been perceived as a "nice play" (33), "a pleasant non-threatening affair" and this perception "stems from the reaction of the newspaper and magazine critics who witnessed the first production" (qtd. in Kenneth Krauss 12).[36] Krauss argues that, as a consequence, readers or viewers "seem to miss the references that would lead them to an understanding of how the play comments on what at the time were considered not-so-nice subjects" (12).[37] Certainly, the omission of the "screen device", namely the projected image of the pirate's vessel, from the Broadway production of the play (unlike the published text version) might explain why viewers may have missed some of what Michael Paller could call William's "not-so-nice" interpellations.

The Glass Menagerie might also be a "nice" play because Williams chose to mobilize the literary tradition of the pirate figure—and not to draw on stereotypes usually associated with the queer, the gay, etc. (who, in Williams' times were forced into cultural invisibility). The public, forced/encouraged to focus almost exclusively on the references to El Diablo, to the magician, to the outlaw and the pirate (which are all hyper masculine figures[38]), may have missed the parallels that could be traced between the pirate and the homosexual (the community Williams was trying to give a voice to).

For Hans Turley, indeed, there is an obvious parallel to be drawn between the pirates (often referred to as the "enemy of all") and the molly, or sodomite (often referred to, as the "enemy of the people") (Mackie 116). Of course, the parallel runs deeper than a simple pun on words.[39] Hans Turley's study of 18th Century literary representations of pirates and their social space shows how they were powerfully eroticized as hyper-masculine figures that became associated with homosocial imagery: "[in] the deviant homosocial world of the pirate, piracy, and implicit homoerotic desire go hand in hand" (9).[40] The pirate, he adds, is "a

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[36] Michael Paller, *Gentleman Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality and Mid-Century Broadway.*

[37] Certainly, the omission of the "screen device", namely the projected image of the pirate's vessel, from the Broadway production of the play (unlike the published text version) might explain why viewers may have missed some of what Michael Paller could call William's "not-so-nice" interpellations. (Nicholas Grene "Home on the Stage: Domestic Spaces in Modern Drama").

[38] From the masculine struggles of ancient and historic seafaring to modern maritime novels, maritime adventures (boat-building, sailing, fishing, trading, exploring, and colonizing are prescribed as male activities) remains entrenched in the Western androcentric dualistic heteronormative paradigm.

[39] Through the trope of piracy, Williams endorses transgressive characters who, like homosexuals in the 1930s and 1940s, violate mid-century prescriptions.

[40] Such is the argument promoted by literary critic, Hans Turley (qtd. in Erin Mackie Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century 114). In this study, Turley reveals the pirates' implicit transgression of the sexual status quo, arguing (in Michel Serre's terminology) that "both the

cultural icon, a figure of sexual and cultural anarchy" who "challenges the sex/gender order in ways widely analogous to the sodomitical subject" (Turley, qtd. in Mackie 116). Burg confirms the sexual connotations latent in piratical society (1995: 108). Buccaneers, he claims, shared a range of sex surrogate and sex options that were similar to those of the outlawed homosexuals: "solitary masturbation, fantasies, nocturnal sex dreams and sex contact with members of the same sex are their alternatives" (Burg 108).[41]

Turley, however, admits that if "the outlaw status of the 'sodomitical subject' […] is purchased exclusively by his sexual **deviance** /ˈ**di**ːv**ɪəns/** (Turley, Mackie 116), "The pirate's expression of deviance takes no sexual forms" (in Mackie 117). Piracy, therefore, for Williams, can be read as a sliding signifier that allows the author to evade the accusations of sexual deviance usually associated with the homosexual and to enjoy the liberty provided by the figure of an outlaw, the pirate, which back in the 1930s had disappeared from the ocean and whose legendary exploits, as a consequence, were seen through a romantic lens.[42] Gilbert Debusscher once remarked that "it is surprising how little attention has been paid until recently to the sexual orientation of Tom Wingfield, the author's alter ego in the play." It should not be surprising, when considering how little parallel has been drawn between the sexual deviance of the homosexual and the sociocultural deviance of the pirate.

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piratical subject and the sodomitical subject are parasites that destabilize seemingly straightforward dichotomies such as hero and heroine or man and woman" (qtd. in Turley 41).

[41] Burg, Bary R. *Sodomy and The Pirate Tradition: English Sea Rovers in the 17th Century Caribbean*. N.Y: NYU Press, 1995.

[42] Sexual connotations, however, is only implicit in the Pirates, whereas it is utterly explicit in Molly societies. Brian Parker confirms the reading of *The Glass Menagerie* as a "nice play", when arguing that "what *The Glass Menagerie* seems to lack, in fact, are Williams' characteristic ingredients of sex and violence" (in Bloom 53). I would argue that this is so, because, in his attempt to find ways for the silent majority to be allowed to speak, Williams chose to mobilize the literary tradition of the pirate figure—and not to draw on stereotypes usually associated with this silent majority (be it the queer, the gay, etc.). Resorting to the pirate is surely one way to get rid of the question of sex. In fact, Erin Mackie remarks that "the pirate [is] a figure whose propensity for gender transgression is expressed by its operation outside sexuality" (117).[42] Even a recent literary critic, Turley admitted that "The pirate's expression of deviance takes [indeed] no sexual forms" (Turley, in Mackie 117). "Pirates are defined by their transgressive cultural and economic defense" (Turley 40). Conversely, and if both the sodomite and piratical subject are defined by their cultural 'otherness' (and embody subjectivities at odds with the ideology of heteronormative domesticity), only "the outlaw status of the 'sodomitical subject' […] is purchased exclusively by his sexual deviance (Turley, Mackie 116).[42] Piracy, therefore, for Williams, can be read as a sliding signifier that allows the author to evade the accusations of sexual deviance usually associated with the sodomite and the homosexual. In a similar manner, Williams gets rid of the question of violence (made implicit by the presence of the outlaw figures disseminated throughout the play) by taming the pirates to potent effect.

De: Drysdale, David J. “Melville’s Motley Crew: History and Constituent Power in *Billy Budd*.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol. 67, no. 3, 2012, pp. 312–336. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2012.67.3.312.

Poor working and living conditions engendered mutinous sailors; these sailors might, in turn, seize control of a ship and establish “hydrarchy,” a loose form of democratic government organized from the bottom up.[10] Sailors organized in such a fashion might engage in piracy, attacking the merchant vessels upon which they had formerly been employed, disrupting the circulation of capital across the ocean.[11] Far from the reach of centralized authority, the ship at sea was an especially fraught space in terms of its revolutionary potential. Thus, Linebaugh and Rediker explain, “the ship . . . became both an engine of capitalism . . . *and* a setting of resistance” (*The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 144).

Maritime trade was therefore a site of what Antonio Negri calls “constituent power,” a “source of production of constitutional norms” that holds “the power to establish a new juridical arrangement, [and] to regulate juridical relationships within a new community.”[12] Constituent power thus represents the potential for transformation from below and the possibility of an epistemological reconfiguration of the nation—a dramatic restructuring of democratic governance. Yet, even as the specter of hydrarchy threatened to undermine colonial expansion, imperial power depended on its laboring bodies. In order to pursue its transoceanic projects, the state needed not only to suspend the insurgent potential of constituent power, but also

Abstract

The deteriorating family structure (and its consequences on the individual) has been a thematic obsession for American playwrights as a distinct body of writing. If American dramatists (and Southern ones in particular) are to be trusted, (from Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, to Arthur Miller, and Edward Albee), dysfunctionality and the American family go hand in hand. Fathers, if not physically absent, have abandoned their roles as providers; Mothers are often left with the burden of assuming the role deserted by the disabled patriarch; Children often oscillate between stasis (we find those disabled or crippled by such dysfunctionality) and extreme mobility (they are those who rebel or become outlaws; who, by reaction, dream of escaping the familial scene by looking outward, westward, or looking to the sea or the ocean as fields of adventure and liberty that a life at home, in the office, or in the factory cannot offer.

One may think, for instance, of the young males in *Death of a Salesman* who imagine an escape from their ordinary and disappointing life in the American West. Biff, for instance, has spent many years "in Nebraska when [he] herded cattle, and the Dakotas, and Arizona, and now in Texas" (17), and declares that "there's nothing more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt" (16). He invites his brother Happy to "come out West" (17), to "buy a ranch. Raise cattle, use our muscles," for "Men built like we are," he tells his brother, "should be working out in the open" (17).

In Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into the Night*, life at sea or the sea-shore (not the open spaces of the Western territories) offer a sort of metaphysical voyage into a dream-like reality where suffering family members seem to find momentary relief. In Act 4 of the play, Edmund, the 23-year old son of James Tyrone and Mary Tyrone, reminisces his life at sea, traveling abroad on a merchant ship and explains the moments of ecstatic freedom he felt at sea:

> I was set free! I dissolved into the sea, became white sails and flying spray - became beauty and rhythm, became moonlight and the ship and the high dim-starred sky. I belonged, without past or future, within peace and unity and a wild joy, within something greater than my own life, or the life of man, to Life itself! To God if you want to put it that way.

This longing for movement might well be the very essence of the American people, which John Steinbeck defined best in *Travels with Charley* when he said:

> I saw in [American's] eyes something I was to see over and over again in every part of the nation—a burning desire to go, to move, to get under way, any place, away from any Here. They spoke about how they wanted to go somewhere, to move about, free and unanchored, not toward something but away from something (140)

Seamen, however, and the fierce need to be left "unanchored", can quickly become transgressive. As Rediker explains, most pirates indeed started their careers as seamen (258) Such is, I believe, the message conveyed by Tennessee Williams in the portrayal of his very own Southern outlaw, Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie.* Tom, the rebel, goes out at night and claims he "wear[s] a patch over one eye and a false moustache," and adds "sometimes I put on green whiskers. On those occasions they call me—*El Diablo*" (31). The patch over the eye and the moustache are the stereotypical components of a pirate's costume. By referring ironically to "El Diablo" and "the underworld," Tom refers quite explicitly to Death and Evil, two characteristics of piracy.

Instead of finding refuge in the west, Tom seems to imagine a life at sea as the ideal symbol of liberty and adventure. He admits to his friend Jim that he has subscribed to the Merchant Seamen with the money Amanda gave him to pay the electricity bill. But this life at sea is no ordinary life as Williams also includes slides in his play "to give accent to certain

values" as well as "strengthen the effect of what is merely allusion in the writing and allow the primary point to be made more simply and lightly" (9). Interestingly enough, he chooses to incorporate the picture of "a sailing vessel with Jolly Roger," (*The Glass Menagerie* 39) the flag of pirates, also referred to as "the banner of King Death" (Rediker, *Bandits at Sea* 140). It appears twice during the play: it is first projected on the wall when Tom explains to his mother why he goes to the movies every night. The second time, he is outside on the fire escape with Jim his friend from the warehouse, explaining his plans to join the Merchant Seamen.

Two pirate-figures are presented in the play: Tom Wingfield and Jim, the Gentleman-caller, who, during his senior year, had assumed the lead role of the high school production, the operetta "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert and Sullivan. Through the importance given to the pirate (but also to Malvolio, the magician and trickster figure in the play), Williams seems to have found an insurgent space through which the American theater challenges the models and meanings of an American society marked by the Depression of the 1930s; a world in which the Old South and its Southern comforts (including its Gentleman callers) is anachronistic in this new 20th Century capitalistic society.[43]

In exploring these two figures of piracy and the references to the pirate-ship disseminated throughout the play, I would like to explore this "pirate" drama as the articulation of a counterculture (piracy itself was considered as an egalitarian, anti-authoritarian counterculture to the nation).[44] At the same time, however, the play offers a containment of this oceanic model of community and belonging. At the end of the play, Tom indeed becomes a mock-pirate whose Jolly Roger turns into a merchant ship on which Tom merely "will be furnishing food, clothing, and arms to other men and ships, not stealing such resources from them, as murderous pirates would do" (Cardullo 91). Tom's failure, in that sense, will leave the world with other mock-pirates, the Jim Connors of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operetta, whose adventures are limited to "accumulating—or dreaming of accumulating—knowledge, money, and power in that order" (Cardullo 91). I will thus explore how the "pirate" drama offered T. Williams and its readers an imaginative space through which the playwright not only contested but also disciplined radical forms of community that challenged and violated the insurgent discourses against the American nation-state.[45]

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[43] Pirates and rogues seem to be emblematic of this anachronistic South. In *Gone with the Wind*, isn't Rhett Butler himself qualified of "rogue": "He was dark of face, swarthy as a pirate, and his eyes were as bold and black as any pirate's appraising a galleon to be scuttled or a maiden to be ravished". Rhett's grandfather on the Butler side "was a pirate [. . .] made people walk the plank if there was any money to be made that way. At any rate, he made enough money to leave my father quite wealthy. But the family always referred to him carefully as a "sea captain" (950). The mention of the pirate in his family—said to be a sea captain—suggests that the "proper" title of sea captain may be a mask, like the title of gentleman, worn by an intricately subversive character.

[44] See Williams 75.

[45] The ambivalence reflected in the treatment of piracy illustrates well the ambivalence traced by David Savran in *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers; the Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

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