

# **It Was Too Rare To Be Normal**

The Impact of Off-stage Characters,  
Homosexuality and Homophobia  
*in A Streetcar Named Desire and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Hege Linnerud Næss



A Thesis presented to  
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages  
The University of Oslo  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Master of Arts Degree  
Spring Term 2012



# **It Was Too Rare To Be Normal**

The Impact of Off-stage Characters,  
Homosexuality and Homophobia  
in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Hege Linnerud Næss

© Hege Linnerud Næss

2012

It Was Too Rare To Be Normal: The Impact of Off-stage Characters, Homosexuality and Homophobia in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Hege Linnerud Næss

<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

## Abstract

Tennessee Williams' on-stage characters have been given much attention by the critics, yet the off-stage characters that exist only as a memory are sometimes forgotten. The theme homosexuality is shown through Williams' off-stage characters, as well as the homophobia we encounter, which is triggered by the deaths of these two. My main objective is to look at Allan Grey in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Skipper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and their function in the two plays. It is remarkable how Williams has incorporated these characters in the play to influence the turn of events, but never to appear in front of the audience's/reader's eyes. Why are their homosexuality and their deaths highlighted as the two main issues?

The first part of Chapter One will discuss what kind of role Allan Grey and Skipper's masculinity has in the plays, and how these two characters function in opposition to the other, heterosexual, masculine men. The second part of Chapter One will focus its discussion on how Allan Grey and Skipper's homosexuality comes across, how their homosexuality is revealed and how their relationships with the other characters are affected by their sexual identity. The first part of Chapter Two will discuss how Allan Grey and Skipper's homosexuality functions outside themselves; how their earlier presence generates a discussion about sexuality between the other characters in *Streetcar* and *Cat*. In the second part of Chapter Two, I will direct special attention to how and why the two off-stage characters create fear within the protagonists Blanche and Brick, who clearly express their "disgust" with Allan Grey and Skipper's sexuality.



## Acknowledgements

To Nils Axel –

Thank you for your valuable guidance. Your humor and your great spirit have made this process much more interesting, much more fun, and a bit easier than I thought it would be.

To my fellow students –

My lunch breaks would not have been the same without you.

To Marianne –

You have been extraordinary and I will miss our conversations deeply.

To my sister Silje –

Thank you for being someone to look up to.

To my parents –

For always cheering me on.

And last, but not least, Thorstein –

I sat beside you and became myself.

All I ever needed was your love.





## Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	5
Introduction: “It Was Too Rare To Be Normal”	7
Chapter One:	
The Conflict Between What is Considered “Normal” and “Abnormal”	
Discussing Masculinity	13
Discussing Homosexuality	24
Chapter Two:	
The Roots of Fear	
Discussing Homophobia Around Blanche and Brick	31
Discussing Homophobia Within Blanche and Brick	42
Conclusion: “Thought Him Almost Too Fine To Be Human”	53
Works Cited	59



## Introduction:

### “It Was Too Rare To Be Normal”

*To know me is not to love me.*

*At best, it is to tolerate me.*

Tennessee Williams (Hayman xi).

“Normal? No! – It was too rare to be normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal” (Williams, *Cat* 94). The protagonist of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Brick Pollitt, utters these words when talking about his dear relationship with his long lost friend Skipper. Even though Brick tries to defend their friendship, saying it was too special for it to be entirely normal, the conflicts between what is considered “normal” and “abnormal” keep appearing throughout Tennessee Williams’ plays *A Streetcar named Desire* from 1947 and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* from 1955. Dean Shackelford has claimed that Williams’ “characters call into question the whole notion of ‘natural’ gender roles and the ‘naturalness’ of (...) ‘compulsory heterosexuality.’” Williams’ plays also “reveal the problem of human sexuality to an intolerant, anti-flesh society” (“Subverting the Closet” 135). Looking at the time period, James Gilbert claims that the homosexual man was a symbol of the gender crisis that took place in the 1950s, where the homosexual offered a greater understanding to the ongoing “disorders of masculinity” (75). These disorders of masculinity are something the protagonist Brick Pollitt embodies, and the 1950s gender crisis can be said to be reflected in Tennessee Williams’ troubled characters.

The two off-stage characters in the two plays, Allan Grey in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Skipper in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, represent a type of “otherness” with their sexual identity; because of their homosexuality they are considered “abnormal” according to society’s ideas on how to behave like a man. I would claim that Allan Grey and Skipper were thereby too rare to be completely “normal” and because of their difference, Allan Grey and Skipper had to be kept off-stage. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the protagonist Blanche DuBois talks about a “blinding light” that was turned “on something that had always been half in shadow” (75). This light could refer to a sense of truth, where it “has, like homosexuality and the other secrets of a repressed society, been kept, in the playwright’s

words, ‘half in shadow’” (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 143). As a result of Allan Grey and Skipper’s “abnormality,” these two characters are kept in the dark, where their secrets remain hidden.

Tennessee Williams himself kept a secret for most parts of his life. He had many difficulties concerning the topic of his own sexuality at a time where homosexuality was considered immoral and where he experienced little sympathy (Gilbert 166). This seems to be reflected in his work: “this habit of constructing plot upon a ‘guilty secret’ that is never entirely divulged certainly encodes Williams’ own ‘guilty secret’” (Savran 91). The playwright’s author friend Gore Vidal has even said that “at some deep level, Tennessee truly believes that the homosexualist is wrong and the heterosexualist is right” (Hayman xviii-xix), and that this is one of the reasons why homosexuality as a theme remains concealed in Williams’ plays. Still, out of this conflicted personality came creativity and Williams managed to create intriguing characters that are deeply rooted in American culture. He escaped into an imaginative world and became one of the most well-known dramatists of his time. He wrote about his deepest thoughts and concerns “in ways that made him the most important playwright of his era” (Gilbert 167).

Tennessee Williams “probably ‘came out’ during his first visit to New Orleans. It was here, [Williams] says, that he found ‘a kind of freedom I had always needed.’” Williams enjoyed himself in the French Quarter, saying “I couldn’t have consciously, deliberately, selected a better place than here to discover – to encounter – my true nature” (Hayman 57). And it is precisely in New Orleans the story of *A Streetcar Named Desire* takes place; in a city filled with life and excitement in the late 1940s and a neighborhood that “has a raffish charm” (1). We meet the fallen Southern Belle Blanche DuBois who travels to New Orleans to live with her sister Stella after having lost the family property Belle Reve. Stella is married to Stanley Kowalski; a working-class Pole who enjoys alcohol and late poker games with his friends. It is the duel between Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois’ values that seems to occupy much of the play and that has been given much attention by the critics. However, Blanche’s past is even more interesting, because she can never seem to forget how her young husband, Allan Grey, took his own life after Blanche caught him with another man. It may seem that she struggles more with her own sense of guilt than she struggles with Stanley, even though he is a focus of attention: “The inevitability of her doom, however, springs not from the character of this conflict but from her rejection of Allan Grey on the dance floor of Moon Lake Casino many years before” (Bert Cardullo in Poteet 18).

We find some of the same dilemmas with the characters in Williams' play from 1955: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Here we meet the Pollitt family, led by the plantation owners Big Daddy and Big Mama. The play's action begins when the whole family gathers for Big Daddy's birthday party, where the members of the family are suddenly confronted with the lies of the past. The play deals with an obvious lack of communication and everyone except Big Daddy himself knows that he is suffering from cancer. Underneath this overarching cancer cloud other issues surface. It seems that the play's action very much revolves around Brick's incapacity to make Maggie pregnant and therefore secure the future of the family property. This incapacity stems from his guilt over his best friend Skipper's death, after he revealed his love for Brick. It is rather Brick's memory of Skipper and Skipper's homosexuality that is at the center of the play's conflicts. As a result, there is something buried within Williams' plays that is even more intriguing than the obvious conflicts presented by the characters on stage. Rather than focusing on the visible characters, I will focus on the so-called *off-stage characters* that seem to influence the plays' action even though their lives and deaths belong to the past. We find such a character in Allan Grey; the protagonist Blanche DuBois' deceased husband in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (from now on referred to as *Streetcar*). The second off-stage character is Skipper, the protagonist Brick's deceased friend in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (from now on referred to as *Cat*). Both of these off-stage men share many characteristics, but they also differ in the way they are presented.

My main objective is to look at Allan Grey and Skipper's function in the two plays. I will argue that the two off-stage characters play very special roles. It is remarkable how Williams has incorporated these characters in the play to influence the turn of events, but never to appear in front of the audience's/reader's eyes. Furthermore, why are their homosexuality and their deaths highlighted as the two main issues? I will keep this question in mind throughout, where the analysis of these two characters will constitute the core of the text. I argue that Williams manages to move the plot from being about the on-stage characters, to be about the impact of the off-stage characters of Allan Grey and Skipper, thus shifting from dealing more with the past than the present.

There is one quote by Georges-Claude Guilbert I believe raises many questions about both Allan Grey and Skipper. He states that "The queer in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) has already died before the play starts. The queen is dead, long live the queen: it is this death that gives life to the plays" (86). Allan Grey and Skipper have quite correctly passed away when the plays open, yet he argues that these two give "life to the plays." Manfred Pfister's definition of what he calls backstage characters is that they

“are only spoken about without them ever actually being seen on stage, to be given individual qualities and even to influence the plot.” They are referred to on stage by the other characters in the play, but they never appear before the eyes of the theater audience: “the simple fact that they are presented verbally rather than multimedially means that they have a status that can be clearly distinguished from that of the figures of the *dramatis personae*” (164-165). Hence Allan Grey and Skipper have another function than the characters visible on stage, but what are these functions and why are they there?

Pfister states that one of the characteristics of the off-stage characters is that they do not have individual qualities nor do they influence the plot (164-165). I would agree that the off-stage characters do not influence the plot that actually happens on the theater stage, but they certainly influence the characters’ thoughts, choices and actions and thus the outcome of the play. To discuss how and why this is done will be my ultimate goal for this text. My claim is that both Allan Grey and Skipper influence the past, the present and the future of the characters in the play, and without Allan Grey or Skipper, there would not be a conflict and there would not be a play. The deaths of these two are what fuel the plays with action. Allan Grey’s death seems to be the main reason for the protagonist Blanche’s behavior throughout *Streetcar*; it drives her to the brink of madness as she clings to a forgotten past which eventually affects her position in life. Skipper’s death also influences Brick’s present life in *Cat* to such an extent that his apathy and depression takes over. Skipper’s close friendship with Brick is something all of the characters in *Cat* know about, and the conversations about him make this off-stage character’s presence even stronger.

Going back to Guilbert’s quote mentioned earlier, he writes that “the queen is dead,” but on the contrary, neither Allan Grey nor Skipper can be classified as homosexual queens in the modern sense of the word. Neither Allan Grey nor Skipper was seen as feminine homosexuals; both of them appeared to be quite normal men of their time. Fred Fejes states that “effeminacy was not a reliable marker of homosexuality” in the 1950s America and the “abnormal” man could therefore be anyone (15). Allan Grey was, according to Blanche, “not effeminate” (75), though he possessed some feminine and tender qualities. Skipper, on the other hand, was an athlete; a football player who never appears to have woman-like qualities. Guilbert misinterprets their function when he says that they are the “queens” in the play, because they are in fact somewhat masculine as well as homosexual. Their masculinity and homosexuality is neither stereotypical nor alike. The first part of Chapter One will therefore discuss what kind of role Allan Grey and Skipper’s masculinity has in the plays, and how these two characters function in opposition to the other, heterosexual, masculine men.

Furthermore, I will discuss the masculine men Stanley Kowalski, Harold “Mitch” Mitchell and Brick Pollitt and look at how their personas are considered “normal” as opposed to Allan Grey and Skipper’s “abnormality.”

Allan Grey and Skipper can also be said to hide their homosexuality and the hidden homosexual was often seen as even more threatening because it meant that homosexuality could be lurking anywhere, and “abnormality” itself could not be spotted (Fejes 15). The second part of Chapter One will therefore focus its discussion on how Allan Grey and Skipper’s homosexuality comes across, how their homosexuality is revealed and how their relationships with the other characters are affected by their sexual identity. Their place in a heteronormative society is questioned and the expectations that go with it prove to be challenging for both of them. I will discuss how and why this eventually leads to their deaths. I consider this aspect of Williams’ plays to be a comment on how people dealt with homosexuality in a time where such sexual preferences were widely considered immoral and abnormal.

The complications of masculinity and homosexuality are interesting to consider, especially within Williams’ plays where we find that “normal” men, such as Stanley Kowalski and Brick Pollitt, cannot rely on the visible traits of the homosexual Allan Grey and Skipper for a reassurance of their own masculinity. Both Stanley and Brick’s sexuality is questioned, and Brick especially has to face the repercussions. Fejes writes that when the new image of the homosexual stated that “gender inversion” was no longer a marker for homosexuality, the lines got blurred and a fear of an “abnormal” homosexual identity started to materialize (Fejes 15). This fear is clearly present within Brick; however, the other characters are also affected by the two off-stage characters’ sexuality. The first part of Chapter Two will therefore discuss how Allan Grey and Skipper’s homosexuality functions outside themselves; how their earlier presence generates a discussion about sexuality between the other characters in *Streetcar* and *Cat*. I will look at how Allan Grey and Skipper’s existence raises questions and thereby affects the people around the two protagonists Blanche and Brick. It is also necessary to look at the milieu that Williams depicts in *Streetcar* and *Cat* in order for us to understand Blanche and Brick’s homophobia better. Therefore, in the second part of Chapter Two, I will direct special attention to how and why the two off-stage characters create fear within the protagonists Blanche and Brick, who clearly express their “disgust” with Allan Grey and Skipper’s sexuality. Blanche and Brick’s fears are thereby closely connected to homophobia. Their reactions and feelings surrounding this “scandalous” behavior constitute this section.

My main approach is that of close reading by looking at the thematic features in the two plays, especially focusing on different views on the subjects of homosexuality in Chapter One and homophobia in Chapter Two. I will stay close to the actual text by looking at certain dialogues and monologues from the two plays. My research has found that there is little theory available on the characterization of off-stage characters and I was surprised to find that few critics have taken this approach into consideration when discussing Williams' works. Nor have I found texts on the actual comparison of Allan Grey and Skipper. Several critics have stated, however, that the two off-stage characters have an important role in both Blanche and Brick's lives, but have chosen not to look at how and why in an in-depth manner. This made working on my thesis even more fascinating. Realizing that my own analysis could be compared and contrasted with other critics' point of view has been rewarding. Williams and his works are a national American treasure and finding information about the plays was therefore not problematic. Critics like Dean Shackelford, David Savran and William Mark Poteet have written texts that have both given me support on the topic in hand, but also given me ground for skepticism. I will incorporate some theories of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick where appropriate, and rely on Michael Kimmel, George Chauncey and Fred Fejes for historical information.

I will use the final 1947 version of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. There is also however, an earlier version of *Streetcar*, an unrevised Signet-version that contains a queerer monologue by Blanche when talking about Allan Grey. The only time I will refer to this version is when I will discuss Georges-Claude Guilbert's own analysis of the homosexual Allan Grey. Otherwise I will refer to the final version that shows how one had to take a subtle approach to the topic of homosexuality on the theater stage in 1947. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Brick's development throughout the play differs from the original version written by Williams and the revised version that was played on the New York stage. The Broadway version offers a more sympathetic Maggie and an appearance by Big Daddy with an elephant joke in Act Three, after some revision done by director Elia Kazan. I will instead concentrate on the original version of *Cat*, which is also the version Tennessee Williams himself preferred (*Cat* 134-135).



# Chapter One:

## The Conflict Between What is Considered “Normal” and “Abnormal”

### *Discussing Masculinity*

The intention behind Tennessee Williams' plays is highly debated among critics. Dean Shackelford states that John Clum “accuses Williams of writing heterosexist, homophobic dramas ‘built on a closeted sensibility.’ Like DeJongh, Clum essentializes gay identity in Williams and fails to comprehend the complexity of his attitudes” (Subverting the Closet” 138). David Savran also argues that critics “fail to recognize the complex ways in which Williams' drama and fiction explore the homosexual subject and demonstrate the fluidity and decentralization of masculinity and femininity” (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 138). The plots of both *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are examples where these fixed notions of gender are rather something fluid and flexible. Allan Grey and Skipper are characters whose masculinity is put to the test; their male behavior is questioned when their sexual identity is revealed. Allan Grey and Skipper's behavior are described by the others as something “not right” and “not normal.” Judith Butler writes about how the word “normative” is synonymous with “pertaining to the norms that govern gender.” She argues that gender appears in different forms and “then a normative judgment is made about those appearances and on the basis of what appears” (xxi-xxii). Allan Grey and Skipper are not acting accordingly to their gender behavior and are therefore classified as “abnormal.” However, not only does their masculinity differ from the other men in the plays, but their masculinity also differs from each other.

At the beginning of *Streetcar*, we get very little information about Allan Grey and his place in Blanche's life. Yet Blanche is the one person that carries the memory of Allan and her characteristics show us what kind of person Allan Grey really was. Blanche appears to have an expression that is “*one of shocked disbelief*” and “*there is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggest a moth*” (3-4). The story of Allan Grey starts to unfold itself in Scene One of *Streetcar*, when Stanley asks Blanche if she's been married, and Blanche answers “Yes. When I was quite young (...). The boy – the boy died. (...) I'm afraid I'm – going to be sick! (18). This is the first clue that Blanche has been,

and still is, affected by the boy she married. Looking at Blanche's choice of words, it is peculiar how she calls her former husband "a boy," as opposed to a man. In order to understand her utterance, it is natural to think of Allan's age; Allan and Blanche were quite young when they married, and perhaps "he was not yet fully grown" or "he was less butch than a man" (Guilbert 91). If he was indeed not fully grown, one reason for her use of words could be that he was never a "man" in their relationship; the marriage was never fully consummated. It seems as though his masculinity and sexuality was something hidden, consequently his persona could not resemble a "man's" – where a man's sexuality is often flaunted and proven, as we see in the other man in the play; Stanley Kowalski.

The first time we meet Stanley and his friend Harold "Mitch" Mitchell is when they appear in Scene One after a round of bowling: "*They are about twenty-eight or thirty years old, roughly dressed in blue denim work clothes. STANLEY carries his bowling jacket and a red-stained package from a butcher's*" (2). When Stella, Stanley's wife appears, "*he heaves the package at her. She cries out in protest but manages to catch it; then she laughs out breathlessly*" (3). This Stanley character comes across as a "Neanderthal huntsman, (...) bringing back to the cave the bloody flesh of the freshly-killed mammoth" (Guilbert 99). We understand immediately that Stanley is the man of the house. He says in Scene Eight: "Remember what Huey Long said – 'Every Man is a King!' And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!" (89). Stanley is the typical alpha male; he has a strong will and a winning charisma, and he is ultra-masculine. Even though Stella tries to argue with him, she always seems to lose, and Stanley rejects it when she tries to control him: "Since when do you give me orders?" (23). Even though the roles of men and women in the late 1940s were complex, it can be said that Stanley plays the part of the dominant male leader, and that Allan Grey and his lack of masculinity serves as a foil to Stanley's character. Stanley Kowalski is thus Allan Grey's main counterpart in the play, and Allan Grey's different masculinity functions to highlight this.

Blanche's choice of words can also have something to do with Allan's sense of manhood. Michael Kimmel distinguishes between the word "man" and "boy" in his book *Manhood in America*, where he says "being a man meant also not being a boy" and "a man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control" (18). It could be that Blanche calls him a boy in order to show that only a confused boy who lacks control can do the things Allan did, because as we will see later on, Allan's choices eventually left Blanche alone. The use of the word "boy" however, could also be a euphemism; that being a word that seems harmless but is used in order to conceal a difficult

truth, for example “he passed away” instead of “he is dead.” Euphemisms are often used in reference to sexual orientations, and if this is the case with *Streetcar*, Blanche wants to hide Allan’s truth and calls him a boy without attaching his homosexuality to the person he is.

Yet the mere memory of Allan makes Blanche sick. Whether this is due to the memory of him, the memory of his homosexuality, or the memory of his actual death remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that the person she loved stirs up some feelings that are difficult to disregard. However, this first introduction of Allan Grey is similar to Skipper’s introduction in *Cat*. The first time we hear about Skipper is in Act One when Maggie talks about Brick and Skipper’s problems with alcohol. Maggie says: “It was just beginning to soften up Skipper when – I’m sorry. I never could keep my fingers off a sore” (18). With Maggie’s statement, we learn that talking about Skipper is quite a delicate and touchy subject, as is Allan Grey. Skipper is clearly a subject preferably avoided. Still, Maggie goes on talking, while Brick does not want to hear more about it: “Maggie, shut up about Skipper. (...) What you’re doing is a dangerous thing to do. You’re – you’re – you’re – foolin’ with something that – nobody ought to fool with” (39). This “something” that Brick is talking about must be a reference to Skipper’s homosexuality, since homosexuality as a word should not be thrown around carelessly in those days. America of the 1950s was angst-ridden and haunted by witch hunts directed towards everything foreign, as well as the gay and lesbian community. Being something other than a real man, being a homosexual at that time “was not only perversion of the highest magnitude, but, more importantly, also tantamount to being a ‘traitor’” and “mentally ill” (Shackelford, “Gay Subjectivity” 104). A lack of “normalness” was a threat to society. Butler comments on this, saying that to have a gender “means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of subordination,” and that to behave like a man should behave, is considered normative: “One such view prescribes and condones the sexual ordering of gender, maintaining that men who are men will be straight, women who are women will be straight” (Butler xiii). Being called and defined as something “different” than a man was a serious allegation and Brick could feel this is tampering with the memory of Skipper. In fact, Skipper was homosexual but very much like a man, a point I will return to.

In *Streetcar*, Blanche is also careful with revealing too much information about Allan. The only one Blanche talks to about Allan is Mitch in Scene Six, and he is the only one she opens up to. Blanche avoids talking about Allan to Stanley and everybody else, and Scene One is abruptly ended by her sinking “back down” and “her head falls on her arms” (18). Williams is hiding and mystifying Allan and Skipper’s sexual orientation at the beginning of the plays, only to build up dramatic tension by revealing the true colors of the off-stage

characters little by little. The homosexuality in the two plays uncovers slowly, but strongly after all. Knowing that homosexuality as a topic is in fact very present in the two plays makes Williams' subtleness quite obvious.

By taking a closer look at Stanley Kowalski's masculinity in *Streetcar*, we can figure out what kind of function he has in the play, in contrast to the dead homosexual Allan Grey:

*Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the centre of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying centre are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them. (16)*

Stanley functions as the masculine male bird in the bunch, always sexually loaded as he "sizes" the women up. He enjoys typical manly activities, and he has an owner relationship to "his car, his radio, everything that is his," and one can argue that even Stella belongs to this category. Stanley is hyper-masculine and hyper-heterosexual. However, Butler "claims that heterosexuality is an identity permanently at risk: 'It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming de-instituted at every interval'" (Shackelford, "Subverting the Closet" 136). We witness Stanley's heterosexuality and his need for proving it several times throughout the play; for example in his erotic relationship with Stella, in his exposure of his well-built body, and with his violent outbursts. His masculinity must be repeated and uncovered, in order to establish the heteronormative society that he represents. Allan Grey's disembodied presence becomes important as a contrast to Stanley, because as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues: "in order to protect the status and identity known as 'heterosexuality,' the prevailing hegemony forces gay men and lesbians to inhabit the closet and keeps heterosexuality 'out of the closet' to reaffirm heterosexual normativity" (Shackelford, "Subverting the Closet" 135). Stanley becomes a symbol of heterosexual normativity, while Allan Grey represents the homosexual abnormality that must be closeted.

There are very few similarities between Allan Grey and Stanley, and at first sight one could argue that Williams often relies on stereotypes to get his message across. If Stanley functions as the strong, masculine master in the play and Allan inhabits the role of the weak poet who in the end kills himself, one could argue that they exist on opposite sides of a fictional masculinity-barometer. However, as we will see, Stanley also inhabits some tender qualities which again show Williams' complexity in dealing with the notions of masculinity.

After Blanche and Mitch's encounter in Scene Three, Blanche turns on the radio, and "Waltzes to the music with romantic gestures. MITCH is delighted and moves in awkward imitation like a dancing bear," but they are interrupted by Stanley who "crosses to the small white radio and snatches it off the table" and "tosses the instrument out of the window" (40). Mitch's awkwardness is interrupted by Stanley's need to mark his territory, though severely drunk. The guys have to handle him, and this is when Williams implies a homoerotic tone. This scene can be seen as a homoerotic interaction: "STANLEY is forced, pinioned by the two men, into the bedroom. He nearly throws them off. Then all at once he subsides and is limp in their grasp. They speak quietly and lovingly to him and he leans his face on one of their shoulders" (41). Though it does not last long, there is a romantic scene implied, however, Stanley's "homoerotic actions are replaced by his once again heterosexual, animal self" (Poteet 29). Hereby, Williams depicts Stanley's character at some deeper level, showing that he is capable of experiencing tender emotions towards his friends. Still, Williams makes Stanley go forward with another basic instinct; to neglect those feelings and return to his ultra-heterosexual behavior. Consequently, Stanley's representation of a heterosexual man remains ambiguous. Stanley also "becomes the object of the female, and, by implication, the gay male's gaze" (Shackelford, "Subverting the Closet" 148). Stanley's well-built body is described often in the play and he removes his sticky shirt in front of Blanche because "be comfortable" is his motto (17). Stanley thereby becomes an object of the gay man's desire, and Stanley's role "as surrogate gay male and sex object enable the playwright to violate the very norms Stanley seems to represent" (Shackelford, "Subverting the Closet" 149). Still, Stanley tries to uphold his place in the heteronormative hierarchy several times throughout the play and his masculine behavior seems impossible for his friends to compete with.

Williams thereby offers the readers other characters that serve other purposes. A character that inhabits an alternate position is Mitch. During the poker game in Scene Three, Stanley acts out the dominant role, while Mitch comes across in a more subtle and soft way:

MITCH: I'm out again. I oughta go home pretty soon.

STANLEY: Shut up.

MITCH: I gotta sick mother. She don't go to sleep until I come in at night.

STANLEY: Then why don't you stay home with her?

MITCH: She says to go out, so I go out, but I don't enjoy it. All the while I keep wondering how she is.

STANLEY: Aw, for God's sake, go home, then! (32)

A poker game can be seen as the ultimate manly activity, where the guys are desperately trying to keep both the women and other feminine qualities such as a display of emotions, off the table. Mitch admits in Scene Three that “Poker should not be played in a house with women” (42). It is appropriate to assume that the masculine sport of poker playing has little room for sentiments, hence the rejection of Mitch’s feelings. Mitch also says that he is “out” of the game several times throughout the scene, which results in him being “out” of the manly ritual and “out” of the male bonding. Since the poker game appears twice in the play, it can be seen as an important ritual for the men and one could argue that this act of poker functions as a homosocial interaction (Poteet 19). Williams Mark Poteet states that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

defines “male homosocial desire” as social interaction(s) among men, traditional male bonding, which allow men subconsciously to express and consciously repress homoerotic attraction to one another; to resist homosexual identification, homosociality is inherently, and often times rabidly so, homophobic. (21-22)

In *Streetcar*, the ritual of playing poker is where homoerotic desires are repressed and homophobia is praised. Mitch’s feelings are ridiculed and excluded, because his persona threatens the ultra-masculine environment that exists in a poker game. It is therefore natural to think that the ritual of poker generates the homophobia within the play, which I will come back to in Chapter Two. Still, masculinity, homosexuality and homophobia prove to be closely linked.

We can also compare the poker game to the situation where Blanche witnesses Allan in a room she “thought was empty – which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it...” (76). It is peculiar that Stanley and his friends are described as playing in stark light; “with the bold colors and intensity directly informing their collective masculinity” in the play (Poteet 22). They have nothing to hide and they gladly play poker in front of everyone, which is evidence of how real men interact. However, the bedroom is different, with shadows and dims which “relates to the dark room, the private space, into which Blanche enters to find her husband and another man having sex” (Poteet 22-23). The secretly dark bedroom serves as a contrast to the lit up poker game, symbolizing how things that happens in a bedroom, and especially what has happened to Allan Grey and another man, should forever be consumed by darkness. The poker games highlight how masculinity and homophobic tendencies are present and accepted in the play, whereas manly femininity and homosexuality should remain hidden. In *Streetcar*,

Allan Grey functions as a dimly lit shadow in the corner of a homophobic environment that expects normality.

The dim bedroom in *Streetcar* can be paralleled by the bedroom where Maggie and Brick are situated in *Cat*. The way Williams describes the setting in his “Notes for the designer” makes us wonder if everything is not quite “right” from the beginning; the room has not “*changed much since*” the two men “*shared this room all their lives together.*” Williams also writes that “*the room must evoke some ghosts,*” because the relationship “*must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon*” (5). Williams is referring to the former plantation owners Jack Straw and Peter Ochello that left their property in the hands of Big Daddy. The union of Straw and Ochello is significant to the story in *Cat*:

The entire dramatic action of the play is trapped within the matrix of their relationship. Williams constructs a kind of narrowing cultural spiral around Straw and Ochello: from breaking with the societal norms of the mid-twentieth century South, to owning the plantation, to sharing the bedroom, and finally to the bed itself. (Poteet 42)

The themes masculinity and homosexuality prove to be more obvious in *Cat* than in *Streetcar*. Whether this is due to Williams’ success as a playwright, which made him act more freely with his material in 1955, or if it was his intention with the plot from the beginning, is unclear. Williams is bolder in *Cat*, where homosexuality is obvious from the very beginning: “the very room represented on stage, the imputed center and origin of the plantation, continually evokes the homosexual coupling whose progeny fill the play” (Savran 102). Somehow the bedrooms in both *Streetcar* and *Cat* become a secret closet, where certain things should remain private. In contrast to how the things going on in the bedroom in *Streetcar* should be hidden away, Maggie complains about Mae and Gooper’s “no-neck monsters” (7) that always seem to interrupt the conversations going on in their bedroom. The room and the bed in *Cat* can also be compared to how Brick’s masculinity must be proven by making Maggie pregnant; yet nothing happens and time stands still. This space is clearly contrasted to the hectic life with constant remarks, interruptions and expectations that exists outside those four walls. The room becomes the closet; “a chamber in which the reign of homo-sexual patriarchy was conceived and delivered,” and “with spies always lurking just outside” or “always attempting to eavesdrop through its fragile walls” (Savran 104). Brick and Maggie’s privacy is constantly invaded by the children who represent a society that praises family life and parenting; a society Maggie and Brick are left out of. The two

bedrooms in *Streetcar* and *Cat* show how the action that goes on there breeds interference by others.

Skipper's masculinity also evokes curiosity within the other characters in *Cat*. Skipper's masculinity becomes even more interesting, because it differs from the portrayal of masculinity in *Streetcar*. Skipper's masculinity is not contrasted with Brick's, as Allan's masculinity is to Stanley's, but it is rather compared. Brick and Skipper are somehow complementary, while Allan Grey and Stanley are opposites. In contrast to Skipper's personality, Blanche talks about how the letters from Allan are "poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was and I – never mind about that!" (28). Blanche regrets how the vulnerability of her and Allan eventually caused his death, and she indirectly hints at how being vulnerable is a negative characteristic. This is again opposed to how masculinity is preferred within the play, where Stanley is the best example. If Allan had been more masculine, stronger and more secure, he could have survived what he felt was a moral downfall. Skipper, on the other hand, is not a poet nor does he possess feminine qualities; he is actually an athlete like Brick. Maggie tells the audience: "But that fall you an' Skipper turned down wonderful offers of jobs in order to keep on bein' football heroes – (...), so you could keep on bein' team-mates forever!" (42). Maggie talks about Brick and Skipper's close relationship during their football hey days, saying they were too afraid to grow up and suggesting that they wanted to remain together to the extent that they turned down job offers in order to stay in that situation as long as they could. Brick even says that both him and Skipper went into pro-football because they wanted to "– keep on tossing – those long, long! – high, high! – passes that – couldn't be intercepted except by time, the aerial attack that made us famous! And so we did, we did, we kept it up for one season, that aerial attack, we held it high!" (96). This shows that Brick and Skipper's success on the football field was a time they both treasured, and Brick wants to re-live the young, glory days. Skipper himself was a part of an ultra-masculine society, and thus represents another type of homosexual than the tender poet of Allan Grey. Their differences highlight how differently homosexuality can emerge and how differently homosexuality is acted out. The illustration of a homosexual stereotype is lacking within *Cat*.

In contrast to Skipper, Allan acted "different" than a man should, according to Blanche:

I loved someone, too, and the person I loved I lost. (...) But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness



which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking —still— that thing was there... (75)

Guilbert defines his “dictatorship of gender” as the social constructions of how gender is perceived and performed. If gender consists of pure constructs, “sexual orientation is just as artificially constructed as gender” (93). Blanche herself also participates in this dictatorship “which constrain men to repress their feelings and hide their fragility” (Guilbert 94). When Blanche states that Allan’s tenderness “wasn’t like a man’s” (75), she contributes to society’s view of what a man *should* be like, and how a man *should* behave. Her feelings about this may have been projected on to Allan, making him fully aware of her view on the traditional roles of men and women. Furthermore, Blanche also mentions that Allan was *not effeminate*, and according to George Chauncey, effeminacy became a cultural strategy for many homosexuals, where several adopted signs of femininity, such as make-up, women’s clothes and women’s names and “transformed their self-identity – or at least their public persona – into a fairy” (50). Thus, effeminacy became a way to construct an image of a feminine homosexual. On the contrary, neither Allan Grey nor Skipper was effeminate, nor did they act out their homosexuality in public by portraying feminine characteristics. Consequently, they represent another type of homosexuality, where their masculine features are more obvious than their feminine features, at least in the case of Skipper. They were very much like men, even though they inhabited a different sexuality.

This being said, there does exist an image of two other “fairies” in *Cat*, at least according to Brick. The characters of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello are two other dead homosexual men in the play. These two represent a happy story about two homosexual men, which is a story obviously contrasted to the unhappy lives that both Allan Grey and Skipper lived. We never hear about any unfortunate situations that involve Straw and Ochello, and we can only imagine that they managed to live a life in peace and serenity. By including them in the play, Williams depicts two homosexuals that did not face repercussions for their actions. We do not hear of them committing suicide or of their lives having a tragic outcome because of their love for each other. Instead, they are significant when it comes to Brick’s own view on homosexuality. Like both Allan Grey and Skipper, Straw and Ochello evoke unfamiliar emotions within some of the characters that can be related to homophobia. Allan Grey, Skipper, Jack Straw nor Peter Ochello have any influence on the actual turn of events by their actions, being that they are dead and off-stage characters. Thus it is not the homosexual men themselves that cause the chaos through their actions in the play, but it is their earlier

existence that affects the other characters; and it is these memories of the off-stage characters that cause conflict.

Claiming that Straw and Ochello tried to live as an openly homosexual couple makes them “sissies” and “fairies” according to Brick: “You think me an’ Skipper did, did, did! – sodomy? – together? (...) You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men? (...) Straw? Ochello? A couple of – ducking sissies? Queers?” (92). Men who adopted effeminate behavior openly in public wanted to make a statement about how their sexuality was different, but also reasonable; “it was a way to declare a gay identity publicly” (Chauncey 56). Even though both Straw and Ochello did not flaunt their sexuality in public, they still lived together and they must have been a topic of curiosity in the community. Brick, however, could think of them as fairies, because of their lack of secrecy. The fairies “reaffirmed the conventions of gender even as they violated them: they behaved as no man should, but as any man might wish a woman would” (Chauncey 57). This could provoke, because when men’s masculine characteristics are altered, others feel threatened. Still, it is unlikely that Brick thinks of this 1920s definition when he utters his negative words about the couple. It could be that their presence evokes real anger within him, because Brick does not want his true friendship with Skipper to be compared to a homosexual partnership. Neither Allan nor Skipper can be classified as being effeminate, yet it could be that the story of Skipper in *Cat* “is rooted in Tennessee’s knowledge that Cornelius [Coffin Williams, Tennessee’s father] had always felt ashamed of having an effeminate son” (Hayman 152-153). The examples of Allan Grey and Skipper could be Williams’ way of justifying himself. Either way, homosexuals were often defined in terms of their absence of masculinity, and these men were called “fairies” and “queers” in order to establish a negative view of the presence of femininity within men (Kimmel 99). What Brick is trying to do by calling both Straw and Ochello sissies is to degrade their masculinity as he knows it and distance himself from them. He does this with Skipper as well, even though he knows that Skipper was not a “fairy” nor a “queen”; Skipper was merely a normal guy who played football and happened to fall in love with his best friend. This shows that homosexuality can be acted out without the use of “effeminacy” and fairy-like qualities. Homosexuality can even exist within a butch football player; it refuses to be defined by stereotypes.

The “abnormality” within Allan Grey and Skipper comes from their manhood being constantly questioned by others. Male behavior was a rigid notion in the 1950s, and you could be considered “different” if you did not act according to society’s expectations. Yet Allan Grey and Skipper’s masculinities were very much like other men’s until the point where they

both realized their sexual identity. When Allan and Skipper's actions had made them known homosexuals in the eyes of their friends, their masculinity, or the loss of it, started to affect the other characters and their sexuality became impossible to disregard. Others as well as themselves had to address it. Then again, Allan Grey and Skipper's homosexuality also differs from each other. As Judith Halberstam has said: "Some queers need to leave home in order to become queer, and others need to stay close to home in order to preserve their difference" (27). Both Allan and Skipper found it impossible to preserve their rareness in the world they lived in.

### *Discussing Homosexuality*

Following the Kinsey report of 1948, homosexuality in America became unrecognizable. People could no longer distinguish a not effeminate homosexual from other heterosexual men (Fejes 14-15). Some feared this. Even though the 1950s was considered a decade of “quiet, order, and security,” many suffered in societies where “ideas of normality were enforced with a desperate passion” (Kimmel 236). Senator Joseph McCarthy saw both communists and homosexuals as a threat to society, because they “both represented gender failure” (Kimmel 236). Allan Grey and Skipper are examples of two men that found living with the definition of being homosexual not only difficult, but in fact impossible. According to critics, Williams himself was a homosexual. Yet he disapproved of queens and “flamboyant conspicuousness in public places” and he saw it as “a mockery not simply of women but of his own sense of manhood” (Guilbert 93). If this were to be true, Williams did at least not create the character of Allan and Skipper to make mockery of masculinity. Neither Allan nor Skipper acted flamboyantly; they instead come off as more understated than if Williams had related more to the lifestyle of the flamboyant homosexuals. Nevertheless, both Allan and Skipper’s homosexuality is ambiguous and complex. Even if Allan was not effeminate, he was still somewhat different; he was nervous, soft and tender. Williams therefore still “objectifies, almost anthropomorphizes, Allan’s homosexuality into a *thing*, independent of his subjectivity, whereas, Stanley’s animal like nature defines his masculine identity and subjectivity” (Poteet 30). Even though Allan was not effeminate, not a queen and not a fairy, he was still different and described as such in the play. Maggie also describes that there was something different about Brick and Skipper’s friendship; “somethin’ was not right with it! – Me *included!* – between you” (42). This “un-normal”, different “thing” is undisputable Allan Grey and Skipper’s homosexuality.

Allan’s homosexuality is revealed to us in Blanche’s conversation with Mitch after their date in Scene Six. Blanche says that she caught her husband: “Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty—which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it...” (76) In the queerer Signet-version of the play, discussed by Guilbert, it says that Blanche walked in on Allan; “the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friends for years” (Guilbert 95) This could explain why Blanche keeps referring to Allan as a boy, placing the affair “in the realm of cliché Greek style relationships” (Guilbert 95). It seems that Allan had been in a sexual relationship with this

man for some time, which again hints at how Blanche and Allan perhaps never engaged in sexual activities and that Allan's differentness can be explained by his homosexual preferences. Allan has therefore been well aware of his sexual orientation before Blanche knew.

This love triangle is not something alien within Williams' plays and this "one partner in the triangle (usually the older man) is relegated to a mysterious and ominous position, waiting somewhere offstage, somewhere in the wings" (Savran 122). Even though we get little information about this older man that Blanche caught Allan with, it could be yet another off-stage character. Blanche describes the situation: "Afterwards we pretended that nothing had been discovered. Yes, the three of us drove out to Moon Lake Casino, very drunk, laughing all the way" (76). Even though it seems that the three of them were carelessly happy, the older man is lurking in the background as a threat to Blanche's unhappiness: "this older man is less an individual subject than an entire past life or the expiring culture with which the subject in question is associated" (Savran 122). Thereby the older man functions to highlight Allan Grey's homosexuality and together they establish a homosexual environment within the play. The older man also shows what kind of milieu Allan Grey really belongs to, even though Allan has kept this a secret. The triangle between a woman, the "virile young man and a weak or effete older man," is "perhaps the most durable characterological pattern in Williams' work and remain the nucleus of many plays" (Savran 122).

Unsurprisingly, we find the same love triangle by looking at the constellation of Brick, Maggie and Skipper in *Cat*. According to Maggie, there was something odd about Skipper, even though Skipper tried to hide this "thing" away. Skipper had unexplored feelings for Brick, and in order to suppress these feelings, he made love to Maggie in order to "act" like a heterosexual. Maggie says:

He made that pitiful, ineffectual little attempt to prove that what I had said wasn't true... – In this way, I destroyed him, by telling him truth that he and his world which he was born and raised in, yours and his world, had told him could not be told? – From then on, Skipper was nothing at all but a receptacle for liquor and drugs. (42-43)

Skipper tried to go through with it in order to repress his feelings towards Brick and prove Maggie wrong, but Maggie "outs" him, and tells the truth that the world they all lived in had told him not to tell, which yet again indicates how the norms of that society preaches that Skipper's actions should be considered "abnormal." Society with its fixed moralities becomes important to a human being, and Skipper had "forbidden" feelings in the world he existed in. Maggie, though, knows the reason why Skipper went through with it: "Skipper and I made

love, if love you could call it, because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you. (...) And so we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us!” (40). Sedgwick writes about this phenomenon and says that the bonds of rivalry and love are closely connected. Theorist René Girard have several examples “in which the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved’s already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival.” The bond between the rivals is even stronger, “more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved” (Sedgwick, *Between Men* 21). If Brick is the beloved – the one person they both admire and want for themselves – then the rivalry between Maggie and Skipper could be the strongest bond. Brick tells us how Maggie wanted to be closer to Brick by reconnecting with Skipper: “I lay in a hospital bed, watched our games on TV, saw Maggie on the bench next to Skipper when he was hauled out of a game for stumbles, fumbles! – Burned me up the way she hung on his arm!” (96). This quote raises some questions: is Brick jealous of Skipper because his wife hangs on his best friend’s arm, or does it indicate that Brick is jealous of Maggie for being able to sit beside Skipper and comfort him? It could be that Brick resents Maggie for her flirting with Skipper. However, the erotic triangles Girard looks at often places the woman as the beloved and the men as rivals, which could in fact be quite true with *Cat*. Then Brick and Skipper are rivals over Maggie’s sense of womanhood, which would define them both as heterosexuals and “save them” from their doubts of their sexual identity. But Maggie’s futile attempt to connect with Brick by sleeping with Skipper ends in tragedy, and Brick holds a grudge towards Maggie for this. Skipper failed in his endeavor, discovering that he had stronger feelings for Brick than he himself had known. This shows that Skipper’s homosexuality was impossible to suppress. Guilbert argues that “Allan has been crushed by the ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ enforced by the dominant culture” (104), and it is safe to say the same about Skipper. This is what the two off-stage characters have in common.

Adrienne Rich has used the term “compulsory heterosexuality” in her essay from 1980, and states that the assumption “that women are ‘innately sexually oriented’ toward men” can damage a person’s identity (632). The individual is expected to identify oneself as a heterosexual within the gender system, and this comes from a male-controlled ideology where a heterosexual institution has hegemony. Rich claims marriage itself is “an institution founded on male interest and prerogative” (654). Closely linked to “compulsory heterosexuality” we have another term; “compulsory domesticity.” Axel Nissen says it is “the attitude (...) that the be-all and end-all of existence is marriage, that it is not possible to be fully a man or a woman

without getting married, and that there is no human condition superior to the married state” (*Manly Love* 104). Even though this term is used in relation to literary texts mainly from the nineteenth century, these ideas are clearly present in later decades. “Compulsory domesticity” can be compared to how the safe haven of the family household was a very strong image in 1950s America. Blanche and Maggie are somewhat obsessed with the thought of marriage; Blanche sees it as a rescue where she will not be anyone’s problem, and Maggie sees children as the only way to secure her future. When Maggie talks about the “no-neck monsters” that belong to Mae and Gooper, she says that “It goes on all the time, along with constant little remarks and innuendos about the fact that you and I have not produced any children, are totally childless and therefore totally useless!” (9). The fact that Maggie and Brick do not have any children automatically makes them “useless” in their environment, and compulsory domesticity is an underlying theme in this play. Blanche and Maggie are preoccupied with society’s structures and they force society’s thoughts into the minds of their men. Henry C. Wright stated in 1855 that: “Those who do not enter into the relations of marriage and parentage, cannot be said fully to answer the great end of being” (Nissen, *Manly Love* 104). Both Allan Grey and Skipper tried to enter into such relations. Allan married a young girl believing it was the right thing to do, but he could not fulfill Blanche’s hopes and dreams for their marriage because of his sexuality. Skipper had sexual relations with a woman, but he also failed, and became only more convinced of his love for Brick. The thought of a life on the outskirts of society proved to be too much for Allan and Skipper; they could not live as homosexuals in a heterosexual society because the thought of that life became unbearable: “the reigning heteronormativity drove [them] to neurosis, and then to suicide” (Guilbert 94). Compulsory heterosexuality ruined Skipper, while the compulsory domesticity made Allan disappoint Blanche and ultimately himself. They were both disappointed in themselves for failing in the heteronormative society, fueled by expectations that neither of them could live up to, and this eventually drove them to their deaths.

Blanche describes how Allan Grey decided to take his own life;

I ran out – all did! – all ran and gathered about the terrible thing at the edge of the lake! I couldn’t get near for the crowding. Then somebody caught my arm. ‘Don’t go any closer! Come back! You don’t want to see!’ See? See what! Then I heard voices say – Allan! Allan! The Grey boy! He’d stuck the revolver into his mouth, and fired – so the back of his head had been – blown away! *She sways and covers her face*. It was because – on the dance-floor – unable to stop myself – I’d suddenly said – ‘I know! I know! You disgust me...’ And then the searchlight which had been turned on the world was turned off again and never for one moment since has there been any light that’s stronger than this – kitchen – candle... (76-77)

In talking about light in this passage, Blanche uses light as a symbol of how she had found love and saw the world lit up, before it was so abruptly turned off, finding that for the rest of her life she had wandered in darkness, lacking love. This passage could also be a reference to Allan's sexuality; how the revelation of one's own sexuality can be seen as a searchlight that is turned on you and your new world of reference, but the burden becomes too strong, and the light is abruptly turned off, till there is only darkness and ultimately, death. Allan decides to shoot himself after Blanche confronts him and rejects him on the dance floor. This differs from Skipper's death. When Big Daddy and Brick have their conversation in Act Two, Williams writes in his notes that "*the thing they're discussing (...) is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them. The fact that it existed it had to be disavowed to 'keep face' in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the 'mendacity' that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with*" (89). The notes states that Skipper "died to disavow" the thing between him and Brick, which questions if Skipper had to die to keep their secret a secret. This hints at how Brick himself could be homosexual and it is certainly open for discussion; many critics have tried to prove that Brick was a homosexual, a closeted homosexual, a homosexual homophobe or just a heterosexual homophobe. What is most interesting, however, is that it was unthinkable to be openly homosexual at the time and this affects how Williams tried to hide it in his characters. Skipper was a homosexual, and he had to die in order to deny and reject his own truth, and this is what troubles Brick. Yet the reason for Skipper's suicide involves a rejection from Brick, just like Allan Grey's suicide involves a rejection from Blanche. Skipper chose to call Brick:

BRICK: I left out a long-distance call which I had from Skipper, in which he made a drunken confession to me and on which I hang up! – last time we spoke to each other in our lives...

BIG DADDY: (...) This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself. *You!* – dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it! – before you'd face truth with him!

BRICK: His truth, not *mine!*

BIG DADDY: His truth, okay! But you wouldn't face it with him! (97-98).

Brick's rejection of Skipper was the main reason for Skipper's suicide and Brick knows it: "Brick cannot accept either Skipper, his ideal, as a fellow gay man, nor can he admit the possibility that he possesses tender and homoerotic feelings for his idol" (Shackelford, "Gay Subjectivity" 110). Both Blanche and Brick are guilt-ridden over their friends' suicide, because they somehow participated in society's rejection of them as people.



On the other hand, Big Mama talks about Skipper's death from another point of view: "You know how poor Skipper died. They gave him a big, big dose of that sodium amytal stuff at his home and then they called the ambulance and gave him another big, big dose of it at the hospital and that and all of the alcohol in his system fo' months an' months an' months just proved too much for his heart" (107-108). The last days of Skipper's life are therefore a greater tragedy than first narrated, because Skipper suffered from a fever that "doctors couldn't explain" (96) and his quality of life were deteriorating. This could be the reason Big Daddy asks "Why did Skipper crack up?" (95). His mental and physical health was obviously rapidly declining, and there could be various reasons for such a fever. Savran calls it "Skipper's quasi-suicide" (107). It is still unclear if Skipper died of this medical condition, or if he actually decided to end his own life by consuming too much alcohol or drugs which eventually led him into a depression. Either way, Brick's rejection played a large part in it. Brick tells us what happened just before Skipper's death:

BRICK: Y'know, I think that Maggie had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed (...) – Poured in his mind the dirty, false idea that we were, him and me, was a frustrated case of that ole pair of sisters that lived in this room, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello! – He, poor Skipper, went to bed with Maggie to prove it wasn't true, and when it didn't work out, he thought it *was* true! Skipper broke in two like a rotten stick – nobody ever turned so fast to a lush – or died of it so quick... (96-97).

It seems legitimate to claim that Skipper became depressed after his failure on the football team, after Brick's injury and his removal from the squad, and after Maggie's attempt to get closer to Brick by sleeping with Skipper. Skipper could not manage the pressure from either side, and without having succeeded in conforming to a heterosexual life, or having his hobby or his best friend to share it with, it all became too much. Skipper is also somehow "outed" when he cannot fulfill Maggie's expectations in bed, and his love for Brick suddenly becomes obvious to both of them. This incident where Skipper is "outed" could be considered a crucial turning point.

In comparing this with Allan Grey in *Streetcar*, one might assume that Blanche did "out" him on the dance floor, and that the shame that comes with that "outing" did make him commit suicide. Still, in the final version of the play, Blanche's "I know! I know! You disgust me..." could certainly not be interpreted as all the spectators on the dance floor knowing the subject matter was homosexuality. Since Blanche also uses the verb "to say" and the adverb "suddenly," there is little chance that the entire dance floor heard Blanche's words (Guilbert

98). It seems more like a whisper in his ear. Still, a whisper so devastating that made him decide to end his life. However in *Cat*, Brick and Skipper's relationship was something special for both of them, and Skipper's "outing" caused panic within Brick since he chooses to hang up on Skipper's confession. This panic causes Brick to abandon Skipper. Even though Skipper has a hard time dealing with his sexuality, Brick is still very much involved, and also responsible in Skipper's death, because "the play suggests that social rejection is the root of his [Skipper's] downfall – not homosexuality" (Shackelford, "Gay Subjectivity" 105-106). Brick not only represents the love Skipper can never have, but he also represents a society that rejects Skipper and his "differentness." Destroyed by alcohol and loneliness, Skipper chooses the slow death.

Some would suggest that the reasons for Allan Grey and Skipper's deaths are that they suffered from internalized homophobia and that their deaths were difficult to prevent, because of their troubles with their identity and place in life (Guilbert 96). Still, it is somewhat difficult to know the reason for Allan and Skipper's suicide. Yet George Weinberg states that "the healthy homosexual is usually someone who has discovered that the heterosexual ideal he has believed in since childhood is inapplicable in his own life" (88). It is obvious that neither Allan nor Skipper could come to terms with their homosexuality, and even though both of them tried, the heterosexual ideal was something neither of them could live up to. Weinberg also says he "would never consider a patient healthy unless he had overcome his prejudice against homosexuality" (1). Besides the two off-stage characters themselves, there are several other characters in the two plays that have not overcome this prejudice against homosexuality. Allan Grey and Skipper do not only function as a tragic example of homosexuals struggling with a foreign definition; they also function as a projection of the on-stage characters' own fears of homosexuality. Perhaps the reason for Allan and Skipper's deaths can be found in disapproval from others; thus the answer can be found in the many expectations from people around them, and not as much within themselves. Blanche and Brick are not the only ones struggling with Allan and Skipper's secret. Somehow all the characters in *Streetcar* and *Cat* are affected by the lives of the two men, because as Maggie says: "the walls in this house have ears..." (20). Consequently, the things the walls hear reside in the characters' minds, and the curiosity, the interference and the fear of "abnormality" starts to grow.

## Chapter Two: The Roots of Fear

### *Discussing Homophobia Around Blanche and Brick*

David Savran says that most American plays of this time period, “even those considered at the time sympathetic to the ‘problem’ of homosexuality, were written in the language of remorse.” Other plays which also dealt with homosexuality did, for example, not mention the word homosexuality, or they portrayed homosexuality with anxiety, treating it as a problem (Savran 87-88). Still, the theme of homosexuality is present in Williams’ work, even though it was insisted that he could not come forth with homosexuality as a theme on stage during the 1940s and 1950s, “believing that ‘there would be no producer for it’ given the homophobic program of the Broadway theater of that period” (Savran 82). The word homophobia signifies the actual fear of homosexuality, which is a fear that takes place within both *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The American psychiatrist George Weinberg coined the term homophobia in 1967 and the word was used to determine a strong repugnance and disgust with homosexuality. The term was an expression for a state consisting of irrational fear of homosexuals and their behavior. Homophobia is often built into society’s structures and in human beings’ mind set around sexuality (Nissen, *Homo/hetero* 58).

In 1940s and 50s America many had firm opinions as to how to be a man and how to be a woman. These opinions have survived and are still present in today’s society. Men and women who do not act according to a set of unwritten rules in society are perceived as different and as a threat, because they demonstrate that male or female behavior is not something you are born with, but rather constructed and fluid (Nissen, *Homo/hetero* 63). Williams’ plays are perfect examples of how this unfolds in practice. He offers a commentary on how male or female behavior is constantly evolving and changing, and both *Streetcar* and *Cat* contain instances where the concepts of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality are questioned. Men and women that do not act according to society’s rules can be perceived as a threat to a “normal” way of life and it is in these pockets of fear homophobia emerges. Williams’ plays are illustrations of how this happens. For example, Stanley Kowalski has certain character features that place him within one category: he inhabits the masculine ideal. Nevertheless, he is also the object of the gay man’s desire, even though his homophobic reactions are obvious. The character of Stanley Kowalski has many layers, which can serve as a comment on how male behavior is not a fixed notion after all.

Still, Stanley exhibits a more “normal” male behavior than Allan does, and Allan’s “abnormality” is detectable in many of Blanche’s lines. By looking at Blanche’s interactions with Stanley in *Streetcar*, we see that her emotions run wild when talking about Allan: “These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy. Give those back to me! (...) The touch of your hands insults them! (...) Now that you’ve touched them I’ll burn them!” (27-28). The question we may ask is why she does not want Stanley to have the letters in his hands. We can challenge the truth Blanche claims; are these really letters from Allan to her, or are they in fact to someone else, perhaps a man? (Guilbert 91) If that is the case, one can interpret that there is proof of the “secret” of Allan’s sexuality, which is suddenly exposed when Stanley grabs them by the hand. The letters and the content become “abnormal” in their world, and Blanche has to burn them for that reason, in order to get rid of Allan’s dangerous ideas. Blanche’s fear of admitting or revealing Allan’s homosexuality already appears in Scene Two. On the other hand, if these are in fact love letters from Allan to Blanche, it could mean that the brutish ultra-masculine Stanley has the power to ruin the emotional validity of the love letters from the fragile, feminine poet; thus Stanley’s touch is in fact an insult to Allan. As we will see at the end, Stanley and the world he represents ultimately destroy the world of Blanche and Allan. This passage could be Blanche’s futile attempt to resist Stanley’s overwhelming power. Guilbert states that “Stanley stands for normality and unrefinement as opposed to the refinement of Allan (and Blanche)” (91). Blanche wants to protect the memory of her old, innocent and fragile creative world from being destroyed by the rough, sweaty hands of the modern working class hero Stanley.

Blanche represents the timeworn traditional old world, and in the buzzing modern city of New Orleans her presence and values come off as old-fashioned. The previously mentioned “dictatorship of gender” comments on how “man” and “woman” and sexual orientations are pure constructs, and Blanche and Stanley are characters that endorse this patriarchal system. It may seem as though Blanche is a part of this dictatorship, and at the same time, being mistreated for not valuing the dictatorship because of her affairs in Laurel (Guilbert 93). This is again an example of the fluidity of femininity that Blanche represents. However, Blanche’s traditional opinions as to how to behave like a man and a woman can be said to affect how she views homosexuality as “abnormal.” Blanche has already admitted that Allan did not behave like a man, and he will forever be “different” in her eyes. The Southern Belle’s old milieu can therefore be argued to have an impact on her development of homophobia. However, this “differentness” does not have to be all negative, because Blanche also appreciates Allan’s fragile qualities in many other ways. She has traditional values when it

comes to how men and women should behave, but do we really see evidence that these old-fashioned values trump her appreciation for a certain kind of gentleness and tenderness in a man?

The lady prefers men like Mitch and Allan – she prefers their softer qualities, as opposed to her fear of the ultra-masculine Stanley. When Mitch and Blanche interact during the poker game, she even says “That one seems – superior to the others. (...) I though he had a sort of sensitive look” (34). This information shows us that the two sisters, Blanche and Stella, differ in their taste in men. Blanche likes her men sensitive – which Allan Grey also definitely was. Even though many critics argue that the sexual tension between Blanche and Stanley is impossible to oversee, Blanche still preaches the idea that a man should behave like a gentleman, which Stanley obviously do not. Therefore, by looking closely at how her character features count more than her traditional background, Blanche’s own fears of homosexuality are not as evident as one would think at first. She truly appreciates Mitch’s tender qualities. Judith J. Thompson has even argued that “Blanche attempts to elevate Mitch to the romanticized status of the idealized Allan Grey” (Guilbert 103). She appreciates Mitch’s tenderness and how it reminds her of Allan’s, but it is possible to argue that Mitch cannot come close to the glamorous image of her first lover, as we see in his change of personality towards the end of the play (Guilbert 103-104). Stella tells Blanche about Mitch: “He’s on the precision bench in the spare parts department. At the plant Stanley travels for. (...) Stanley’s the only one of his crowd that’s likely to get anywhere. (...) It’s a drive he has” (35). This drive allows Stanley’s character traits to be appreciated more among the play’s other characters. It seems that everything about Stanley is more worth than Mitch; hence the ultra-masculine ideal becomes the model, also in the men’s work place. Stanley also mocks Mitch for his more sensitive qualities, saying that with the money he wins in the poker game, he will “deposit them one by one in a piggy bank his mother gave him for Christmas” (37), reducing the grown up man to a little boy who has no control over his own money.

If we connect this ultra-masculine ideal to the term homophobia, they are, in fact, closely linked. Homophobia is more than just a fear of homosexuals: “homophobia is the fear of other men – that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, are not real men” (Kimmel 8). Stanley and the poker players are examples of this. Stanley does not want his fellow mates to emasculate him, so he constantly flaunts his masculinity, in front of both the women and the men. Kimmel argues that American men “project their fears onto others; and when feeling too pressured, they attempt an escape” and that they “return to self-control, exclusion, and escape in their efforts to

ground a secure sense of themselves” (9). Men who feel disgust against homosexuals experience a loss of masculinity within themselves, and that they therefore have to gain control, which again produces narrowness and prejudice (Weinberg 3). It is likely that this is the case with the men in *Streetcar*. Stanley tries to show off his preferable masculinity, while Mitch becomes ostracized, not “enough of a man” and an object of ridicule because of Stanley’s narrowness and prejudice. This narrowness intensifies homophobic emotions within the characters.

Another character that also dismisses Allan Grey’s differentness is Stella. We often see Stella as the subordinate part in her relationship with Stanley, and when her husband yells her name by the stairs late one night, she retreats into his arms while he “*lifts her off her feet and bears her into the dark flat*” (44). Stella favors this ultra-masculine ideal, and her and Stanley’s passion for each other culminates in a ferocious sexual relationship. She treasures her husband’s drive, saying she was “thrilled” by his behavior the night before (48). She also takes a part in a society that accepts and applauds the ultra-masculinity within men and dismisses homosexuality. We see Stella’s own homophobia in this passage:

STELLA: I mean her marriage, when she was – almost a child! She married a boy who wrote poetry... He was extremely good-looking. I think Blanche didn’t just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out – (...) This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate. (83)

Stella’s choice of words in this passage shows her dismissal of homosexuality; she could just as well have described Allan as an immoral, perverted or wicked, young man. Also, “practicing homophobia is one of the best ways to uphold the patriarchy, and this somehow prepares her for her later rejection of Blanche” (Guilbert 92). Blanche reenacts Allan from her memory, as does Stella, but in a different, less romantic way. While Blanche somehow tries to explain and justify Allan’s sexuality throughout the play, “Stella names it and attaches it firmly by referring to him as a degenerate” (Poteet 31). We also see evidence of Stella’s subordinate place in the heteronormative society when she says she could not believe Blanche’s story “and go on living with Stanley” (114). Stella fears that leaving Stanley will make her an outcast; she wants to secure her future in the heteronormative society by remaining by her husband’s side. Stella chooses Stanley and defines her place as a traditional woman in the “homosocial order of the play” (Poteet 31).

Stella has to reconstruct Allan Grey from her memory the way she sees him; Allan’s function is to illustrate a man who writes poetry, who was “extremely good-looking,”

“beautiful and talented” yet a “degenerate”. Hence, Allan functions as a different, nervous and tender queer man, while Stanley must be ultra-masculine, ruthless and very much alive. Stella’s different perception of Allan Grey is an “account filtered by complex homosocial dynamics – the only one that Stanley can hear” (Poteet 32). She goes on by saying to Stanley: “You don’t know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her, and forced her to change” (93). Blanche and Allan were both innocent and delicate, but people like Stanley, with their strong beliefs, ruined them both. The society Stanley and Stella represent has the power to crush the society Allan and Blanche embody.

Society claims its part when Blanche has arranged her date with Mitch. She admits she is nervous and that she has only given him a goodnight kiss because “I want his respect.” She says that “I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes – I *want* Mitch... *very badly!* Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone’s problem...” (62-63). These lines are clearly connected to the term “compulsory domesticity,” where Blanche sees marriage as a prime focus. However, the ideal of compulsory domesticity within Blanche seems absent if we consider her scandalous behavior back in Laurel, and her past behavior is one of the reasons why Stanley mistreats Blanche at the end of the play. In the final scene, it is most likely that Mitch and the other men in the play are well aware of Stanley’s rape of Blanche. Stanley wants “to destroy and control both the ‘feminine’ impulses in men and the ‘masculine’ impulses in women,” and “Stanley’s outburst represents conventional American society’s reaction to the threat of otherness” (Shackelford “Subverting the Closet” 148/150). Blanche herself is seen as an “other,” since she has not lived by the standard ideal. The “otherness” that exists in Mitch is also challenged, and when Mitch yells at Stanley in the final scene, saying “You! You done this, all o’ your God damn interfering with things you – (...) I’ll kill you!” he is again weakened by Stanley’s power and “*collapses at the table, sobbing.*” Stanley calls him a “bone-headed cry-baby” (122). Mitch can even be seen as the play’s second gay man, since “Mitch is a mama’s boy, which, in the 1940s and even to some extent today, might be read as code for a gay man or sissy. (...) The sissy in films and popular culture as a whole represented the stereotypes of the gay man and thus reinforced a homophobic reaction in the audience” (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 150-151). Whether or not Mitch does evoke a homophobic reaction among the audience is difficult to say, but his character is portrayed as weak, awkward, and definitely not as masculine as Stanley. Therefore, Mitch and his “otherness” come out of this play as a loser, whereas Stanley comes out as a winner. Stanley suffers no consequences for his rape, whereas Mitch

experiences guilt and he ends his story by sobbing on the table. By the end of the play, Steve says: “This game is seven-card stud” (124), which can be seen as a reference to how men control the world; “in 1947, studs rule (...), and queers or dissolute women lose” (Guilbert 113). Unluckily for Blanche and Allan, this proves to be true. The ending is meant as a pun on the “‘stud’ Stanley, who has destroyed Blanche, and the symbol of the privileged masculine heterosexual world which does the same to all women and gay men (...) who cross binary boundaries” (Shackelford “Subverting the Closet” 152). The heteronormative society with its forced masculinity therefore produces the homophobia we will encounter within Blanche, and her surroundings can be said to have an impact on her emotional register. Her reasons for her homophobia will be thoroughly discussed in the second part of this chapter.

In comparing and contrasting *Streetcar* and *Cat* I find that the homophobia within the other characters in *Cat*, besides Brick, does not come across as strongly as it does in *Streetcar*. If one were to say that homophobia centers around Blanche in *Streetcar*, it certainly dwells within Brick in *Cat*. In order to better grasp the character of Brick, one should look at the environment and the people surrounding him. The story of *Cat* takes place at a plantation in the Mississippi Delta, and the “South’s obsession with the past and history and with the family and generations makes it a location where the concepts of ritual and initiation are still important” (Poteet 5). After World War II however, the South changed from a “predominantly agricultural society (...) to an urban and industrialized culture,” where several workers travelled to the bigger cities, and “what had been a rigidly hierarchized culture was replaced by a more flexible and mobile ordering of social classes” (Savran 89). The softening of this rigid culture is not so obvious in *Cat*; we hear of several African American servants such as Lacey, Sooke, Daisy, Brightie and Small. These structural changes do create a backdrop for the conflicts of the play, however Williams does not make a point of addressing them to a great extent. Somehow, the barren union of Brick and Maggie represent this new society, as opposed to the domestic household that Gooper and Mae embody, and “although Brick and Maggie despise the hypocritical society around them, they accede to its continuation at the end of the play.” Still Brick is fighting against this “deprived and materialistic society embodied by Big Daddy” in great parts of the play (Savran 99). Maggie on the other hand, wants to embrace it.

In many ways, Maggie is the play’s “primary desiring subject” (Savran 106). Maggie wants her husband’s attention, she wants to have children, she wants the family estate; she wants a future. Maggie is desperate to make things work with Brick and is struggling with seeing his apathy and depression take over every part of his life. This ultimately affects their



marriage. Maggie says she wants to survive by keep going, as a cat on a hot tin roof which tries to stay on the roof “as long as she can” (19). Where *Streetcar* seems to rely on stereotypes, *Cat* incorporates some paradoxes, and Maggie as a character functions as such. For example, Big Daddy has a “leech” for Maggie, since he “drops his eyes down my body when I’m talkin’ to him, drops his eyes to my boobs an’ licks his old chops!” (12). Maggie is therefore the play’s desiring object as well, and she represents both “obstacle and goal, both the barrier to the fulfillment of [Brick] his desire and the symbolic repository of his own sexuality” (Savran 107). Maggie also functions as a desiring object for Skipper, since she could be the “savior” of Skipper’s sexuality when he tried to convince himself that he was heterosexual by sleeping with her. The attempt was futile, and left the impression that Skipper could not perform: “he made that pitiful, ineffectual little attempt” (43). This could be seen as a “ritual of castration, the appropriation (or theft) of the other’s Phallus that reimprints it metonymically in every limb and recess of her body” (Savran 107). Skipper’s intent with the sexual relations proved wrong, and Maggie is thus a “sign of both erotic desire and castration” (107). For Brick, Maggie seldom helps the situation – she only makes things worse.

Brick’s incapacity to deal with his sexual identity ends in violence. Violence against women is thus a common denominator for both *Streetcar* and *Cat*. Stanley, Big Daddy and Brick all abuse their women verbally and physically on several occasions. In *Streetcar*, during the poker game in Scene Three, Stanley is drunk and “charges after Stella” (41), and he also rapes Blanche at the end of the play. Brick experiences anger when Maggie talks too much, and he tries to hurt her with his crutch, while Big Daddy yells at Big Mama several times and talks badly about her behind her back: “when Big Mama comes back into the room, boy, then I see what she looks like, and I wish I didn’t!” (72). The men want to maintain a sense of power, while the female body is vulnerable and in jeopardy (Savran 108). Williams’ stage directions are clear: “Big Daddy is famous for his jokes at Big Mama’s expense (...), though sometimes they’re pretty cruel and Big Mama has to pick up or fuss with something to cover the hurt that the loud laugh doesn’t quite cover” (48). Throughout both plays the women, with their feminine qualities, are submissive and degraded, while the men act out their masculinity and enforce their power through their own rules. By learning how the other males of his family treat women, Brick is innocently engulfed in this stereotypical and heteronormative pattern and is unable to change or escape it. The environment in *Cat* becomes conventional.

The ultra-masculine man in *Cat* is Brick’s father; Big Daddy. He is described as being “a tall man with a fierce, anxious look, moving carefully not to betray his weakness even, or especially, to himself” (46). There are several passages where we see Big Daddy as the typical

alpha male – similar to Stanley Kowalski’s position in *Streetcar*. Both Big Daddy and Stanley Kowalski inhabit the same position in the heteronormative society they take part in and the heteronormative order of the play. One example of this is during Brick and Big Daddy’s conversation when Big Daddy talks about how he wants to experience sexual pleasures, even at his age:

Well, I got a few left in me, a few, and I’m going to pick me a good one to spend ‘em on! I’m going to pick me a choice one, I don’t care how much she costs, I’ll smother her in – minks! Ha ha! I’ll strip her naked and choke her with diamonds and smother her with minks and hump her from hell to breakfast. (74)

By boasting about his sexual fantasy, Big Daddy reveals that his sense of masculinity is closely linked to his sexuality. His only wish is to have the fantasy fulfilled before he dies. The conversation is spiced up with prostitutes, diamonds and minks and resembles typical guy talk not necessarily rooted in reality. Nevertheless, it says a lot about his view on women. Big Daddy makes his mark in the conversation and his need for proving his masculinity comes off quite strongly. However, Big Daddy also admits that his younger days were somewhat experimental. In their conversation, he says: “Now hold on, hold on a minute son. – I knocked around in my time. (...) I said ‘Hold on!’ – I bummed, I bummed this country till I was – (...) Slept in hobo jungles and railroad Y’s and flophouses in all cities before I” – (90). Big Daddy even says that he quit school when he was ten years old and “rose to be overseer” of the plantation. And when Straw died, Big Daddy “was Ochello’s partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger!” (58). Even though he mentions how he was Ochello’s business partner, the story of those three men establishes a homoerotic environment. It seems that Big Daddy admits to having experienced homosexual relations and his relationship to Straw and Ochello could indeed make a reference to a *ménage à trois* (Guilbert 87). We can assume that the reasons for why the young boy of Big Daddy was taken in by the homosexual couple were “moved by other feelings than mere charity” (Guilbert 87).

One could argue that Big Daddy experiences homosexual panic as much as Brick himself, because, according to Douglas Arell, victims of homosexuality:

are trying to draw a line between themselves and the homosexual and place themselves on the right side of it. (...) Big Daddy may thus be in deeper denial than Brick, and his apparent comfort with homosexuality – which implies confidence in his heterosexuality – may be a deeper form of the ‘mendacity’ than that he deplores. (65-66)

The ultra-hetero quote where Big Daddy says he will find a woman and “strip her naked and choke her with diamonds and smother her with minks and hump her from hell to breakfast” shows how Big Daddy is desperate to maintain his position. And even though Big Daddy comes across as understanding of Brick’s relationship with Skipper, it does not mean that he would accept it. Even though Big Daddy knocked around in his time, his constant demonstration of masculinity shows normality after all, and he embodies the heteronormative society. Furthermore, one of the reasons why homosexuality was seen as a threat was because it challenged the concept of the family. Men having relationships with other men threatened reproduction: “in homosexual relations, the penis no longer functions symbolically but is merely a means to pleasure. (...) [T]his is why homosexuality is so threatening to the patriarchal order and must be suppressed. Once the penis becomes a means to pleasure, ‘*the phallus loses its power*’” (Corber 120). Big Daddy has served his purpose as a man by bringing Gooper and Brick into the world, whereas Brick has not become a father yet, and is thus lacking the appropriate position in the heterosexual world.

There is reason to claim that Big Daddy, as well as Brick, lives a life with mendacity. Big Daddy says he could write a book about it: “Think of all the lies I got to put up with! – Pretenses! (...) Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!” (84). Big Daddy has to “act” like he cares for a woman, which makes us question if he really cares for women at all. Another sign of Big Daddy’s homosexuality is that he can be seen as a character that suffers from repercussions for his homosexual behavior and his relationship with other men. Big Daddy does not return in the final act in the original version of the play, and he suffers from bowel cancer, which can be seen as “a recurrent trope for gay male promiscuity” (Corber 121). Big Daddy could be dying from the poison within him, that of a repressed homosexuality, because the disease is a “poisoning of the whole system due to the failure of the body to eliminate its poisons” (Corber 121). Big Daddy therefore comes off as a paradox as well: “the impossible intersection of desire and disgust, of homosexual and heterosexual generation, of misogynist and antihomophobic discourse” (Savran 106). Dramatically speaking, Big Daddy functions as the transport vessel of homosexuality in the play, but he is still *Cat*’s ultimate example of both masculinity and normativity. Big Daddy stands for power, authority and heterosexuality in his marriage with Big Mama: “he seems to epitomize the orthodox heterosexualized masculinity of the 1950s that simultaneously desires and degrades women” (Savran 100-101). I argue that the contradictions and paradoxes that constitute Brick, Maggie and Big Daddy again show Williams’ complex way of dealing with masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality.

The relationship between Brick and his father is also problematic, as are most fictional father-son relationships. Kimmel claims that “the boy needs a father towards whom he can reorient his rebellion and grasp a positive identity. (...); when the ‘boy does not have his father immediately available,’ he can develop a ‘large reservoir of repressed aggression,’ which can lead to a kind of ‘cult of “compulsive masculinity”” (228). Brick certainly experiences aggression and frustration, and they struggle with communicating, because they never really talk about things. Brick says: “We talk, you talk, in – circles! We get nowhere, nowhere!” (79) And even though Big Daddy tries to communicate with his son in Act Two, Brick does not manage to hear the understanding; “in his father’s implied homosexual past history, Brick simply hears ‘queer’ and begins his long homophobic tirade” (Poteet 54). Consequently, homophobia does not lie within Maggie or Big Daddy, but rather within Brick. Maggie is actually the one that is most tolerant of Brick’s relationship with Skipper, and tries to glorify the relationship between her husband and his best friend: “It was one of those beautiful things they tell about in the Greek legends (...), because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly. (...) I – I think it was – *noble!*” (41) Nevertheless, Maggie is fully aware that the relationship between Brick and Skipper could never be carried out, or even talked about. She is the voice of society, even though her character is understanding and rather sympathetic of the friendship. Ultimately, Skipper is dead and he is no longer a threat to Maggie’s happiness. Poteet claims that the characters must choose between “the classical, ephedophilic, and platonic ideal of Greek friendship and the homophobic, post-psychoanalytic effeminate identity.” Maggie prefers the noble Greek model, while Brick goes for the homophobic (Poteet 48-49).

Brick sticks with his homophobia throughout the play, whereas Maggie and Big Daddy, even though they are a part of a homophobic society, do not project their own homophobia onto Brick; they are merely objects in Brick’s complex fears about homosexuality. When Brick’s marriage with Maggie fails and his memory of Skipper keeps creeping into his mind, his own homophobia emerges, and the homophobia is with him at all times. On the other hand, in *Streetcar*, Blanche starts off with her own fears of Allan’s “abnormality,” but as we will see, her development is different. In *Streetcar*, the homophobia and the need to establish a heteronormative social order occur in all of the characters around Blanche. Stanley and Stella are homophobic by default and agree with it, while Blanche is affected by her own memories and her own fears. Brick is also affected by his fears, but the protagonists’ development differs either way. Blanche and Brick’s reasons for their feelings of “disgust” are different and their destinies prove to be different. One thing they do have in

common, though, is their search for an answer in the past. Maggie says it beautifully: “When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don’t work (...) But not facing a fire doesn’t put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant...” (19).

### *Discussing Homophobia Within Blanche and Brick*

The protagonists Blanche and Brick have one special thing in common: their disgust. Blanche said that she was unable to stop herself on the dance floor with Allan and then “suddenly said – “I know, I know! You disgust me....” (77). Blanche admits to how she said it; she was “unable to stop” herself and “suddenly said”; thus it seems that Blanche’s feeling of disgust overwhelmed her sense of reason and we can assume that she regretted this utterance. Brick, on the other hand, has to be tempted with alcohol in order to reveal his feelings to Big Daddy:

BIG DADDY: I’ll make a bargain with you. You tell me why you drink and I’ll hand you one. I’ll pour you the liquor myself and hand it to you.  
BRICK: Why do I drink? (...) Give me a drink and I’ll tell you.  
BIG DADDY: Tell me first!  
BRICK: I’ll tell you in one word.  
BIG DADDY: What word?  
BRICK: DISGUST! Now how about that drink? (81)

Both Blanche and Brick expresses their feelings of disgust when confronted with Allan Grey and Skipper’s homosexuality, but the two off-stage characters have different functions when it comes to Blanche and Brick’s homophobic development. Taking into consideration that Blanche is a female character and Brick is a male character, they deal with things in different ways and we can see evidence of this in the speech patterns in *Streetcar* and *Cat*. Brick’s dialogue “indicates hidden emotions and suggests that his detachment and ‘coolness’ are only pretended, a part of his self-deceit,” while Blanche’s speech patterns express neurotic tendencies: “she speaks ‘with feverish vivacity’, or in a shrill, excited, hectic voice” (Rogers 186). Brick has to appear cool and nonchalant mainly in order to hide his true feelings, whereas he is in fact falling apart. Brick is “slim and firm as a boy,” but also “at some deeper level he is far from peaceful” (9). Maggie talks about how Brick has “that rare sort of charm that usually only happens in very old or hopelessly sick people, the charm of the defeated. – You look so cool, so cool, so enviably cool” (18). It seems that Brick has somehow given up on life all together, and while Brick keeps his silence, his troubles “grows and festers, becomes malignant” according to Maggie.

Blanche also experiences a lack of peace, but it comes forth in a more obvious manner. All her emotions are shown in her expressions. If we look closely at the passage where Blanche finds out about Allan and the older man he had been friends with for years, we can see where Blanche’s disgust lies. Her rejection “stems from her accidentally seeing him

involved in a sexual act with an older man” (Poteet 18). Because in the earlier, queerer Signet-version, Blanche says on the dance floor; “I saw! I know!” which differs from the final version where she says: “I know! I know!” (Guilbert 95). Therefore, the meaning of Blanche’s words becomes more graphic, and it is the actual act that disgusts her. It goes against what is considered “natural” and the actual act of homosexual sex “terrifies the dominant culture. Homosexual panic is very much linked to this basic dichotomy: female bodies are made to be penetrated, male bodies to penetrate” (Guilbert 96). Nevertheless, if one were to consider Blanche’s old values yet again, these values could be used as a reason for her rejection of Allan as well. One can argue that a character like her has a strict image of what is pure and that sex itself can be seen as something “dirty.” We only hear about Blanche having sexual relationships with young men where she functions as a prostitute back in Laurel, but this life does not co-exist with the life she is trying to live. The Southern Belle tries to come off as quite a delicate woman with good morals intact. Little do we know about her past, but one could claim that Blanche sees sex as dirty, and that she feels sexual attraction is not to be flaunted, in contrast to how Stella and Stanley feels. Blanche actually confronts Stella when Stanley and Stella’s relationship turns out to be very sexual, saying: “You’re married to a madman!” (48). Blanche’s “rejection of the physical for the sake of an abstract ideal leads to frigidity or perversion and implies the denial of one’s own sexual needs as well as those of others” (Rogers 50). Blanche would rather have sex in a lousy motel room, in order to keep it a secret. It is possible that Blanche rejects Allan because of the sexual activities she witnessed, and not because of whom he did it with. This makes her a product of her old environment, and her homophobia is not caused by her fears of homosexuality.

Still, Weinberg talks about a side of homophobia that is based on society’s values, which involves how the person who inhabits the “other” sexuality is seen as a threat to society’s values and a person who does “not adopt a society’s usual value system runs the risk of being seen as undermining the society” (16). This could certainly fit both Blanche and Brick’s view of their homosexual friends, which makes it difficult for both of them to accept Allan and Skipper. Weinberg writes about “Existence Without Vicarious Immortality” which is how “the notion that there are homosexuals distresses some people because the thought of persons without children reawakens their fear of death” (17). In the 1950s, the safe family home was considered the hub of social acceptance, where children should be raised to become good Americans. Kimmel sums up the 1950s decade in his *Manhood in America*:

American men still felt temporary about themselves, even more restless in the midst of even greater abundance (...). Responsible breadwinners and devoted fathers, they were still anxious about overconformity but unable and unwilling to break free of domestic responsibilities to become rebels on the run. Besides, they were *needed* at home to raise those sons to be real men. (257)

Brick can be seen as a typical 1950's man who experiences these failures in every part of his life, and this causes him to shut down emotionally. In *Cat*, "the lack of meaningful dialog stresses the discrepancy between pretensions and truth" (Rogers 174). Brick stutters, and does not fulfill his sentences, which gives us a feeling that communication is a problem throughout the play. The reason why Brick is lacking words could be that there is no space for his emotions, or it could be that he is ashamed of them. The dialogue hints at how the characters are not listening to each other, but rather to conversations that do not include them. The people in the house want to hear what they want to hear, but do not want to hear what is actually being said; which shows how honesty and truth is constantly at risk in *Cat*. Maggie wants to hear Brick say he loves her and wants to have a child with her, but she does not understand his pain. Big Daddy rejects Big Mama, and none of the characters appreciate each other's presence, but "everybody tries frantically to bridge the unbearable silence in order to save at least the appearance of family harmony" (Rogers 174-177). It could be this mendacity Brick refers to. Big Daddy asks who's been lying to him, and Brick answers "No one single person and no one lie (...) – The whole, the whole – thing... (83). Brick's whole life is a lie, and he feels that everyone around him takes part in the upkeep of mendacity. He therefore chooses to drink; he wants to feel numb and avoids dealing with his emotions. This is similar to Blanche's way of living. Blanche chooses to take a drink when the nerves get the better of her, even though she proclaims that she seldom touches alcohol: "Now don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty!" (7). On the other hand, Blanche does not drink to kill her disgust; she drinks to forget her shame and her regrets.

Brick's drinking problem and his inability to deal with his emotions has been said to stem from a fear of being homosexual. Weinberg draws upon several categories for why homophobia emerges, and one of them is called "The Secret Fear of Being Homosexual." Freud coined the phrase a *reaction formation* which was a "mechanism of defending against an impulse in oneself by taking a stand against its expression by others" (Weinberg 11-12). Brick certainly takes a stand against Skipper's expression of his feelings towards Brick. Also taking into consideration the environment Brick belongs to, his negativity can come from how



he sees that homosexuality threatens the natural masculinity, because masculine behavior proves to be inconstant and flexible. Many men also feel discomfort at being an object for the active sexual attention that they constantly project onto women, and this can in fact be true in Brick's case (Nissen, *Homo/hetero* 70).

Another attitude is based on experience. Attitudes that are based on experiences with homosexuals could be both bad and good experiences, and can therefore shape one's view on homosexuals (Nissen *Homo/hetero* 71). Brick has several references to homosexuality, for example that of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. The relationship between Straw and Ochello makes an impact on Brick and his own negative view of homosexual couples arises from this memory of them as "a pair of sisters" (96). Taking into consideration the time period, it is possible to argue that Straw and Ochello were a well-known couple which perhaps reinforced negative feelings about homosexuality in the community, and that this has been passed on by Brick. Another reference that Brick has is to an incident at his school:

Don't you know how people *feel* about things like that? How, how *disgusted* they are by things like that? Why, at Ole Miss when it was discovered a pledge to our fraternity, Skipper's and mine, did a, *attempted* to do a, unnatural thing with – We not only dropped him like a hot rock! We told him to git off the campus, and he did, he got! All the way to North Africa, last I heard! (92-93)

This quote suggests that Brick is clearly affected by his peers, which shows how homophobia has influenced and surrounded him in social settings, and led him to think badly of homosexuality. They "dropped him like a rock," and Brick is clearly afraid of being treated like the pledge to his fraternity was treated; Brick is afraid of being treated differently. Brick could be mostly concerned with how others think of homosexuality; it could be "the fear of being *thought* a homosexual – [which is] finally more important than whether or not Brick actually is gay" (Paller 105). Brick is more concerned about his social standing and what other people think of him, and that a bad reputation could be the "root of his collapse" (89). He is paralyzed by the fear of him being a homosexual, and tries to defend himself throughout the whole play (Paller 105). Brick is perhaps not aware of his feelings toward Skipper, but he strongly rejects the notion that any other character in the play should define what they were. Ultimately, Brick fears being defined as not normal and he throws out names of homosexuals in a negative manner because he "fears being labeled a 'sissy' himself" (Shackelford, "Gay Subjectivity" 112).

This fear of losing face could emerge from the societal position he had and the group Brick was a part of. The American football scene is a scene of masculinity, and it is not just a

game; “it is the very arena of ‘supreme confidence’ and ‘super-masculinity’” (Poteet 35-36). Brick’s body and masculinity is often described throughout the play, similar to Stanley Kowalski’s body. One could claim that Brick’s homophobia is rooted in professional American football, and that when “making it known that one is gay, (...) [it] constitutes a basic rejection of conservatism, of the status quo.” Brick agrees with the “status quo”; since “hiding homosexuality (...) indicates that one either agrees with the status quo or at least defers to it” (Brian Pronger in Poteet, 57). Brick hides his feelings for Skipper because of his fear of going against this conservatism. Skipper, on the other hand, had the guts to reveal his true self to Brick, even though he was a part of this society, which again shows Williams’ complex approach to how and where homosexuality can appear.

The incident at Brick’s college showed that there was little tolerance for homosexuals in this sport environment. Negative meetings with homosexuals therefore reinforce negative attitudes against homosexuality (Nissen, *Homo/hetero* 71). Another attitude is based on defense, which relates to how an individual is insecure or has unresolved sexual or identity conflicts, which makes him or her afraid to be confronted with homosexuality. People who feel a strong need to be detached, to distance themselves from homosexuality, are most likely afraid that the distance is too close after all (Nissen, *Homo/hetero* 72). One could also argue that this is the case with Brick. Williams describes Brick’s emotions when he writes that the designer should give room for the characters “to move about freely (to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out)” (6). As a contrast, Brick is hurting, stuck in one place with a broken leg, and he cannot move around freely. He is physically and mentally constrained to remain in the same position. This could be a sign of Brick wanting to “come out.”

We also learn about Skipper primarily through Maggie, which shows us that she is the one doing the talking, searching for the truth. Brick, on the other hand, is rejecting the truth, which could also be a classic sign of how he wants to hide the truth about his own sexuality. Maggie talks about one night she and Skipper drank together: “SKIPPER! STOP LOVIN’ MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE’S GOT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM! – one way or another!” (42). Looking closely at this sentence, it shows us that Brick was even more afraid of hearing it than Skipper was of telling it, because it was primarily in Brick’s hands to let Skipper admit it. Skipper threatened Brick with his homosexuality and thus Brick’s “normality.” Therefore, his homophobia comes across stronger than his homosexuality, which is why his homophobic tendencies generate more interesting questions. Arell, inspired by Eve Sedgwick’s phrase *homosexual panic*, writes that “it is clear that the phenomenon she is talking about exists at a

very deep level in the modern male psyche” (65). We see this homosexual panic when Brick tries to defend his relationship in his conversation with Big Daddy:

Once in a while he put his hand on my shoulder or I'd put mine on his, oh, maybe, even, when we were touring the country in pro-football an' shared hotel-rooms we'd reach across the space between the two beds and shake hands to say goodnight” (...) Why can't exceptional friendship, *real, real, deep, deep* friendship! between two men be respected as something clean and decent without being thought of as – *Fairies*... (...) Skipper and me had a clean, true thing between us! (...) – till Maggie got the idea you're talking about. (94-95)

Sedgwick writes about how there is a fine line between “homosociality and homosexuality many men sometimes fail to comprehend,” and Shackelford says that “there is a fine line between male-male intimacy, which he admits he shares with Skipper, and self-acknowledged homosexual feelings” (“Gay Subjectivity” 110). Sedgwick argues that “homosexual panic is a fundamental, permanent, universal feature structuring all inter-male relations, not a surface emotion experienced in the face of some direct manifestation of homosexuality” (Arell 65). Thus, Brick's homosexual panic and fear of homosexuality in relation to his own male relationships can thus have been present in him long before he was confronted with his relationship with Skipper, but still – Skipper triggers it.

In order to determine what trigger's Blanche's homophobia, we need to take a closer look at the passage where Blanche talks about Allan's sexuality:

He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage when we'd run away and come back and all I knew was I'd failed him in some mysterious way and wasn't able to give the help he needed but couldn't speak of! He was in the quicksands and clutching at me—but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except I loved him unendurably but without being able to help him or help myself. (75)

Blanche feels that she failed Allan, but she also admits that she was slipping in the quicksand with him – his sexuality was damaging her as a person and her reputation – Blanche's “own sexuality has been called into question” (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 144). This is similar to Brick's situation. The protagonists of the two plays are both afraid of how their own identity could be damaged by two other people's homosexuality. Brick's heterosexual image is in fact more threatened by having a homosexual friend, and Maggie mentions that she was “sort of tagging along as if it was necessary to chaperone you! – to make a good public impression” (41), during their date with Gladys Fitzgerald and Skipper. This raises questions to how and why Maggie has been functioning as Brick's beard on social occasions. A beard is

used “when gay men bring a woman along on a social occasion to give the public impression of heterosexuality” (Poteet 49). If we look closely at the quote by Blanche, it also says how Allan Grey wanted *her* help, and perhaps Allan needed a beard as well. Guilbert says: “did he merely need a ‘beard,’ that is, a girlfriend or wife serving as cover? Or was he ‘sincerely’ attempting to ‘convert’ to heterosexuality?” (94). If we look at the situations where both Allan Grey and Skipper tried to “act” as a heterosexual, we find some similarities. One can argue that Blanche was Allan Grey’s beard in a heteronormative society, and while Gladys Fitzgerald was Skipper’s beard during the date, Maggie functioned as Brick’s beard in order for him to spend more time with his best friend. Maggie can also be said to function as Skipper’s beard when he tried to sleep with her. Either way, the women in the plays – Blanche, Maggie and the unknown Gladys Fitzgerald – failed to help their homosexual friends, by being a beard or evoking some passion or lust within them. Blanche’s attraction for young boys could also stem from her guilt over Allan; Blanche “must sleep with other young men in the hopes that she will save them from homosexuality since she failed so miserably in doing so with her husband” (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 144).

Thus Maggie fails to evoke any sense of lust or passion in her own husband. Even though we get the impression of Brick as being well built and handsome man, he does not engage in sexual pleasures with his wife very often. Big Daddy asks; “How was Maggie in bed?” and Brick answers “[wryly] Great! the greatest!” (96) Brick’s answer shows us his lack of interest in having sex with his wife. Maggie talks about how Brick *was* wonderful in bed, so indifferent; “Never had any anxiety about it” (18). If one were to argue that this is because of Brick’s homosexuality, it is doubtful that Maggie could have made a difference to both Brick and Skipper’s sexual identity by sleeping with them. This is similar to Blanche’s function; it is doubtful that Blanche could have made a difference to Allan’s homosexuality. This shows that Williams comments on how homosexuality was not anything to “solve.” The people of the 1940s and 50s who thought homosexuality to be an illness that could be cured, was mistaken.

The protagonists Blanche and Brick are playing a losing game in the two plays. Brick is bound to lose because he experiences a conflicting life; he has to be approved by his father to take over the plantation and thereby establish his position in a heteronormative society. The memory of Skipper must be pushed aside. One could ask how Brick will manage to “become/remain a heterosexual man and still be in love with the memory of his dead friend” (Poteet 44). Blanche is also in love with the memory of Allan Grey from the past, as well as herself; she tries hard to hide her own deterioration by avoiding stark light so that no one will

see how old she really is. In the end, everyone still left in Blanche's life rejects her. Blanche is explained as mentally insane because she is not conforming to the rules of society (Guilbert 93). Unluckily, in this period of time, "if a woman became blatantly promiscuous, she was even seen as mad" (Guilbert 106). Blanche's numerous affairs could, as mentioned, be seen as a way of reconnecting with the past, as Brick also does when he breaks his leg trying to jump hurdles one night. Brick explains why he did this in the middle of the night: "Because I used to jump them, and people like to do what they used to do, even after they've stopped being able to do it..." (44). Brick misses the things he used to do with Sipper and he has not stopped caring about his friend, even after his death. Blanche's memory of Allan – as her one true love – is also very vivid in her mind. Therefore, they both escape into a drunken state to escape their present lives, and seek comfort in the past because they cannot figure out who they are in this life. Blanche wants youth, love and traditional values, while Brick wants to remain a young, sexually driven athlete with his best friend by his side. Ingrid Rogers argues that Brick and Blanche "do not realize that the relationships of star and fan and of youthful beauty and admiring beau had been immature, unloving ones. Popularity is a basically egocentric value since in respect to it other people matter only as sources of recognition" (44). Rogers therefore tries to argue that their past self and their youth is one of the reasons why they cannot manage in the present. On the contrary, it is rather the deaths of Allan Grey and Skipper, and how it happened, that are the reason for their unhappiness. It seems that Williams is unfolding true love before our eyes, long lost for both Blanche and Brick, disguised in society's expectations of how to deal with homosexuality. Blanche and Brick's sorrow for their friends is at first disguised to seem like homophobia, when it is, in fact, based on regrets and a wish for second chances.

Blanche herself mentions that the opposite of desire is death, and since she fears death and the death of her youth, she tried to live a life filled with desire in order to feel alive. Blanche has a reason for her way of living in Scene Nine; "I'll tell you what I want. Magic! (MITCH laughs.) Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be the truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" (99). This can be compared to the truths Blanche is trying to avoid, not only her age, her past as a fading Southern Belle, or her affair with an under aged boy in Laurel, but also the fact that her husband was a homosexual. She is preaching the magic within a romance, instead of realizing reality. She rejects the truth, and she rejected Allan's truth, which again drove him to take his life. But is her search for magic really homophobia? Or is it only a denial of reality all together? Blanche talks about how her death will be:

I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean. I will die – with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship’s doctor, a very young one with a small blond moustache and a big silver watch. ‘Poor lady’, they’ll say, ‘the quinine did her no good. That unwashed grape has transported her soul to heaven.’ (*The cathedral chimes are heard.*) And I’ll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard – at noon – in the blaze of summer – and into an ocean as blue as (*chimes again*) my first lover’s eyes! (117-118)

Williams is a master of symbolism, and this passage reminds us of how Allan Grey, as “the unwashed grape,” has transported her away from sanity into death: the asylum where she will spend the rest of her life. Nancy Plooster argues that Blanche remains homophobic after Allan’s death (Guilbert 96). On the other hand, Guilbert argues that it was Allan who killed himself in the end, and that Blanche is “silly to imagine that *she* killed her husband. He was neurotic, unhappy, he suffered from internalized homophobia, her outburst was merely the trigger that made him pull the trigger” (96). Blanche perhaps experienced fear of homosexuality at a young age, alongside many other fears. However, the dear memory of Allan seems to trump the “problem” and “abnormality” of his sexuality and her denial of reality and her search for magic has little to do with homophobia. It is Blanche’s memory and the guilt that haunts her the most. She “realizes her misjudgment about Allan, which mitigates and excuses the gay viewer/reader from a shared guilt of reconstructing the homosexual scene,” and the reason why Blanche the character has become so iconic in the gay community is because Williams “*sacrifices* Blanche for gay pleasure” (Poteet 31). Williams “inscribes the gay subject and turns the play into a plea against homophobia and the social intolerance of both gay men and unconventional women” (Shackelford, “Gay Subjectivity” 138). I believe Blanche’s homophobia changes towards the end, where she finally recognizes Allan Grey’s death. She says she will be buried at sea, in an ocean “as blue as my first lover’s eyes” (118); Blanche will be buried in Allan’s memory. I believe Blanche’s fear of homosexuality diminishes and her memories of Allan become something she can rely on in the future; her memories will be the magic in her life until the searchlight is turned off and darkness and death takes over.

Towards the end of *Cat*, Brick’s indifference comes across in many ways. He “shrugs slightly”, while Maggie pours him a drink, and at the end, Brick is drunk and responds to Maggie; “I don’t say anything. I guess there’s nothing to say” (133). Arell writes that “his extreme passivity throughout the play reflects not an existential choice but an inability to choose” (Arell 62). On the contrary, Brick is rather retreating into a “normal” life with an

attempt to make love to his wife, in order to suppress his homophobia and prove to himself that he can be “normal” – perhaps a hopeless attempt. This is also similar to what Skipper tried to do when he slept with Maggie. Both Skipper and Brick’s attempts to conform to a heterosexual life have to fail. Therefore, Brick’s consummation with Maggie can therefore be seen as a full-circle moment, though a sorrowful one. Perhaps Brick will never confront his own truth. Brick could either admit his feelings towards Skipper, or “protect the position he has attained in life. (...) Another possible overall objective for Brick might be, ‘to find peace’. Unfortunately, neither alternative grants him that – and again, paralysis is the result” (Paller 113). The ending of *Cat* “becomes a testament not to the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality, but to the impossibility of erasing male homosexual desire, and to Skipper’s irrevocable position in the erotic triangle” (Savran 109). There is no doubt that Skipper has brought on this depression and unhappiness in Brick, and it is difficult to say if Brick resolves his questions of his own identity or goes on living in an unanswered heterosexual society (Savran 109).

I believe the two plays are quite different in the way they comment on homophobia. Blanche’s homophobia emerges from her traditional values and need for marrying a man. Brick’s homophobia is a fear of homosexuality which emerges from the society he takes part in, and he questions his own sexuality in a 1950s America. Brick and Blanche are subjects of their societal structures and both had negative feelings towards homosexuality. However, Blanche’s love for Allan seems to win over her fears, and Brick’s fears could come from a feeling of misplacement in life. Skipper and Allan Grey become triggers for Brick and Blanche’s homophobia, but in different ways: Brick suffers from homosexual panic, while Blanche experiences fear of the past and lives in an illusion. Skipper and Brick attempted to conform to a heterosexual state, with various results, and Allan and Blanche attempted to conform to a heterosexual, normal life, but neither of them succeeded. Within both *Streetcar* and *Cat* we never get full closure, even though it is easier to see Blanche’s destiny than it is to see Brick’s. The final moments of *Cat* and *Streetcar* make us wonder about their lives, and Williams’ plays “always imply far more than they speak, leaving certain characters and events shrouded in uncertainty” (Savran 91). Williams rather makes room for our thoughts to wander off, and he makes room for us to decide what the plays’ meanings will eventually be. As Savran so correctly puts it: “the action of the play cannot be disentangled until those watching or reading it resolve the material contradictions that structure the culture in which they live” (102). And this is why Williams’ plays offer a commentary even on today’s culture, which again shows his plays’ timeless and everlasting importance.

The two protagonists of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* share the loss of their two best friends in life, but neither Blanche nor Brick confront their truths, nor do they find peace with themselves. Brick retreats into a state of indifference; Blanche retreats into solitary madness. They do not cope with their emotions; Brick chooses not to cope while Blanche does not cope at all. And this is the true tragedy within the two plays, alongside Allan Grey and Skipper's deaths. I believe Brick's song at the end puts both his and Blanche's detachment from their present life into words:

*Show me the way to go home,  
I'm tired and I wanta go to bed,  
I had a little drink about an hour ago – (...)  
Wherever I may roam,  
On land or sea or foam. (...)  
You can always hear me singin' this song,  
Show me the way to go home. (123-125)*



## Conclusion:

### “Thought Him Almost Too Fine To Be Human”

*To be “gay,” I think,  
is not to identify with the psychological traits  
and the visible masks of the homosexual,  
but to try to define and develop a way of life.*

Michel Foucault (Halberstam 1)

To develop one’s own way of life proves to be difficult for the characters in Tennessee Williams’ plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Not only do Allan Grey and Skipper fail in their attempt to make an idyllic and peaceful future for themselves, but so do Blanche and Brick. As Brick tells the reader: “Skipper and me had a clean, true thing between us! (...) – It was too rare to be normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal” (94). However, the relationship was questioned because it proved to be almost too rare. While Skipper and Brick’s friendship was rare, special and unique, so was Allan Grey and Blanche’s relationship.

Allan Grey and Skipper’s personalities were also so rare that they had to be considered abnormal. The two off-stage characters represent two dead homosexual men in the plays, yet they are the drivers of the action. This dramatic feature was included in plays produced at a time when homosexuality equaled death. There was a rule for the gay characters in literature written in the 1940s and 50s: “The character must die by the end of the text, preferably by his or her own hand” (Poteet 20). The audience could accept gay characters in American literature and on stage if they were willing to punish themselves. This was to serve a purpose: “it attempted to deny gay readers any *pleasure* in a homosexual representation” (Poteet 20). Also, no American playwright could show off homosexuality candidly on stage without facing consequences, that of censure or even rejection (Shackelford, “Subverting the Closet” 135). Williams therefore incorporated homosexuality in his plays, but in a discrete manner. If Allan Grey or Skipper had appeared as on-stage characters, Williams would have exposed his own sexuality. Consequently, Williams wrote from the closet for many years, and some of his own personal conflicts are shown through his off-stage characters, by not incorporating them

on stage but rather making them victims of homophobia. Moreover, Williams' own homosexuality puts limitations on an analysis of his plays. His own reasons for incorporating homosexuality into his works are a great place to start, but an unsatisfactory way to end an analysis.

I argue that Allan Grey and Skipper's presence in the past penetrates the action to such an extent that the topic of the whole play is really about homosexuality and how to deal with it. Hayman argues that in *Cat*, "the episode from the past has more relevance to the present than it does in *Streetcar*" (147). Everyone knew about Skipper and his close friendship with Brick in *Cat*, while only Stella and Blanche have met and remember Allan Grey in *Streetcar*. The episodes from the past seem to be more significant than the present, yet I believe this is the case with both plays, at least for the protagonists. Additionally, Allan plays a part in how Stanley is perceived. Even if Stanley himself has not been affected by Allan in the story of his life, the character Stanley is affected by the story of him in the play. Allan's function is to highlight Stanley's characteristics and his brutal masculinity, which stands in contrast to the off-stage character of *Streetcar*. Formally and dramatically speaking, the past is as integral to the plot in *Streetcar* as it is in *Cat*. Skipper's function is to show how close homosexuality can come. Brick's homophobic emotions stem from the fact that Skipper has been an important part of his life for so long; he has been Brick's best friend. So again, formally and dramatically speaking, Skipper's past is integral to Brick's present, because the two characters seem quite alike and play off each other, as do the opposites Allan Grey and Stanley.

Returning to Pfister's definition, he claims that the off-stage characters "are only spoken about without them ever actually being seen on stage, to be given individual qualities and even to influence the plot" (164-165). Possibly a new definition of off-stage characters is needed, because Pfister's proves to be too narrow. Allan Grey and Skipper are such large parts of Blanche and Brick's persona that they become visible in the on-stage characters' actions and narratives. Blanche and Brick's emotions bring Allan Grey and Skipper back to life and into the moment. Blanche and Brick's narratives elevate the off-stage characters and make them equal parts of the plays. Both Allan Grey and Skipper are also given several individual qualities through the narrative. Despite their invisibility, their presence is pivotal in the play. When their lives and deaths are narrated by Blanche and Brick, the more we hear about them, the more we get to know them. I believe these individual characteristics make the characters grow in our minds, and Blanche and Brick's emotions show us that Allan Grey and Skipper were important parts of their lives. The conclusion that off-stage characters such as Allan Grey and Skipper can become central characters shows us that on a theatre stage, or in

reading a play, “telling” about the characters does not have to be less important than “showing” the action on stage (De Jong 21).

Allan Grey and Skipper also influence the plot to a great extent; they represent a type of “otherness” which generates homophobia within the other characters. Blanche, in contrast to Brick, is more concerned with the magic of the past and her homophobic tendencies are less obvious by the end of the play. The way Williams tells the story of Allan Grey reinforces the view that homosexuality should actually not be frowned upon or misjudged, because as Leonard Berkman points out: “Blanche’s most fundamental regret (...) is not that she happened to marry a homosexual. (...) Blanche’s concern is more directly that, when made aware of her husband’s homosexuality, she brought on the boy’s suicide by her unqualified expression of disgust” (Poteet 20). Had Blanche in fact regretted the marriage itself, we could see her as still homophobic at the end of the play. But what she does regret is the part she played in Allan’s death, and she feels guilty for having thought badly about him and his sexual identity. She represents the minority at the time that actually could see beyond sex, and see the person Allan Grey, who Blanche still loves at the end of the play. The character of Blanche DuBois was one of Williams’ favorites. Michael Bronski writes: “Williams himself saw Blanche as a survivor. He claimed, ‘I am Blanche DuBois.’ It was Williams’ life as a gay man that enabled him to create a character who survives by rejecting the sordidness of this world and creating a better one of her own” (Guilbert 113). Even though the outcome for Blanche in the play seems tragic, I argue that Williams himself had hope for the future; he had hope for the “outcasts,” hope for the people who wanted to be different, hope that homosexuality one day would become more acceptable, and hope that people who struggled with the definition of sexuality should eventually be free.

Brick’s development is contrasted to Blanche, because at the end of the play he surrenders to his forced heterosexual world by agreeing to make Maggie pregnant and therefore fulfill her dreams. It is unlikely that Brick’s unhappiness will disappear through this action. Blanche also retreats into her world of madness, but with the glamorous memory of her first love, which perhaps will give her some relief in the future. Both Allan Grey and Skipper affect Blanche and Brick’s worlds in a tragic way, but they have also affected them in positive ways. Brick will never forget the one true friend he had, and Blanche will never forget the one true love of her life. One can argue that even though the off-stage characters’ homosexuality is causing most of the problems in the plays, Blanche and Brick still have the glamorous images of their friends intact. Ingrid Rogers, on the other hand, argues that Brick’s “love for his friend, Skipper, was in fact very superficial. Brick readily accepted the role of

athletic hero and with his friend took part in a football-buddy relationship according to society's false values" (96). On the other hand, we find more evidence of Skipper and Brick's relationship being something real and authentic. As he says to Big Daddy: "Why can't exceptional friendship, *real, real, deep, deep friendship!* Between two men be respected as something clean and decent (...). It was a pure an' true thing" (95). Brick has affection for Skipper and the past they shared. If one can argue that Allan Grey and Skipper actually were the big loves of Blanche and Brick, it indirectly says that their sexuality does not matter a great deal after all. Their personalities matter more than their sexual preferences, because both Blanche and Brick will appreciate their presence in their lives long after they are gone. One can argue that Williams' plays are about *personality*, and not sexuality. This could be a reason why his characters have snuck into our minds and stayed there. Allan Grey and Skipper's function is to create an image of homosexuality where the person's qualities comes first, and not the person's sexuality or sexual preferences. As Stella said about Allan: Blanche "adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human" (83). Brick thought Skipper too fine to be anything other than his one true friend.

Allan Grey and Skipper deserve more than being reduced to images of sexuality. Even though their homosexuality is part of them, it is not all that they are. Allan Grey and Skipper brought more to the play than their homosexuality; they brought more to the lives of Blanche and Brick than their "differentness" and they brought more to the play. That is why Allan Grey and Skipper's roles as victims are combined with being the main subject matter in the protagonist's narratives. Their importance goes beyond their homosexuality, and that is why Allan Grey and Skipper are off-stage characters and at the same time, central characters. Allan Grey and Skipper affect the reader/viewer, they affect the other characters in the story, they affect the view of homosexuality in the plays and they affect the outcome. Williams thereby manages to depict characters with more tolerance and respect than we see at first sight. That is why Williams' plays could be read as a critique of society's expectations and why his work is significant even today. *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* become plays about the prejudice and a wrongful judgment of people. As Shackelford has said:

Attacking Williams for internalized homophobia, as several gay critics have done, therefore fails to account for Williams' accomplishment of conveying gay subjectivity through his subtle, though paradoxical, depiction of vulnerable men and women, and through images and symbols which suggest that repression of the 'other' may not be in the best interest of America. ("Subverting the Closet" 153)

Allan Grey and Skipper both represent the “other” and faced serious repercussions for their actions. As we have seen in Williams’ plays, and as we still see in our contemporary society, the repression of the “other” can be fatal. Still, Allan Grey and Skipper serve as heroes in their time, because they tried to live their lives to the fullest. Allan Grey and Skipper represent two men who ultimately wanted to live by their desires. The two off-stage characters show the concluding connection between the two plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; namely that both off-stage characters managed to influence the characters and thus the action even though they were never present on stage. We find that they represent the homosexual man of their time; a mid-twentieth century man constrained by society’s expectations, unable to be fully himself and thus unable to exist. This existential dilemma adds depth to Tennessee Williams’ plays.



## Works Cited

- Arell, Douglas. "Homosexual Panic in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*." *Modern Drama* (2008): 60-72.  
Accessed URL 07.11.2011:  
[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern\\_drama/v051/51.1.arrell.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_drama/v051/51.1.arrell.html)
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. New York: BasicBooks, 1994.
- Corber, Robert J. *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.
- De Jong, Irene J. F. "Three Off-Stage Characters in Euripides." *Mnemosyne* 43 (1990): 1-21.  
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/4431886.pdf?acceptTC=true>
- Fejes, Fred. *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2008.
- Gilbert, James Burkhart. *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Guilbert, Georges-Claude. "Queering and Dequeering the Text: Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*." *Cercles* 10 (2004): 85-116. Accessed URL 07.11.2011:  
<http://www.cercles.com/n10/guilbert.pdf>.
- Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2005.

- Hayman, Ronald. *Tennessee Williams: Everyone Else Is an Audience*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Nissen, Nils Axel. *Homo/hetero*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. 2001.
- Nissen, Axel. *Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Paller, Michael. *Gentlemen Callers: Tennessee Williams, Homosexuality, and Mid-Twentieth-Century Broadway Drama*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005.
- Pfister, Manfred. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Poteet, William Mark. *Gay Men in Modern Southern Literature: Ritual, Initiation, and the Construction of Masculinity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5 (1980): 631-660.
- Rogers, Ingrid. *Tennessee Williams: A Moralists' Answer to the Perils of Life*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976.
- Savran, David. *Communists, Cowboys and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.



Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008.

Shackelford, Dean. "The Truth That Must Be Told: Gay Subjectivity, Homophobia, and Social History in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*." *Tennessee Williams Annual Review* Vol. no. (1998): 103-118. Accessed URL 03.11.2011:  
<http://www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org/archives/1998/11shackelford.pdf>.

Shackelford, Dean. "Is There a Gay Man in This Text? Subverting the Closet in *A Streetcar Named Desire*." In *Literature and Homosexuality*. Ed. Michael J. Meyer. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, (2000): 135-159.

Weinberg, George. *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Essex: Heinemann, 1995.

Williams, Tennessee. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. New York: New American Library, 1983.