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SEXUALITY AND WOMANLINESS, LACAN AND REVIERE:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’
BLANCHE DUBOIS (A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE)

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SEXUALITY AND WOMANLINES, LACAN AND REVIERE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’ BLANCHE DUBOIS (A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE)

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ABSTRACT
The terms like ‘libido’ and ‘drive’, popularised by Freud while defining sexuality, were later picked up by Melanie Klein and then much later with the appearance of Lacan received a new treatment. Where Freud defines anatomical differences in terms of their psychic consequences, Lacan defines sexual position in terms of getting a place in the social as sexed subjects. Joan Riviere maintains that womanliness is a cover up to conform to social constructions of femininity, a masquerade whereby the woman as a category does not exist. According to Riviere, there is no distinction between womanliness and pretence. Womanliness is a capacity which can only manifest itself in defensive way. So there is nothing like eternal feminine. Following Lacan the sexes cannot be divided into two complimentary and it is because the symbolic sexual distinction takes no account of the lack in the Other. The Other is treated as a symbolic system which works through a constitutive lack via a promise it cannot fulfil. So it often works through a kind of deceit which, if not recognised and controlled, has catastrophic results for self and society. Tennessee Williams’ Blanche Dubois in A Streetcar Named Desire enacted this catastrophe. The present paper seeks to explore the character of Blanche Dubois in the light of the concepts of Lacan and Joan Rivier in the contexts of determining identity independent of biological origins.

The traditional concept of sexuality is grounded on the biological considerations. Psychoanalysis has offered an extended and transformed perspective of understanding sexuality. The traditional concept of normal and perverse have been received a shocking exposure in the light of psychoanalysis in the sense that any clear and definitive distinction between the two is impossible. It is no longer simply the reproduction which sexuality was designed to manifest as its aim, but the satisfaction. The sexual tendencies which may appear to be the most perverted one happened to be revealed as common and vice versa. Sigmund Freud, a psychoanalyst, through his works, especially his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905), invites attention on the issue of sexuality concerning especially the relation between the body, sex and pleasure. His contribution lies in understanding sexuality as an attempt to realize human relations, pleasure and satisfaction. Freud defines anatomical differences, highlighting the presence or absence of male genital organ, in terms of their psychic consequences.
Initiated by his observation of the female Oedipus complex Freud tends to explore the nature of feminine sexuality, but fails to give a definitive picture which prompts him to describe femininity as a ‘dark continent’. The first great debate on feminine sexuality was initiated through a paper by Ernest Jones (1879-1958) which gradually invited responses from many of the women psychoanalysts including Melanie Klein (1882-1960) and Joan Reviere (1883-1962). The issue was received a new treatment much later with the appearance of Lacan.

Tennessee Williams, born on March 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, is one of the most powerful dramatists of America of the twentieth century who wrote dramas of high emotional conflicts where the characters are trapped in their extreme moment of emotional crises. The pressure of repression that Williams experiences himself throughout his life due to his unfavourable family environment and his being a homosexual one is transmitted to his characters. He has exploited the theme of sexual repression to its extreme in his plays with the basic intention to show its inherent ambiguity and confusion. For him it is the ‘deeper necessities’ in order to communicate his own confused sexual identity. Tennessee Williams’ second Broadway success A Streetcar Named Desire received variety of responses mainly for the creation of enigmatic Blanche Dubois. The actions of the play move round Blanche either to present her in the height of an angel or a condemned one. But Williams has created her to reveal the predicament of an otherwise exceptional but helpless woman in a patriarchal society. The different character traits infused in Blanche has made her an easy prey to psychoanalysis. In this paper she has been undertaken to be analyzed in the light of Lacan’s concept of sexuality and Reviere’s doctrine of ‘womanliness as masquerade’. Philip C. Kolin in his article “Reflections on/of A Streetcar Named Desire” very emphatically writes:”Streetcar tells tale about us and is one of the most haunting tales we tell about ourselves, often revealing what we want concealed and concealing what we want revealed.” (Kolin 1)

This reading of Streetcar shares some vital points of both sexuality and masquerade.

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, a Freudian theorist, has rewritten Freud concentrating his discourses on question of human subject, its place in society as sexed one and above all its relationship to language. The conceptualization of feminine sexuality is the most controversial area of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan makes the famous statement: “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship” (Lacan, Seminar XX, Encore 12). His theory of sexuality mainly revolves round sexual differences on the basis of his unique treatment of the phallus and “structures of sexuation” which present woman as ‘absolute outside’. Freud’s castration complex has been transformed in Lacan, and he considers castration as a symbolic process intended to recognize the lack caused for the deprivation of one’s jouissance (drive). Lacan has not considered sexual differences from the anatomical perspective, and for him the ‘phallus’ is a signifier, not directly equivalent to the male genital organ. It is the signifier of the lack. Masculinity and femininity are defined in each one’s relationship to the phallus, the signifier. In the mirror stage the child remains under the imaginary unity with his mother. But the braking up of this imaginary unity in the symbolic stage has given rise to the shocking realization that desire cannot be satisfied. Initially the phallus functions as the imaginary object assumed to satisfy the mother’s desire. But the shattering of the imaginary unity between the mother and the child leaves the phallus as an object beyond reach. The phallus thus symbolically represents the moment of split between the subject and its objects of desire and also the lack caused by the split. Both boys and girls experience symbolic castration by compromising with the partial fulfillment of their jouissance. Jouissance is identified with the drive and the real. Through Oedipus complex the boys recognize mother as a lacking other and the father as possessor of the phallus, object of mother’s desire. So it is the pretence of having the phallus, the object of desire for the Other (women), which is identified with the masculinity. But the girl’s case is much more complex where she ultimately chooses to become the object of desire for the Other (men).
Here unlike masculinity, femininity involves the masquerade of being the phallus. In both the cases the phallus is represented as a signifier of the desire of the Other. The following comment of Lacan regarding woman’s position has made him come closer to the concept of masquerade:

“... it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved.” (Lacan, Ecrits 289-90)

Lacan was against any notion of a stable fixed identity including a stable sexual identity, and it is the unconscious which never allows the subject to realize completeness. The frustration of the original desire experienced in the oedipal period invokes the chain of significations. As complete satisfaction can never be achieved, so the subject moves on from one signifier to another.

Blanche has lost her first love in the form of her young husband, the homosexual, at an early stage when her vision of love and sex just started flowering. This frustrating experience at the initiation of her sexual life has left in her what we can identify as Lacanian ‘lack’. Her subsequent sexual interactions are partly motivated by her search for that original one which was not simply on physical level but was infused with a spiritual flavour. All her sexual encounters can be arranged in the chain of signification where the central signifier is always missing, and so the end result of each experience is despair. To make the study convincing we can trace back to Blanche’s first love experience with her husband as her ‘mirror stage’. The breaking up of this relationship at the shocking exposure of his being homosexual dropped her at the symbolic stage as a split personality.

Lacan thinks that the human subject is always split between a conscious and an unconscious. By the former he intends to mean the conscious side of the kind that is accessible and the latter indicates a series of drives which remain inaccessible. The subject experiences something to be missing from them and this ‘something missing’ is the other side of the split out of which unconscious emerges. Throughout life the subject desperately tries to replace that ‘something missing’ which is experienced as a lack. Lacan calls this lack desire which is always beyond reach. Even when our demands are met, desire remains unsatisfied. In this respect sexuality is not the result of a simple need. It is the human predicament to be driven by an inherent dissatisfaction and sense of insufficiency. There is always an imagination of something more which we do not have any idea about, but which we believe is there. Tennessee Williams in the Foreword page of the play Sweet Bird of Youth has made a very striking comment which is very relevant in this context. He is of the view that “there is something much bigger in life and death than we have become aware of (or adequately recorded) in our living and dying.” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980, 154).

In his symbolic ‘structures of sexuation’ Lacan develops masculinity and femininity which is available to both men and women irrespective of biological determinants. Lacan has developed the concept of two types of jouissance namely Phallic jouissance and Other jouissance. Masculine and feminine structures depend on the type of jouissance one is able to attain though the jouissance is never enough. Phallic jouissance is accompanied with a sense of dissatisfaction even after we possess our object of desire and it is related to masculinity. Masculine structure transferred desiring Other into an object a. It is called masculine not because only man can experience it. It is phallic because it is endowed with a sense of dissatisfaction or of failure. Lacan relates Other jouissance to feminine structure. It is Other because it cannot be defined within the symbolic order, and so not phallic. For Lacan the experience of unspeakable ecstasy is feminine or Other jouissance. Both men and women can experience phallic or Other jouissance. Lacan has not stopped his analysis of the ‘structures-of sexuation’ here, but has gone further in finding out a crucial difference between men and women. He is of the view that women can experience both forms of jouissances whereas men can experience either phallic or the other.
women experience a surplus jouissance. Sexual difference is so determined by one's position in relation to jouissance. Masculinity and femininity are non complementary and defined by different relationships to the Other. Lacan's striking comment that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship is also enhanced by his concept of masculine and feminine structures.

Following Lacan, sexuality is not the result of a need because even when the need is fulfilled, feeling of dissatisfaction still remains. Blanche's life is an enactment of catching hold of 'desire' or Lacan's central signifier 'phallus' which is beyond reach. This search to fulfill her 'desire', evoked by the loss of her husband, the Other, has led her towards her catastrophe. Ultimately she could not find out her place in the patriarchal society symbolizing the phallocentric 'structure of sexuation' of Lacan. The drama which is enacted between Blanche and Stanley in his home can be aptly applicable to Lacan's symbolic 'structures of sexuation'. Masculinity in Stanley searches his desiring Other in his wife's body, dreams, poker game, which can be considered as phallic jouissance. Stanley's experience with each one fails to give him complete satisfaction. Blanche's, on the other hand, lies in getting financial support and home which Stella partially fulfills. Her flirtation with Mitch, Stanley, and the boy who came for collecting subscription for The Evening Star, only intensify her despair. Lacan elaborates in his discussion on Courtly Love that no one can seduce one's despair and real love can never be found through any form of sexual activity. It is always out of reach like Blanche's young husband. In her case there is something more the glimpse of which she imagines and which is quite often reflected in her inclination to poetry and in her aspiration as well: "How pretty the sky is! I ought to go there on a rocket that never comes down."

(Williams, Plays 1937-1955: 499) bears quite opposite aspect of her personality. Freudian notion of constant clash between Eros and Thanatos, the pleasure and death instincts, is aptly applicable in Blanche. She imagines achieving salvation through death and at the same time demands desperately someone to come to rescue her from her predicament. She is in the midst of earthly desires and ethereal longings inheriting the dichotomy of flash and spirit of Williams' world.

One very controversial concept developed in Lacanian psychoanalysis is 'woman does not exist' (Lacan, Seminar XX, Encore 7). Lacan's formulations about feminine sexuality present woman as the 'absolute outside'. But for Lacan 'woman' like 'phallus' has no positive signified. 'Woman' does not refer to any universal category of women. So the notion of women as a homogeneous group is only an appeal to an illusory identity. Lacan's concept of feminine jouissance, experience of something unspeakable, is beyond symbolic order. The existence of 'woman' is also determined at the level of symbolic structure. Lacan defined the position of 'woman' in a rather convoluted double negative: "It's not because she is not — wholly in the phallic function that she is not there at all. She is not not at all. She is there in full. But there is something more." (Lacan, Seminar XX, Encore 74)

Ernest Jones in his paper "The Early Development of Female Sexuality" concentrates on the types of female development. Other than heterosexual and homosexual groups, he talks about a number of intermediate groups. This paper of Ernest Jones has motivated Joan Reviere to develop his concept of masquerade in his paper "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929). Every individual has more or less an inherent biosexual tendency, and there is not necessarily only fundamental heterosexual or homosexual attributes being displayed in an individual. Sexual manifestations are the outcome of the playing out of this conflict and the differences in the degree of anxiety.

Joan Reviere has pointed out the case of a new type of woman, that is, 'intellectual woman', who aspires to intellectual pursuits or masculinity sharing the traditionally consigned field of man.
'intellectual woman' quite naturally raises fear and anxiety in men who tend to believe intellectual pursuit as their enclosed field. Reviere thinks, "Women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (Reviere 35). She further writes that womanliness "could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" (Reviere 38).

Reviere traced the idea of masquerade at work in female oedipal complex and hence it contributed in the development of female sexuality. The girl experiences the rivalry with both the mother and the father. Reviere has analyzed the case of an 'intellectual woman' and revealed that after her successful intellectual exhibition she preferred to enjoy the favour of male partners especially the 'father figures'. She has the conscious feeling of rivalry and superiority over the male partners, and does not like to be judged by men. Moreover she inwardly wished men to recognize masculinity in her. But publicly she exhibits her condition of womanhood. According to Reviere this compulsion is due to evoke friendly feelings for her in man and to protect her by masquerading as innocence.

For Reviere there is no essential distinction between genuine womanliness and womanliness as masquerade. In this respect womanliness put on as mask is applicable to women in general other than only to 'intellectual women'. Reviere has raised a dilemma by considering the appearance and essence of womanliness as the same. But the term 'mask' implies something hidden, and this something hidden is always assumed to be the genuine and authentic one. It is the dilemma of appearance and essence of womanliness that Lacan takes into his consideration. Lacan thinks that masquerade reveals "the feminine sexual attitude" par excellence, that is to say, it is the mask or veil that is constitutive of the feminine libidinal structure" (Heath 52). It is the constructed nature of woman's identity that masquerade put forwards and not the essential one. "The masquerade says that the woman exists at the same time that, as masquerade, it says she does not" (Heath 54).

Blanche resembles the type of 'intellectual woman' of Reviere. Stanley, quite often described as an "ape", a "pig", a "goat", is also "the gaudy seed-bearer", father of Stella's "son". Blanche always intends to present her superiority over this father figure by displaying her superior taste and culture. The presence of Blanche in his family has become a threat for Stanley. He enjoys absolute power over his wife Stella who has surrendered herself to the Man in her husband. In the play the first address of Stanley to Stella is "Hey, there! Stella, Baby!" (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 470) and he throws the package that carries meat at her. The term baby indicates Stella's inferiority to Stanley and 'meat' indicates his beastly nature and their relationship that is settled upon sex or flash. In this family structure Blanche with her spirit is a misfit. The man in Stanley cannot bear Blanche's superiority over him as 'a cultivated woman', 'a woman of intelligence and breeding' possessing 'beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart' (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 551). Again inherent hatred for Stanley, the father figure, is always there in Blanche, but apparently she prefers to present herself as a very delicate and vulnerable woman. Blanche's compulsion is also for securing protection for her. She confesses a helpless woman's predicament to Stella:

"I've run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another...because it was storm...and I was caught in the centre...People don't see you-men don't-don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 515).

She demands appreciation for her beauty from the men, and for this purpose she lies about her age. Stella is her younger sister but even after that she tells Mitch, a friend of Stanley:

"Stella is my precious little sister. I call her little in spite of the fact she's somewhat older than I. Just slightly. Less than a year." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 499).
And then, in order to hide her actual age, which may reflect in her face, she immediately requests Mitch to put over the light bulb the little colored paper lantern which she bought at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. In the play, we see, for the time being, Blanche is successful in convincing Mitch to fall in love with her constructed identity. She confesses Stella “I want to deceive him (Mitch) enough to make him – want me…” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 517) and for this she is so much sensitive about her age and looks.

Freud in his psychoanalytic explanation of mourning and melancholia reveals that loss prompts the ego to incorporate attributes of the lost loved one. Blanche is defined from this perspective as homosexual inheriting the attributes of her young husband. So the young boys always remain her center of attractions. The incident with the student of her school and later with the newspaper boy in Stella’s house substantiates the masculinity in Blanche. In her responses towards the matured one like Stanley or Mitch, she always puts on the mask of womanliness if we can call it following Reviere. She wants to project herself as object of desire for the Other (men) and so turning herself into being the phallus (Lacan). Reviere considers both the appearance and essence of womanliness as the same, but Blanche does not fit here completely. Blanche’s words to Mitch: “I can’t stand a naked light bulb any more…” clearly defines what Blanche is. She doesn’t want to face the truth, her true identity, any more. She is so more suited to Lacan’s notion of masquerade that reveals only the constructed nature of the essential identity of women. “I’ve got to keep hold of myself!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 473). This ‘myself’ is different from what she appears to be. The “colored paper lantern’ symbolizes Blanche in the true sense. She says to Stella, “Have got to be seductive – put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and glow –” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 515).

In comparison to Blanche, Stella is satisfied in her world and her demand is limited as she thinks “there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant.”(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 509). Whereas for Blanche it is “Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light... some tenderer feelings …” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 510) that matters much. Stella is fitted in preordained social roles of woman, which are daughter, wife, mother, where woman comes to be positioned within the restrictions of an inherited patriarchal circuit. She is a wife to Stanley and is going to be a mother of his child. She has surrendered herself to her male counterpart and is secured. But unfortunately Blanche doesn’t belong to any one of the roles and, may be for this, her life has become a suspect for the society which has ultimately removed her to a place where a complete normal human being is not expected. So Stanley by exercising his physical power over the delicate Blanche has created wound in her body and spirit and has left her incomplete abnormal, not deserving to be in his social structure defined by patriarchal hegemony.

In Lacanian perspective of sexuality the different character traits of Blanche, generally deserve condemnation only, at least demands some more positive readings. She possesses both masculine and feminine attributes in herself which intensifies her being more as an outsider in Stanley’s family environment which is mostly filled up by ‘heterogeneous types’. In the play Blanche herself has used the term ‘heterogeneous’ to get confirmation from Stella about the identity of the players of poker game. However, Blanche is come out as a woman whose femininity may not ultimately secure a place for her in the patriarchal society resembling ‘phallocentric structure’, but she has left trace of character, larger than life. Here again we can aptly put Lacan: “She is no not at all there. She is there, but there is something more.” (Lacan, Seminar XX, Encore 74)

WORKS CITED


Appendix - 2

EXPERIENCING CASTRATION IN THE DRAMATIC WORLD OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: A STUDY OF SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

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EXPERIENCING CASTRATION IN THE DRAMATIC WORLD OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: A STUDY OF SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH

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ABSTRACT
This paper is a study in highlighting the threat of castration that has haunted Williams’ characters. Castration enhances repression as Lacan defines castration as a process of giving up of a part of one’s “jouissance” (drive). It is a fundamental loss experienced by both the sexes. A human being is forced to acknowledge the impossibility of the fulfillment of his or her desire and so destined to feel castrated. Lacanian view of castration involves everyone as castrated experiencing the lack at every moment. Castration is one of the major themes in Williams’ plays as most of his characters are delineated as psychologically castrated. But castration is treated as an external threat with the social intervention in the play Sweet Bird of Youth, which is elaborately discussed in this paper.

KEYWORDS: castration, repression, jouissance, lack, social intervention.

Castration is one of the major themes in Williams’ plays as most of his characters are delineated as psychologically castrated. Castration is related to repression as it is defined as a process of repressing or giving up of a part of one’s “jouissance” that means drive. When it becomes impossible to fulfill the desires, it is repressed creating a lack in the persona as a consequence. Lacan considers castration as a symbolic process meant to identify the lack that is developed for the deprivation of one’s drive or desire. Lacanian view of castration involves everyone as castrated experiencing the lack at every moment. Freud, in his autobiography of 1925, wrote: “The castration complex is of the profoundest importance in the formation alike of character and of neurosis” (Freud, SE XI 37). Freud’s researches on this complex has found it related to “something intruded from without into the child’s world. Something that was not innate but came from outside, from history or prehistory.” (Mitchell 13) Williams exhibits his indebtedness to Freud by treating castration as an external threat with the social intervention in the plays Orpheus Descending, Suddenly Last Summer and A Sweet Bird of Youth. Following Williams’ conventional pattern, Chance Wayne in Sweet Bird of Youth and Val Xavier in Orpheus Descending are fugitives haunted by the threat of castration.

On one morning Williams found an un-mailed letter of his own lying on his writing desk where he came across a sentence, “We are all civilized people, which means that we are all savages at
heart but observing a few amenities of civilized behaviour.” (Williams 151). This inherent savagery of civilization is reflected in its extreme form in the plays *Orpheus Descending*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Sweet Bird of Youth*. In *Orpheus Descending*, Val Xavier is physically killed. His guitar and the snakeskin jacket are symbols of his being an artist and his otherliness. He injects the spirit of fertility and love in an otherwise sterile conventional society and naturally becomes a threat. But his snakeskin jacket, which cannot be destroyed, has left the stamp of his spirit. In *Suddenly Last Summer*, the devouring Mother, who is responsible for her son’s psychic dismemberment, is “committed to the annihilation of a fellow human being through the agencies of society” (Williams 146). Here Sebastian Venable, a pleasure seeking homosexual, used his mother to make “contacts” for him, something that his shy and introverted nature prevented him to do it himself. But with his mother’s physical disabilities, his dependent self explores another signifier (Lacan) in his cousin, Catherine. The unconscious or the repressed desire goes on shifting from one signifier to another in searching for an end signified in the chain of signification. The girl, the only witness to Sebastian’s terrifying death, will have to tell the story in front of the mother and the doctor, who are operating to make her repress the truth. Here we see the sadistic plight of a girl struggling to assert the truth of her story. Only to save the dignity of a man who is dead, the society is almost negating the dignity of a girl who is alive. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, the Boss is presented as symbol of Power operated against the individual desires of both his daughter Heavenly and her lover Chance Wayne. Again in this play the focus is, time and again, shifted from the power of social force to that of universal force of Time which is unbitten. Princess, Heavenly and Chance Wayne are all in a sense victim of that unbitten Time. Ultimately Chance surrendered himself to the social forces to save his moral dignity as a human being with an earnest appeal “I don’t ask for your pity, but just for your understanding—not even that—no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all.” (Williams 236) All the three plays depict the savagery of civilization that assigns power to those who are at the summit of social and economic success. In all the three plays repression is operated both at the individual and social level where sublimation comes only through sacrificing or surrendering one’s life. In all the three plays the characters have to experience the threat of castration both within and without.

In the Foreword pages of the play *Sweet Bird of Youth* Tennessee Williams has expressed some vital realizations of his life which become the sensitive issues of the world of the play. During the course of a dinner that Williams once had with one of his distinguished colleague he came across a question and it was whether he did not feel that he had been blocked as a writer. To this Williams’ immediate reply was, “Oh, yes, I’ve always been blocked as a writer but my desire to write has been so strong that it has always broken down the block and gone past it.” (Williams 151) In the play all the major characters and especially Chance Wayne, Heavenly, and Princess are trapped in confronting this ‘block’ in the form of external pressures. Being himself a neurotic the first obstruction Williams has to face is to make his theme understandable to anyone who is not a neurotic. The heart touching cry of a person who felt himself castrated can be discerned in the words of Williams when he says, “All my life I have been haunted by the obsession that to desire a thing or to love a thing intensely is to place yourself in a vulnerable position, to be a possible, if not a probable, loser of what you most want. Let’s leave it like that. That block has always been there and always will be, and my chance of getting, or achieving, anything that I long for will always be gravely reduced by the interminable existence of that

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(Williams 152) In Williams’ case his belonging to a sexual identity that doesn’t deserve to be labeled as so-called normal or heterogeneous type operate as an ever-existing block in the way of leading his life in a society that supports heterosexual hegemony. But it is a fact that every human being with a conscious mind, in some way or the other, has to experience block that always intends to resist the spontaneous activities of life along with its many-folded desires and aspirations and as a consequence feel castrated in accordance to Lacan.

In the play *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Chance Wayne, the male protagonist of the play, who has turned up into a gigolo, comes back to St Cloud, his birthplace which becomes a forbidden one for him now. He was in love with Heavenly, Boss Finley’s daughter. In the words of Boss, Chance is a handsome young criminal degenerate who had his daughter when she was only fifteen. The allegation against Chance is that he has transmitted corruption to Heavenly’s body in the form of disease and for which she will have to be undergone a whore’s operation. Chance was driven out of St Cloud and was threatened with castration if he would have been seen in the place. Since then he has been leading the life of a fugitive searching for his fate, and now again he is in St Cloud with Alexandra Del Lago, a renowned film actress currently under mental depression for the waning of her beauty. Chance’s come back to St Cloud is spread like fire in the state and he is treated like an alien, in his own home land, by both his friend and foe. His very presence in St Cloud has become a suspect for everyone. Scudder who bears a soft corner in his heart for Chance tries to make him feel the urgency of the situation and suggests him to keep on travelling till he has crossed the State line. But he is here for his love, Heavenly, with the firmness of his mind, “I go back to Heavenly, or I don’t I live or die. There’s nothing in between for me.” (Williams 207) The play ends up presenting Chance Wayne, surrounded by his enemies, with an earnest appeal which is not for mercy but for the recognition of a Chance Wayne in every one of us.

In the play *Sweet Bird of Youth* Chance Wayne and Heavenly are victims of the savagery of civilization which is hidden under the mask of so-called civilized behaviour. The play displays the savagery and hypocrisy of civilization to its extreme when Boss Finley is organizing a Youth for Tom Finley rally to state his position on the emasculation business that is stirred up a mess in the state. In the name of business about white women’s protection in this state, they picked out a nigger at random and castrated the bastard. Castration is used as a metaphor in this play where all the three major characters are victim of their desires gnawed by the corrupt society and the unbitten Time. Concerning Chance and Heavenly, the society spares little space for those loving hearts to stay together. So we hear Chance Wayne’s determination, “Because I have come back to St Cloud to take her out of St Cloud. Where I’ll take her is not to a place anywhere except to her place in my heart.” (Williams 212), which has a pathetic overtone as it is only illusory. Foucault has put forward his arguments on sex to explore how the term repression has been attached to sex especially under the influence of Puritanism and of Victorian bourgeoisie society. Taboo, nonexistence, and silence - these triple edicts are imposed on sex. He has pointed out the relationship between sex and power in terms of repression. In his *The History of Sexuality* Foucault has elaborated the concept of repression and has pointed out its characteristic features which distinguish it from the prohibitions maintained by penal law. “Repression operated as a sentence to disappear an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things,
nothing to see, and nothing to know." (Foucault 4). In the play Boss Finley, symbol of the 
repressive force of power, is instrumental to impose restrictions upon the love affair of his 
daughter and Chance. He even goes further to drive Chance out of St. Cloud so that there is 
little possibility for the lovers come closer to each other. Chance had sex with his (Boss) young 
daughter and so he has to ‘disappear’ from the place so that there is an ‘affirmation of 
nonexistence’ of any further possibility of love making, the desire for each other must be 
thrown to silence.

In the play Chance Wayne has been haunted by an impending threat of castration but Heavenly 
already feels herself castrated. The intensity of repression is much more in Heavenly than in his 
fugitive lover. The ‘Voice of God’ speech of her father tortures her as she knows it motivated 
for her father’s interest only and not for his only daughter’s. In a sense her lover himself has 
ironically castrated her by putting the “rot in her body” which “had to be gutted and hung on a 
butcher’s hook, like a chicken dressed for a Sunday...” She is infected by Chance Wayne but 
she knows it well that her father is actually responsible for her being deprived of her youth. She 
is accusing her father who could have saved her by letting her marry a boy that was still young 
and clean. But he separated them and forced her to marry a fifty-year-old money bag for his 
own interest. All the subsequent selections are also arranged on the basis of his profit motive 
and not for his daughter. To compete with those of her father’s selection, Chance made effort to 
become big but unfortunately the right doors did not open and so he went for the wrong and got 
infected in the process without knowing of it. Chance is an innocent victim of the situations that 
has been created by Boss Finley, and it did not spare Heavenly who is now left ‘dry’, ‘cold’, 
‘empty’, as a consequence. But even after that Heavenly is not allowed to search out her peace 
in her loneliness that she desires most; rather, going against her own wishes, she has to perform 
in accordance to the suit will of her father who declares, “I didn’t say would you. I said you 
would, and you will.” (Williams 199). Helpless Heavenly surrenders herself to her father’s 
wishes under the threat which is about Chance’s life. In this play Foucauldian repression is 
more strongly operated than that of Freudian which is more or less inherent in every individual.

In the play Freudian repression is exhibited in its extreme in the depiction of the character of 
Princess. Repression as a form of defense mechanism is reflected strongly in her fractional 
conversation with Chance Wayne. She is desperate to forget everything and even her own 
identity that tortures her most. She, masquerading as Princess Kosmonopolis, does not even 
want Chance to expose her name to any outsider because the youth and beauty that is attached 
to the name Alexandra del Lago is on the summit of decaying. She does not want to pull down 
the legend of Alexandra, the famous actress, by revealing the truth of her physical appearance 
which is now turned into that of a middle aged woman. Her desperation is for sustaining youth 
and beauty with her name. Just from the starting of the play Princess is shown engulfed in 
depression. The pressure of repression is so acute that it leads her toward intense depression 
often causing unbalanced mental set up. What she desires most at this crucial juncture of her life 
is put to Chance, her only appointed companion, in her own words: “I want to forget everything, 
I want to forget who I am ....”(Williams 163). There is a striking contradiction in between 
Chance and Princess in responding to their repressed world that has marginalized their 
existence. Whereas Chance is determined to face his present, Princess is desperate to avoid hers 
as she utters: “I can, I will. I’m forgetting ... I’m forgetting.” (Williams 164). In the play
Chance is finally found to make a daring effort to control his life and not to let others to regulate it, but Princess’ effort is to control her disturbing memory through repression. Princess’ concern for her figure reminds us of Blanche’s obsession and both are in a sense victim to the unbitten Time that has taken away the precious part of their life and thrown them in a world of repression.

Princess is also a victim to Lacanian castration. The relationship that is developed in between Chance and Princess is purely on physical level as each one is found exploiting the other. A spiritual union that has strongly coupled Chance and Heavenly even in their physical separation is missing in the case of Princess and Chance. Princess has appointed Chance mainly to get rid of her loneliness but the cramp of alienation still exists because “something is not satisfied in the relation between” (Williams 166) them. Here it is quite apt to quote Freud who states: “We must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction”(Freud, SE XI 188-9). Chance with his practical insight has pointed out the block that comes in the way of their relationship. He says: “You’ve had your experiences, I’ve had mine. You can’t expect everything to be settled at once....Two different experiences of two different people. Naturally there’s some things that have to be settled between them before there’s any absolute agreement.” (Williams 166). It is worth noting that Chance has not dared to speak for any absolute relationship but has used the term ‘agreement’. And in Williams’ dramatic world the characters those are happened to settle down are found to go for agreement just as Maggie and Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Shannon and Maxine in The Night of the Iguana. Princess’ over consciousness to repress her disappointments has turned her into a neurotic who often fails to relate the incidents. Her repressed self is violently shocked at the gleams of her present existence. Princess’ insistence to make her look outside the window is actually her uncontrollable longing to look within. So when she is asked to describe the view, she says, facing the audience. with ‘squinting and shielding her eyes, as if in her dream-like vision: “I see a palm garden...I see that and a strip of beach with some bathers and then, an infinite stretch of nothing but water and ...” (Williams 169). After that she trembles for a sudden confrontation with the truth of her life: “Oh, God, I remember the thing I wanted not to. The goddam end of my life!” (Williams 169) Williams’ highly sensitive characters are quite often got frightened in confronting the truth that stimulates the intensity of repression for the characters.

In the play Chance and Princess with the pang of their waning creative force are leading life for a meaningless existence. Chance’s efforts to achieve success earn him castration for himself and for his beloved Heavenly. In this respect J. Thompson is worth quoted who states:

“Chance’s is a tale of missed opportunities or chances and of successive failures, until the only pleasure he brings to Heavenly is the venereal disease with which he corrupts her.” (Thompson 180).

Princess’ association with Chance has necessitated her taking an instant leave from St. Cloud. In spite of being an innocent outsider, she could not help but fell in the purview of the repressive power mechanism of St.Cloud represented by Boss. In order to separate Princess from Chance, Boss has gone further to order Dr. Scudder to, “Say she’s got something contagious, typhoid,
bubonic plague. Haul her out and slap a quarantine on her hospital door. That way you can separate them.” (Williams 189). Here Boss Finley is doing exactly what Mrs. Venable intends to do with Catherine in Suddenly Last Summer to preserve the dignity of her dead son. Boss is degrading an innocent woman for the sake of his daughter and himself. If the truth of his daughter gets exposed then it will bring disgrace for both his daughter and Boss himself. The mighty is distorting the identity of the marginal according to its suit will. Williams’ dramatic world is filled up with this confrontation of mighty and marginal where the marginal has to surrender sometimes with asserting its identity and sometimes with its annihilation. The repressive force of power is lurking as a constant threat in this world that has compelled its protagonist to become a fugitive. It is because of frequent changing of identity and address that Chance Wayne could not get the report of his mother’s death. But now Chance Wayne has changed himself as for “to change is to live...not to change is to die” (Williams 210). He dares to face Tom Junior not by subduing himself to his man power but by strongly asserting his rights for his existence in St. Cloud. He says “I used to leave places when I was told to. Not now. That time’s over. Now I leave when I’m ready. Hear that, Tom Junior? Give your father that message. This is my town. I was born in St. Cloud, not him... He was just called down from the hills to preach hate. I was born here to make love. Tell him about that difference between him and me, and ask him which he thinks has more right to stay here...” (Williams 219). Here Chance’s words are vibrated with the prolonged repressed out rage that has been exploded in a moment. In the same platform, a little later, Chance is found confessing about his ignorance and wrong deeds with the similar courage to Tom. His clear declaration: “...I know that since the last time I was here something has happened to Heavenly and I...I know I’ve done many wrong things in my life, many more than I can name or number, but I swear I never hurt Heavenly in my life.” (Williams 220). The irony of Chance’s life is that he has unknowingly hurt Heavenly and for which she has to pay her ‘youth,’ metaphorically representing the failure of his wild dream of acting together with Heavenly in “Youth.” It is probably for the first time Chance has got to experience strongly the pang of Freudian repression when he comes to know about the venereal disease of Heavenly caused by himself. His self castration can also be accounted for his desperate dive to get rid of the pressure of repression that is infused with the burden of guilt conscience. It can be interpreted like to achieve sublimation of his repression he goes for sacrificing himself. He does not listen to Princess’ earnest appeal to him to go away from St. Cloud because “Nothing ever comes after failure but flight.” (Williams 221-222).

In the play, however, Chance and Princess contribute at least something positive for one another to get out of their meaningless existence. Chance’s preoccupation with his dream of a film actor so long helps him to tolerate the demands of Princess who is, on the other, absorbed in the shadow of her former self. Chance’s a little act of kindness like in the form of giving her oxygen in the moment of her extreme need strikes the passive cells of Princess that she reveals later to Chance. He unconsciously helps her to experience a positive transformation from a barren self of repression to a living one of compassion. Princess’ realization of Chance as one similar sufferer as herself is a turning point in her world of repression. She confesses to Chance: “when I saw you driving under the window with your head held, with that terrible stiff-necked pride of the defeated which I know so well; I knew that your come-back had been a failure like mine. And I felt something in my heart for you. That’s a miracle, Chance. That’s the wonderful
thing that happened to me. I felt something for someone besides myself. That means my heart’s still alive. at least some part of it is, not all of my heart is dead yet.” (Williams 216-217). But unfortunately the little act of kindness that has initiated to destroy the ‘monster’ in Princess is revived again later due to the absence of it. The indifferent attitude of Chance fails princess’ expectation “you’ve got to help me stop being the monster...you can do it, can help me.” (Williams 217). Consequently she betrays Chance because “Monsters don’t die early; they hang on long. Awfully long. Their vanity’s infinite, almost as infinite as their disgust with themselves...” (Williams 230). She did not respond to his lifelong desire which is about his becoming a star. She rather shows the mirror to Chance to have a look at what he really is. Princess’ betrayal helps Chance to get out of his long cherished illusion and to make up his mind to face the truth.

In the play the fate of Chance, Heavenly, and Princess is in a sense related to one another. On one hand they are victim of the society that did not allow them to have their wings to fly in their own way and, on the other hand, they are victim of eternal Time that has taken away their precious ‘youth’ from them. Both the society and the unbitten Time impose repression upon the characters who are struggling for their existence. The external pressure is strongly internalized in Heavenly and Princess than in the male protagonist, presenting them more repressed and vulnerable as a consequence. Chance Wayne, on the other, has made up his mind to confront the pressure at least to assert his identity. Heavenly and Princess have already found themselves psychologically castrated whereas Chance is under the threat of physical castration. In the Foreword of the play Williams has Written, “I have always felt a release from the sense of meaninglessness and death when a work of tragic intention has seemed to me to have achieved that intention, even if only approximately, nearly.” (Williams 154) In this respect Sweet Bird of Youth is successful to achieve ‘that intention’ with its characters’ tragic plight and predicament.

Works Cited


