

## TRAPPED BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN: GENDER ROLES IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' PLAYS *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* AND *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*\*

**ABSTRACT:** The plays of Tennessee Williams reflect a specific period in development and understanding of gender roles, though his characters occasionally cross the bounds of traditional and challenge the position of women in the mid-twentieth century America. This paper focuses on two of his most well-known plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and their central female characters – Blanche DuBois and Maggie the Cat, respectively. These characters' actions highlight the performative nature of gender, and challenge the traditional gender roles of the 1950s. Introduced into feminist theory by the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, the notion of performative gender indicates that gender is a social construct which is created by the very action of performing it. It follows, then, that gender roles are conditioned by sociohistorical circumstances, which are subject to change. Both Blanche and Maggie manage to play with their assigned role, and subvert it to an extent. Because of this they exceed the limits of traditional, but due to their environment, never quite reach modernity, which ultimately makes them trapped in-between.

**Key words:** gender roles, Tennessee Williams, performativity, Butler

### Introduction

The plays of Tennessee Williams earned their place in the canon of American literature because they are concerned with exploring universal human experience. In his masterpieces, which include *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he dealt with themes such as art, death, memory, loss,

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and marriage. However, Williams' plays also provide strong social commentary on the issues which are firmly grounded in the time period in which they were written. Southern society, class, gender roles, homosexuality, and race are some of the topics which, despite their universality, are predominantly informed by the particular time period in which Williams created, namely, the late 1940s and the 1950s. This period was marked by several changes which altered the structure of the American society. After the WWII, the United States experienced a period of rapid growth in many aspects. The 1950s saw the rise of capitalism, as well as consumerism, the features which would become the hallmark of the American society. However, this was also a period marked by conservatism and return to traditional values, which affected certain members of the society more than the others. WWII may have been a period of hardship, but it also made some members of society realize the extent of their abilities. Namely, the women who had to take over men's jobs in order to help the war effort and support the industry while the men were on the front realized that they were just as capable to hold a job and work even in the most men-dominated fields. And yet, after the war was over and the men returned home, women were expected to step aside and resume their role as the housewives. Not only that, but the housewife became an ideal of American womanhood judging by the variety of ads, magazines, and shows of that time which painted the picture of a woman whose only goal is to become a wife and a mother, a domestic goddess who keeps her home in perfect order, is always dressed up to the nines, and ready to welcome her husband after a hard day's work and take care of his needs (Lamb 2011: 12). In other words, this was an era in which gender roles were strictly defined and enforced by the media in order to permeate every part of the society. Women were feminine, gentle and obedient, and men were masculine breadwinners, acting as the head of the household. While women's work and existence was confined to the private sphere, men occupied and thrived in the public sphere. The ideal model of manhood was a man who was self-made, but this narrative glossed over the reality, in which "any successful Self-Made Man would have built his empire on a number of exclusionary principles, including racism, sexism, and homophobia" (Carpenter 2002: 25). In other words, the picture perfect image of gender roles projected by the Western society was attainable only to a small number of privileged, while the reality was completely different for the marginalized groups. Williams demonstrates the fragility of this idealized picture through the characters of Blanche DuBois, the protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and Maggie the Cat, the protagonist of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), whose negotiation of gender roles is conditioned by their womanhood, as well as their insecure financial situation.

Still, conformity was that era's motto, and the rigid definition of gender roles did not leave any place for those who could not, or would not, conform. Any deviation from established gender stereotypes was discouraged, and even persecuted, such as in the case of homosexuality. What is more, "[s]exual nonconformity was now defined as a national security threat, and the period was marked by arrest and harassment of homosexuals, which was part of a larger Cold War vilification of the non-masculine" (Nicolay 2011). The societal order of the 1950s privileged the men who were unquestionably masculine, which among other things meant heterosexual, while women and homosexual men were marginalized. This is also the framework in which Williams' plays are situated, and the treatment of gender in his work cannot be separated from the time period in which such gender roles originated. Moreover, considering that the Old South is both a theme and a setting of Williams' plays, it adds another important gender role when it comes to his heroines, and that is the role of the Southern Belle. The Southern Belle represented the ideal of womanhood in the antebellum South, though it continued to be relevant even after the Civil War in the effort to hold on to the narrative of greatness of the Old South. As Wei notes, the South represented "an epitome of patriarchal society [where white] men as the center of the society control money, power and even women. [...] Women live a life of dependence on them, both economically and mentally" (Wei 2010: 104). Consequently, Southern Belle was expected to be chaste, modest and submissive, an innocent coquette who will go on to become a perfect invisible wife to a rich plantation owner (Seidel 1985: 3-6). This culture shared a lot with the one of 1950s America, such as rejection of anything unorthodox, repressed sexuality, sexism, racism, and homophobia. Southern Belle was also expected to be the moral center of the family, divested of anything earthy or carnal. The restrictions which such strict gender roles imposed on women are explored in this paper through the characters of Blanche DuBois and Maggie the Cat, by tracing the ways in which they alternately conform to and transgress these limitations.

In order to analyze gender roles, it is necessary to first clarify the notion of gender itself, and the ways in which it can be produced or deconstructed, which is why this paper employs Judith Butler's theory of *performative* gender. In modern feminist theory, gender has been separated from sex and recognized as a social construct, as opposed to biological reality. In her seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir first expressed the sentiment that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 1953: 301). With this definition, de Beauvoir paved the way for the next generations of feminists and gender theoreticians to fully

explore the notion of gender as a social construct. In her theory of performative gender, Judith Butler expands de Beauvoir's definition by positing that "to be a woman is to have to become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler 1988: 522). In other words, gender is not what we *are*, but rather what we *do*, and what we do is conditioned by the society, culture, and time period we live in.

However, the concept of gender as doing does not necessarily mean that there is an active subject who produces or performs gender. While both performance and performativity denote gender as an act, or more precisely "a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler 1988: 523), Butler separates these two notions because 'performance' suggests the existence of agency and subjectivity behind the deed, whereas her theory questions the existence of a subject or a body that 'does' or enacts their gender. Gender is established through the repeated acts, such as the way one walks, and talks, meaning that doing gender is what produces it, but that does not necessarily mean that production of gender is done consciously, by an aware subject. Since, as Butler argues, there is no gender identity or bodily reality which predates the expression of gender, then there is also no subject behind the construction of gender – doing of gender is what creates gendered identity and the subject (Butler 1990: 25). Yet, the lack of subject behind the deed does not mean that there are no other forces which influence, or 'compel' the enactment of gender. Butler identifies heterosexual power structures as the ones that shape expectations placed on gender performance. Moreover, Butler claims that inside this framework, performing one's gender in the right way can be seen as a strategy of survival, because every gender performance that deviates from the norm is punished (Butler 1990: 139-140). This is repeatedly demonstrated in both *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by the society's reception and treatment of Maggie the Cat, and particularly Blanche DuBois.

The understanding of gender as performative highlights its nature as a social construct, opening possibilities for subversion. Nonetheless, the question of whether there is any way to subvert expectations and assert agency over one's gender expression, especially if there is no agent who predates the construction of gender, has not been fully resolved in Butler's theory. The possibility of subversion is further complicated because it is conditioned by the tools used to subvert gender expectations – and these tools, just like gender expression, are pre-established as a part of the dominant discourse. However, this does not necessarily preclude such

tools from being used in a subversive way. Playing with societal expectations, using prescribed gender norms to one's own advantage, and unorthodox gender expression can all be seen as tools employed by the protagonists of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which would then mark them as transgressive and non-traditional characters. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the treatment of gender in these two plays, focusing on gender roles which are imposed on Blanche and Maggie, and examining how aware they are of these roles, what they do to potentially subvert them, and where their actions place them on the traditional-modern continuum.

### **A Streetcar Named Desire**

At first, Blanche DuBois appears to be the quintessential Southern Belle in the Tennessee Williams mold. Since Williams' plays often revolve around the decline of the Old South, glorious and degenerated at the same time, Blanche as the Southern Belle represents all the complexity which the background of that term evokes. While the Southern Belle as the ideal of femininity used to be one of the hallmarks of the Old South and the plantation literature (Seidel 1985:6), in Williams' plays, especially *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the concept is approached in a more critical way. The character of Blanche DuBois exemplifies the detriment of traditional gender roles, even while she attempts to use and subvert them. There are two facets of her upbringing which contribute to Blanche's change of circumstances, and later her tragic end. First of all, she was taught to be dependent on men for security and comfort. For a Southern Belle, the greatest achievement is her ability to secure a husband who would take care of her needs, and support her financially. Therefore, in an effort to secure her future, Blanche assumes the traditional role of the Belle, the prim and chaste maiden who is supposed to attract the opposite sex with her expert, yet innocent flirtation. During her courtship with Mitch, Blanche undertakes every action known to her in order to make herself the perfect example of this ideal. Since the Belle is supposed to be a young girl of marriageable age, not an adult woman of thirty, Blanche manipulates her surroundings in order to preserve the desired image:

BLANCHE: Yes, 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. Will you do something for me?

MITCH: Sure. What?

BLANCHE: I bought this adorable little coloured paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! Will you, please?

MITCH: Be glad to.

BLANCHE: I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action. (Williams 1986: 55)

She also presents herself as proper, inexperienced and vulnerable in order to awake Mitch's protective instincts. In short, she is the damsel in distress, and not only does she create this persona for herself, but she also praises and flatters Mitch, casting him in the role of her knight in shining armor. Blanche's actions show that she is an actress, a performer, and her gender expression is central to her performance.

Another problematic consequence of Blanche's traditional upbringing is also the one that most directly contributed to her fragile state of mind. Since the society which formed her view of the world has a very strict and conservative attitude toward anything unorthodox, Blanche learned that expressing sexuality is sinful and inappropriate, especially for women, and that any alternative types of sexuality are abnormal, or 'degenerate'. As a Southern Belle, she is not supposed to be a sexual being. Yet, desire is one of the driving forces in her life, especially since desire is the opposite of death, which took away her family. Blanche has to reconcile these two aspects of herself in a society in which women are seen either as virgins or as whores. Blanche's tragedy partly lies in her inability to successfully confront and reconcile the Madonna/whore dichotomy, and that is why desire for her ends up being "that rattle-trap street-car" which leads her to the Cemeteries, and then to Elysian Fields (Williams 1986: 70). Because of that, she is conflicted in her interactions with Mitch, as the game demands of her to be enticing and entertaining with the gentleman callers, but not so forward sexually to put them off (Adler 1990: 40). The line which best exemplifies the complexity of Blanche's situation is her invitation to Mitch: "Voulez-vous couchez avec moi ce soir?" (Williams 1986: 88). As McGlinn notes, "Blanche's attempt to maintain the image of herself as a correct and genteel lady also leads her to deny her real sexual nature" (McGlinn 1977: 513), which is why the way she phrases the sentence above reveals how torn she truly is – she does have desires, but knows that she cannot ruin image she has created. Consequently, she can be open only in a way which guarantees that she will not be understood.

This does not mean, however, that Blanche is merely a passive victim of her circumstances. While she does remain torn between the ideal femininity and her own desires, not to mention her promiscuous past, she is also very much aware that she is in fact playing a role, and what is more, that she has to play that role in order to

secure her survival. At several points in the play Blanche exhibits this kind of awareness, telling Stella that

soft people have got to court the favour of hard ones. Have got to be seductive – put on soft colours [...] make a little – temporary magic just in order to pay for – one night’s shelter! [...] People don’t see you – *men* don’t – don’t even admit your existence unless they are making love to you (Williams 1986: 79)

Similarly, she tells Mitch that she is just “obeying the law of nature. [...] The one that says the lady must entertain the gentleman—or no dice” (Williams 1986: 86). Blanche consciously performs her gender according to the expectations of the public, using it as a tool which would help her find security the only way that is available to her, and that is to find a husband. Such approach is in itself subversive, since she re-appropriates the stereotype of Southern Belle which transforms her from the object of stereotyping into a subject who uses the role for her own purpose. Considering that that purpose is finding a husband, and that the tools she uses are a part of pre-established framework, Blanche’s femininity is at the same time performative and a performance. What positions her as a conscious, albeit limited, subject is the fact that Blanche knows that Southern Belle is only a mask, an illusion she creates. She demonstrates this awareness during her conversation with Mitch in Scene VI, where she references the novel “*La Dame aux Camélias*”, casting herself as the titular Lady, and Mitch as her suitor Armand: “*Je suis la Dame aux Camélias! Vous êtes—Armand!*” (Williams 1986: 88). She also rolls her eyes furtively when she claims that her “old-fashioned ideals” (Williams 1986: 91) are preventing her from being intimate with him. In short, she uses every means which she has – her education, intelligence, and knowledge of the assigned gender role in order to aid her performance. That is why Blanche is subversive – she is a fallen Belle who has decided to don the mask which is not true to her, but it is useful as means to an end. Blanche is an artist who creates her own version of reality, as she says herself: “I don’t want realism. I want magic! 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’s sinful, then let me be damned for it!” (Williams 1986: 117).

Blanche’s situation also highlights the societal double standards for men and women, especially when her necessity to go to such lengths in order to present acceptable image of herself is contrasted to the men around her. Her male ancestors squandered the plantation and the rest of their possessions by engaging in “epic fornications” (Williams 1986: 43), yet the society did not marginalize them the way

it marginalizes Blanche. Stella, on the other hand, is allowed to celebrate her sexuality in marriage, which means that female sexuality can only be sanctioned if it is owned, in way, by a man. The same double standards are apparent in the attitude toward Blanche's age. She considers herself old because the society sees her that way, the first blush of youth being the only time in a woman's life when she is truly desirable. Although Blanche is only thirty, which is about the same age as Stanley and Mitch, she is seen as past her prime, while the men are still considered at the height of theirs. Final example of male privilege is seen when the truth about her past is discovered and she is not allowed to have the say in explaining and narrating her own history. As Vlasopolos notes, Stanley overtakes Blanche's narrative of her own life, presenting only what suits him, and no one questions his authority or his sources (Vlasopolos 1986: 332). After that, no matter what Blanche says, the men have already made up their minds – she is soiled goods, and if she was available for others she has to be for them as well, which culminates in her final confrontation with Stanley. The rape she suffers is the last in the line of emotional and physical traumas that she was exposed to, and she is finally broken, retreating from the world in the recesses of her own mind as her last sanctuary. On the symbolic level it is the final confirmation that the new industrial age triumphs over the decaying Old South, while on the societal level it affirms male dominance over women in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, it serves as the confirmation that “what is transgressive must be silenced” (Adler 1990: 79) in a patriarchal world, confirming Butler's theory that any deviation from established gender norms must be punished. This is why the taking away of Blanche's agency is followed by her removal from society to an asylum – it is easier to see her as ‘madwoman in the attic’ than to recognize the legitimacy of her story and her transgressive existence.

### **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**

While Blanche's ethereal character and tragic guilt may find their counterpart in equally tormented and broken Brick, it is Maggie the Cat whose experiences mirror Blanche's ‘gender trouble’. There is more than one parallel which can be drawn between *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on the Hot Tin Roof*. From their setting, plantation background, and family crisis, to the issues of homosexuality and alcoholism, the two plays provide a complex portrait of the mid-twentieth century South. Consequently, Blanche and Maggie are not connected solely because of their gender, but also because of their circumstances and financial/class position. Maggie may be married, but her situation is only slightly less precarious than that of

Blanche, shaping her character, the way she performs her gender, and her actions over the course of the play.

Maggie's socialization into the assigned gender role came from the same source as Blanche's – the traditional upbringing, influenced by the Southern Belle stereotype. As Butler's theory of gender performativity states, the way gender is inscribed onto her body is socially constructed, a part of pre-established, heteronormative framework. However, Williams' treatment of gender in this play shows, just as it did in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, that his protagonist's gender expression is part performative, part performance. There is a dualism in Maggie's personality which is present from her first description. Even though she is described as pretty and feminine, Maggie is also said to have a voice which "sometimes drops low as a boy's and you have a sudden image of her playing boy's games as a child" (Williams 1975: 5). This suggests that Maggie has both feminine and masculine aspects in her nature. Unlike the passive Brick, Maggie is full of energy, constantly on the move, talking, gesturing, and planning. This activity is also reflected in her approach to life. Maggie's existence was not one of privilege but of hardship, yet she managed to go from poverty to marrying into one of the richest families in the country. Maggie witnessed firsthand what it means when idealized vision of nuclear family, with a breadwinner father and a housewife mother is not fulfilled:

I've been so God damn disgustingly poor all my life!--That's the truth, Brick! [...] Always had to suck up to people I couldn't stand because they had money and I was poor as Job's turkey. You don't know what that's like [...] to be as poor as Job's turkey and have to suck up to relatives that you hated because they had money and all you had was a bunch of hand-me-down clothes and a few old mouldy three per cent government bonds. My daddy loved his liquor, he fell in love with his liquor the way you've fallen in love with Echo Spring!--And my poor Mama, having to maintain some semblance of social position, to keep appearances up, on an income of one hundred and fifty dollars a month on those old government bonds! (Williams 1975: 25)

Constrained by both their gender and social expectations, Maggie and her mother were forced to scrap by, proving how insecure the life within the confinement of traditional gender roles was. It only took one weak link for the entire structure to crumble. That is why she is like a 'cat on a hot tin roof'. The security she thought she found in marriage with Brick is threatened once again, this time by the uncertainty surrounding Big Daddy's will, and Brick's unwillingness to provide for the family. Having experienced poverty, and the lack of opportunities as a woman,

Maggie is determined to never experience it again, especially since “[y]ou can be young without money, but you can’t be old without it” (Williams 1975: 25). Her solution, within the limited options available to her, is to perform her gender in a way that would help her to achieve her goals. For example, she tries hard to keep Brick’s attention, taking care of her appearance: “How high my body stays on me!-- Nothing has fallen on me--not a fraction” (Williams 1975: 22). She also tries to get to him by trying to elicit his jealous reaction when she talks of other men wanting her: “Other men still want me. [...] I still turn heads on the street” (Williams 1975: 22). However, she is well aware that she could never allow herself any indiscretion, because that would risk her position both in the family and in the society.

While Brick is lost in his own world, Maggie is the one who is aware of their precarious situation, with Big Daddy dying, and the issue of will not yet settled. Her position is also complicated by the fact that, so far, she and Brick have not produced an heir. This puts in question not only Maggie’s status as Brick’s wife and a member of the family, but also her status as a woman. In the eyes of a patriarchal society, her worth is measured by her ability to be a good wife and mother, a good ‘breeder’. Since this is a woman’s burden, women in the play are the ones more preoccupied by the issues of fertility. For example, Big Mama is the one who monitors Maggie and Brick’s sex life, and questions Maggie about both Brick’s drinking and the situation in their bedroom, implying that if something is wrong it has to be the woman’s fault. In spite of this, Maggie manages to stand her ground, and even challenges patriarchal notions that it is solely a woman’s duty to please her husband when she asks Big Mama: “Why don't you ask if he makes me happy in bed? [...] It works both ways!” (Williams 1975: 21). However, she is well aware that she must do her duty if she wants to see both herself and Brick provided for. Without children she is nothing, and the precariousness of her position is seen when Big Daddy suggests that Brick should find a new wife if Maggie does not suit him, showing how in a patriarchal world she is easily replaceable.

Though Maggie is shown to want children in order to secure her place in the family, she also challenges the traditional view of women as soft and maternal, because she sees parenthood solely as means to an end. Nowhere in the play does Maggie show that she yearns for children for any reason other than necessity, and the only children she interacts with are ‘no-neck monsters’ for her. She is not traditionally maternal, nor is she prim and subdued as it was expected from the wives of her time. Maggie is a very sensual being, and she revels in her sexuality and the lovemaking with Brick. Yet, since she is now a married woman, this is not as problematic as it was for the widowed Blanche DuBois. Aware of her effect on

men, Maggie uses her sexuality and her body in the battle for Brick's attention and love. Her attempt, however, plays right into the patriarchal expectation of how women can achieve their goals – by sexually manipulating men.

The real transgression of gender roles which Maggie commits comes only at the end of the play, when at the height of tension she declares that she and Brick are going to have a child. What is more, she vows to make the lie true by blackmailing Brick and withholding alcohol from him until he gives her what she wants. Here, the traditional roles are subverted in that Maggie is the pursuer, the predator, while Brick is relegated to the role of a 'breeder', as Nicolay notes: "By the end of the play, we see a reversal: if masculinity is defined as the active exertion of power and control, then Maggie has become the man" (Nicolay 2011). In the original ending of the play<sup>1</sup>, where Maggie's character is not softened in order to appeal more to the audience, she is clearly shown as the one in charge. She takes over the role of the breadwinner because through her machinations they will secure their financial future. Brick, lacking the will to fight, submits to her in the end. The ending, however, does not offer an optimistic view of their future together, which may prompt the conclusion that Maggie and Brick's marriage will follow in the footsteps of Big Daddy and Big Mama. Yet, that same ending suggests another possible reading, if their future is seen in the light of Maggie's final actions. That is, the subversion of gender roles at the end of the play may suggest that if Maggie manages to make the lie true and produce an heir, she will be the one to take over the plantation and care of family, while Brick lives out the rest of his life lost in alcoholic haze. This kind of future would make Maggie the true heir of Big Daddy, and confirm her stepping outside the boundaries of her gender role. However, even in that case, it would mean that in order to advance and succeed one must assume the masculine role, and that Maggie cannot possibly achieve her goals of financial security and fulfillment while staying herself, or in other words, while performing femininity. This is why, no matter how transgressive Maggie's actions are, "[t]he patriarchal imperative so clearly embedded in culture" (Nicolay 2011) prevails in the end.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has two endings, or rather two Third Acts. The first version is how Williams envisioned the ending in the first draft of the play, the second version was written due to the suggestions made by Elia Kazan, with whom Williams frequently collaborated and whose insight he respected. Because of that, the final version is changed so as to include Big Daddy, show some development of Brick's character after the conversation with Big Daddy in the Second Act, and make Maggie more sympathetic.

## Conclusion

This paper explores the treatment of gender and gender roles in two of Williams' most famous works – *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. During the 1950s, when the plays are set, the idea that becoming a wife and a mother was enough to ensure security and happiness of any woman was constantly reinforced. The traditional approach to gender roles promised fulfillment, while unorthodox behavior was strongly discouraged. This sociohistorical framework influenced the strict expectations of how gender should be enacted. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity was thus employed to emphasize the socially constructed nature of gender, as well as to call attention to how gender is reproduced. Furthermore, the analysis affirms Butler's assertion that appropriate gender performance is a matter of survival, while deviance in any form is punished. However, Williams' plays also question Butler's theory that there is no conscious subject who enacts gender, because his protagonists are able to subvert their assigned roles to some extent.

Through the characters of Blanche and Maggie, Williams exposes the reality of upholding traditional gender roles and of women's dependence on men when he presents the other side of the medal – women who are marginalized for their choices and cannot depend on men, women who do depend on men but their life is full of abuse and humiliation, and women who are left without either presence or support from their husbands. That is why his female characters have to step outside the boundaries of their assigned gender roles, and even take over the man's role if they want to survive. The results of their actions vary – Maggie secures her future but only by stepping into the masculine role, and Blanche meets a tragic end in order to affirm the dominance of the patriarchal social order personified in Stanley. Neither Maggie nor Blanche conform entirely to the traditional notion of performing gender, and stand as opposition to the characters who are strictly traditional such as Stella, Stanley and Big Mama. Yet, it does not really matter whether the characters perform their roles in the accepted way or subvert them because they remain bound by the societal expectations and rules which harm them. Therefore, both Blanche and Maggie can be read as transgressive characters who step outside of traditional limits, but only in the context of their time. From the contemporary perspective, they remain trapped in some in-between space; more than traditional but not quite modern.

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ZAROBLJENE IZMEĐU TRADICIONALNOG I MODERNOG: RODNE ULOGE U  
DRAMAMA *TRAMVAJ ZVANI ŽELJA* I *MAČKA NA USIJANOM LIMENOM KROVU*  
TENESIJA VILIJAMSA

**Rezime**

Drame Tenesija Vilijamsa odražavaju specifičan vremenski period kada su u pitanju razumevanje i razvoj rodni uloga. Ipak, njegovi likovi povremeno uspevaju da prevaziđu granice tradicionalnog, čime Vilijams preispituje položaj žena u Americi sredinom 20. veka. Ovaj rad se bavi dvema od njegovih najpoznatijih drama, *Tramvaj zvani želja* (1947), i *Mačka na usijanom limenom krovu* (1955), odnosno glavnim ženskim likovima ovih drama – Blanš Diboja i Megi Polit, iliti Megi „Mačka“. Postupci ta dva lika ističu performativnu prirodu roda i preispituju tradicionalne rodne uloge tipične za Ameriku pedesetih godina XX veka. Pojam performativnosti roda uvela je u feminističku teoriju filozofkinja i teoretičarka roda, Džudit Batler. U njenoj teoriji, rod je shvaćen kao društveni konstrukt, kao tvorevina koju proizvodimo našim akcijama. Stoga, rodne uloge nisu biološki zadate, već društveno i istorijski uslovljene, i kao takve su podložne promenama. Blanš Diboja, i Megi „Mačka“ poigravaju se zadatim rodni ulogama na način koji je donekle subverzivan. One stoga prevazilaze granice tradicionalnog shvatanja roda, ali, usled društveno-istorijske situacije, ne uspevaju da dosegnu modernost, što ih čini rastrzanim i zarobljenim između dva sveta.

*Ključne reči:* rodne uloge, Tenesi Vilijams, performativnost, Batler