

PARCHED:
THE QUEER ALCOHOLIC
ON THE MODERN AMERICAN STAGE, 1940–1970

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Abstract

Parched mines the rich correlation between queerness and alcoholism on the modern American stage. It explores the peculiar seductions of the queer alcoholic via readings of six plays from American dramatic literature: Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (composed 1941-42; premiered 1956); Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955); Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962); and Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1968).

I argue that the construction and medicalization of alcoholism in early twentieth-century American ran parallel to that of "sex perversions" (e.g. male homosexuality, lesbianism, transvestitism, transgender sexuality, voyeurism, and sadomasochism). Unsurprisingly, both excessive drinking and queer sexual conduct came to be similarly pathologized as compulsive behaviours that caused both bodily and psychic disintegration. *Parched* analyzes how American playwrights have linked the inherent performativity of queerness and alcoholism, while representing the contagious dissipation that such performances have been feared to cause.

My readings of specific celebrated productions of my primary texts—alongside reviewer responses to them—demonstrate that historically spectators have been enticed into a fascination with the figure via a process I deem *dis/identification*. Audience members must simultaneously identify with, and dis-identify against, the queer alcoholic. The dissertation therefore builds upon and enriches the complex histories and theories of addiction and deviance—indispensable work in an era marked by what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has deemed the binary of compulsion/voluntarity.

Over a period of thirty years audiences came to ceaselessly thirst for these queer depictions, and mainstream theatre provided a suitable cover. This obsessive "drinking in" of the

figure resulted in these texts becoming canonized in American theatre. Cyclical intoxication and queer sexual practices have been a constant throughout the history of dramatic literature (see, for example, the analysis of Euripides's *The Bacchae* [405 BCE] in the dissertation's epilogue), and shifting models of behaviours deemed "excessive" continue to affect their theatrical representations in a reciprocal relation.

In vino veritas.

—Pliny the Elder

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my maternal grandfather, William (Bill) Burney, who helped to instill in me a love of all forms of literature; and, to my paternal grandmother, Elizabeth (Betty) Bryce, whom we sadly lost during its completion. Betty was a warm and gentle soul, and one who truly understood the best of life's pleasures, such as attending the theatre or enjoying the occasional cocktail.

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Introduction:

“We’ll have to drink from the bottle”:

Vieux Carré, the Wooster Group, and an Initiation into Queer Alcoholism

When the Wooster Group premiered its latest work in the Jerome Robbins Theater at the Baryshnikov Arts Centre on 2 February 2011, audience members unfamiliar with either the Group’s trademark theatrical style or the oeuvre of Tennessee Williams likely found themselves in trouble. Attempting to parallel audience members’ reactions with that of the work’s principal character, the *New York Times*’s Charles Isherwood conceded this point in his positive review: “Ms. LeCompte’s production evokes the same responses [i.e. those of the Writer] in the audience: We are by turns touched, amused, repelled, perhaps even occasionally bored. (For those who don’t know the play the episodic plot may sometimes come in and out of focus)” (“Boarders”). First rehearsed in November 2008 at the Group’s famed Performing Garage, *The Wooster Group’s Version of Tennessee Williams’s Vieux Carré*¹ was a skilled and complex reimagining one of the playwright’s notorious late-career flops: the original Broadway version closed after only five performances (Bray VII). The play was a somewhat strange choice, then, for the Group’s next project, a point reiterated by Michael Feingold in his blistering review for the *Village Voice*. He sniffed that

[y]ou may find yourself still wondering, after two intermissionless hours, what the two shared that could tempt the Group to choose this writer and this play. [...]

The resolute loner of a theatre poet and the equally resolute performing collective with its arcane methodology simply never find common ground. (“No [French] Quarter”)

¹ Hereafter cited in the text as *The Wooster Group’s Vieux Carré*.

Feingold's objection aside, there can be no doubt that those with some knowledge of the two artistic forces involved in *The Wooster Group's* Vieux Carré found themselves on more solid interpretive ground than those without.

The reason inheres in what Marvin Carlson has called "ghosting" (8-9ff): the tendency for specific theatrical signs to accrue meanings over time and to carry them from one theatrical context to another. LeCompte relies upon this process in order for spectators to interpret the work, as *The Wooster Group's* Vieux Carré consciously cites the Group's signature aesthetic. During one early sequence, for example, Group veteran Scott Shepherd entered the stage as Nightingale, the play's aged and infirm painter [6:10].² Decked out in a frizzy gray wig and black fez, with a large plastic phallus jutting from beneath a kimono-like silk robe, Shepherd sashayed across the stage clutching a Chinese fan. The kimono, among other signifiers, brings with it associations from previous Wooster Group shows, as Carlson himself notes in *The Haunted Stage*:

The kimono-like costume worn by Joan Jonas [in the piece *Brace Up!*...] evoked external references, as assistant director Marianne Weems has explained: "that's definitely from Noh. But it also is a reference to Yamamoto, the famous fashion store around the corner." The character Masha's kimono, in turn, appeared again in more distinctly Japanese surroundings [in subsequent Wooster Group productions]. (170)

Noh theatre; Yohji Yamamoto's haute couture designs; the orientalist garb worn by Smithers in the Group's production of *Emperor Jones*: all of these repeated elements and allusions evoke

² I would like to note my gratitude to Clay Hapaz, Wooster Group Archivist and Company Member, who gave me access to a private recording of the production. Coincidentally, the video was taped in Toronto, where I attended the 31 March performance of the production. All time stamps are taken from this recording and are therefore approximate; they appear in brackets, while references to the original Williams source text appear in parentheses.

“echoes of the ongoing operations and experiments of the group itself” (Carlson 171). Indeed, by the familiar logic of repertory companies, the actors themselves bring associations with them from one production to another. The sinister, effeminate Smithers in *Emperor Jones* was also played by Scott Shepherd, and thus Shepherd’s work in *The Wooster Group’s Vieux Carré* was ghosted; this ghosting in turn helped a habituated audience member make sense of the production in ways that the uninitiated could not, as Isherwood saw.

After his entrance, Shepherd’s Nightingale became acquainted with the Group’s depiction of the Writer, portrayed by Ari Fliakos. In Williams’s play, the Writer is a thinly veiled author surrogate; Williams specialist Linda Dorff has demonstrated how *Vieux Carré* was moulded from the journals the playwright kept when he first moved to 722 Rue Toulouse in New Orleans in 1939 (Bray VIII). Like Shepherd’s Nightingale, however, Fliakos’s Writer was a complex, layered, and radical re-imagining of the character that combined resonances already present in Williams with those from the Group’s earlier work. Fliakos spent much of the play “with his dark eyes rimmed in black and often wearing little more than a jockstrap” and alternated between “wary stillness” and feverish typing on a disconnected computer keyboard (Isherwood, “Boarders”). The onstage computer technology has become yet another Wooster Group mainstay. It has figured in shows such as their 2002 *To You the Birdie! (Phèdre)*, in which a shirtless Fliakos forewent the jockstrap in favour of a short kilt that routinely exposed his genitals. Thus, company director Elizabeth LeCompte ensured that Fliakos’s Writer was ghosted by his previously exposed and eroticized characterizations as a Group member.

The first interaction between Nightingale and the Writer [14:28] was a startling moment of theatre in which LeCompte swirled together signifiers via costuming, set design, and performance. When she then beckoned the audience to read these blended signifiers, she not only

mobilized the mechanisms of ghosting but also made manifest an invitation latent in the original script. In Williams's text, the two men meet when Nightingale overhears the Writer weeping one night, after the younger man has been staying in Mrs. Wire's boarding house for three weeks. At the start of Scene Two, the stage directions state that

[t]he writer has undressed and is in bed. Nightingale coughs—a fiendish, racking cough. He is hacking and spitting up bloody phlegm. He enters his cubicle. [...]

Slowly, as his coughing fit subsides, Nightingale, the quick-sketch artist, turns his head in profile to the sound of the sobbing. Then the writer, across the partition, is dimly lighted, too. He is also sitting up on his cot, staring at the partition between his cell and Nightingale's. (16)

After some brief discussion about their occupations, Nightingale sits down on the Writer's cot (18) and things immediately become much more intimate. The artist seductively assures the Writer "but now we know each other, the plywood partition between us has been dissolved, no more just hellos" (20). Nightingale even questions the young man about his sexual orientation (i.e. "excuse my blunt approach...but are you?"), and "*plac[es] a shaky hand on the writer's crumpled, sheet-covered body*" (21).

And after the young man shyly reveals some details about his first sexual experience with a paratrooper, Nightingale makes a crucial offer:

...Would you like a bit of white port? I keep a half pint by my bed to wash down my sandman special when this touch of flu and the bedbugs keep me awake. Just a mo', I'll fetch it, we'll have a nightcap—now that we're acquainted! (He goes out rapidly, coughing, then rushes back in with the bottle.)

The witch has removed my glass, we'll have to drink from the bottle. I'll wash

my pill down now, the rest is yours. (*He pops a capsule into his mouth and gulps from the bottle, immediately coughing and gagging. He extends the bottle to the writer.*) (22-3)

So much is contained in this one brief sequence from Williams's play, and LeCompte's staging of the moment worked to emphasize how the playwright knit together codes of queerness and alcoholism in the figure of Nightingale. In fact, the figure of the queer alcoholic on the American stage can be traced back to the modern period, as early as pivotal works of the 1940s. Over the course of a thirty-year period, the queer alcoholic came to flow through the canon of modern American drama, becoming more and more semiotically legible to audiences, with each iteration ghosted by its predecessors. LeCompte's re-imagining of the encounter between Nightingale and the Writer relied upon the specific ways in which the figure has haunted theatrical and cultural history.

In the following chapters I specify many moments from modern American theatre history in which ghosting can be seen to be operating in a direct way: that is, the recycled bodies of actors, such as that of Kevin Spacey, or reiterated sections of texts, such as lines from Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, present the audience with similar representations but in different contexts. But there is something unique in how queer and alcoholic figurations haunt the American stage. Writing of the Wooster Group's decision to present new pieces as works in progress, Carlson states, "[t]his *flow* of elements from one production to another is encouraged by the *fluidity* of the productions themselves" (170-71; emphasis added). Though here Carlson is making a claim related to the ever-changing nature of the Group's body of work,³ his word choice is particularly fruitful for my readings of the queer alcoholic. These ghostings facilitate

³ Wooster Group productions are routinely revived and performed in substantially revised states. Their *North Atlantic*, for example, has appeared in different iterations in 1984, 1999, and 2010.

audience members in identifying the malleable figure and assist in *amplifying* its power as it pours into different contexts. In other words, the figure cannot be properly contained and is able to sluice through boundaries via contagious associations from one text to another. The citations that ghosting provides then concentrate the figure's fluid power, in a sense super-saturating it with meaning for audience members.

The mechanisms of ghosting, then, complicate the usual dynamic of theatre-going identified already by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. There, Aristotle writes of the concomitant pity and fear that a tragic spectator experiences, a concomitance that joins two different ways of looking. In pitying, spectators recognize a character as different from themselves and therefore *dis-identify*. At the same time, in fearing, spectators *identify* with the character, seen as one "like ourselves," in Aristotle's blunt formulation (76). This complicated mode of engagement between audience and characters – *dis/identification*,⁴ which I typographically mark (/) in order to stress the two types of simultaneous relation – works, for Aristotle, in order to achieve the much-theorized "catharsis" that restores the spectator to emotional and spiritual well-being at the end of tragedy. But the dis/identification operating in the production and reception of the queer alcoholic works much differently.

The queer alcoholic fundamentally refuses the spectator the opportunity to be made

⁴ I would be remiss if I failed to note that the process of spectator dis/identification that I explicate in *Parched* is very different from the way the term has been previously glossed in queer theory. In José Esteban Muñoz's appropriately titled *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, for example, the author defines disidentification as a transformative act performed by those outside the racial and sexual mainstream:

To disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to "connect" with the disidentifying subject. It is not to pick and choose what one takes out of an identification. It is not to willfully evacuate the politically dubious or shameful components within an identificatory locus. Rather, it is the reworking of those energies that do not elide the "harmful" or contradictory components of any identity. It is an acceptance of the necessary interjection that has occurred in such situations. (12)

For Muñoz, therefore, disidentification is many things, but it is inherently conscious and active: he refers to it as "a hermeneutic, a process of production, and a mode of performance" (25).

whole: what he or she dis/identifies with is precisely that state of contagious fluidity brought to the fore by the figure. The spectator is brought the terrifying pleasure of the dissolution of his or her subjectivity implicit in Aristotle's formulation, in an identical way to what he or she witnesses the character experiencing onstage. This psychic and emotional response is not left at the theatre or satiated by the performance, because the spectator longs to experience it again—witness, for example, the extreme popularity and endurance of the figure in canonical works—and indeed, s/he *will* get to experience it repeatedly when the queer alcoholic character reappears in the next production, the next play. As Shepherd's Nightingale ominously pulls in Fliakos's Writer with his queer, seductive offer of the nightcap—pleasures in which the Writer will later partake—audience members will similarly find themselves more porous than they'd imagined. In this sense, too, the audience's reaction mirrors that of the principal character, as Isherwood noted.

The process of dis/identification has been both effected by, and contributed to, the immensely loaded state of alcoholism and queerness *qua* ideas during mid-twentieth century America. During the period this dissertation covers, 1940 to 1970, there was an enormous shift in the ways American society viewed both alcoholism and so-called “abnormal” or perverse sexual behaviours. The most significant change was the simultaneous introduction of medical discourse in order to examine the “conditions” of alcoholism and queerness. Of course the inexperienced Writer does not accept Nightingale's proffered drink out of fear of contracting the latter's obvious illness: in the Wooster production Shepherd repeatedly sipped fluid from a bottle and sprayed bright red blood onto a white handkerchief, to hilarious and disturbing effect [13:01ff]. (See Fig. 1.⁵) Nightingale *qua* the queer alcoholic is clearly ill, and both the text and the Group's staging present him as a figure to be, in a sense, diagnosed and cured.

⁵ My thanks to photographer Steven Gunther for permission to reproduce his images here.



Fig. 1: Scott Shepherd as Nightingale in Director Elizabeth LeCompte's Production.

In this dissertation I explore how each of my six primary texts represents the dual performative condition of queer alcoholism via an invitation to audience members to diagnose the figures' bodies that display its symptoms. As my first chapter in particular demonstrates, with its discussion of the frail, abject bodies onstage in the work of Eugene O'Neill, the bodily symptoms of the dual condition are typically those of breakdown and/or dissolution. Through dissecting key theatrical representations of bodily degeneration and mental psychosis, I demonstrate how two so-called pathological states become increasingly wed and emphasized in the cultural imaginary and symbolic order. I then argue that the displays excite and terrify audience members via their performative destabilizing pleasures. This provides an explanation

for their frequent reappearances in the canon of modern American drama, as audiences enjoy the pleasures of fluid subjectivity that theatre offers.

The Wooster Group's Vieux Carré perfectly captured this coding of physical degeneration via the diseased bodies of Nightingale, a “kind of human effluvium” (Bray X), and the doomed Jane Sparks, who suffers from an unnamed progressive blood illness. Nonetheless, as my second and third chapters establish, the figure of the queer alcoholic is overdetermined, and does not necessarily rely upon one set, restricted metaphor; rather, components queerly set it apart. For as the Writer is brought into life in the Quarter—he drunkenly slurs to his landlady at the end of Scene Seven, “I ought to pay you—tuition...” (66)—his form, too, begins to transform. In fact, Mrs. Wire comments upon the Writer’s metamorphosis in the source text: “You see, I do have a son that I never see no more, but I worry about him so I reckon it’s natural for me to worry about you a little. And get things straight in my head about you—you’ve changed since you’ve been in this house? You know that?” (43) LeCompte chose to emphasize the Writer’s affected and sensual body by costuming Fliakos in conflicting ways related to physical fitness (Fig. 2): he both sported an eye bandage to mark the character’s “cataract” (19ff) and frequently stripped down to a posing strap or a pair of glittering prizefighter shorts in order to flaunt his rippling muscles.⁶ And it comes as no surprise that the Writer’s strange bodily condition is married to the consumption of alcohol: as Mrs. Wire cautions him, “One drink has made you drunk, boy” (66).

Nightingale’s bloody handkerchief; Jane’s frailty and lethargy; the Writer’s eye bandage for his cataract: all of these signifiers allow us to see that the queer alcoholic is continually presented as a “sick” figure, in need of remedying. An understanding of the histories of treatment

⁶ LeCompte also managed to play Fliakos’s strange, saucy appearance for laughs at different points throughout the production. Feingold disapprovingly points to one such moment from Scene Two [17:56]: “‘You have interesting eyes,’ Shepherd says, staring at Fliakos’s exposed butt cheeks” (“No [French] Quarter”).



Fig. 2: Ari Fliakos as the Writer.

Note the whiskey bottle prominently displayed at his desk.

for alcohol abuse/dependence and the so-called sexual disorders—histories which, as I explicate shortly, have in fact been intertwined—therefore serves as a necessary baseline for this dissertation, and though my three chapters explicate these genealogies in more detail, it's necessary to explicate them here before proceeding further. As writers as diverse as Marcus Boon (*The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs*), John C. Burnham (*Bad Habits*),

Stuart Walton (*Out of It*), and Craig Heron (*Booze: A Distilled History*) have ably demonstrated, alcohol, particularly in the context of early and mid-twentieth century America, is an exceptionally fraught and magnetic subject: in 1919, the 18th Amendment (or prohibition amendment) to the Constitution was passed. The following year, the notorious Volstead Act took effect, which prohibited “the manufacture, sale, transportation, import and export” of intoxicating liquors for beverage purposes (Brownlee 170). By this point in U.S. history, the temperance, teetotaler, and abstinence movements had gained enormous traction, and exerted a huge influence over social mores.

In tandem with these new and strict measures, the conception of alcoholism as a disease, rather than as a moral weakness, was quickly taking shape in American culture. Though 1935 saw the creation of Alcoholics Anonymous and the famous “twelve-step” program to combat chronic drunkenness, increasingly physicians began to turn to scientific methods for explaining the ontology of the alcoholic. Doctors, activists, and, obviously, alcoholics themselves all became invested in locating a “cure,” based in different types of behavioural or psychoanalytic therapies, abstinence and aversion techniques, or pharmacology—or in some combination of these three remedies. Whereas a man—for the idea of a habitually drunk woman remained nearly unthinkable until later in the twentieth century, despite the obvious existence of such individuals—who habitually drank to excess might once have been called a sinful drunkard, it is highly likely that he would be referred to a doctor for clinical diagnosis as an alcoholic by the mid-1940s.

This new categorization of habitual drinking came into effect in just over one decade, following the official repeal of the Volstead Act on 5 December 1933 (Rotskoff 35). In fact, in 1946—the very year Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* opened on the Broadway stage—Dr.

E.M. Jellinek first published an article titled “The Disease Concept of Alcoholism.”⁷ But the construction of the alcoholic as an identity did not *only* occur in medical and social science literature, though medical authority, I argue, was one of the primary factors that was to bring this about. In a noteworthy coincidence, *Life* magazine published an “eleven-page, illustrated feature” on the topic of drinking and alcoholism in May of the same year as the appearance of Jellinek’s article and the premiere of O’Neill’s play (Rotskoff 61). As Lori Rotskoff observes in her *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II*, the piece, titled “Liquor: Current Studies in Medicine and Psychiatry Are Bringing Enlightenment to the 30,000 Year-Old Problem of Drinking,” marked that Americans were dutifully trying to adjust to both life in a Post-Repeal nation and to a new model of immodest, habitual consumption:

As reformers and politicians lost the power to shape alcohol policy in the United States, other professional groups gained newfound cultural influence. The new authorities were physicians, psychiatrists, social workers, and lay therapists—medical and mental health experts who brought new concerns and therapeutic techniques to bear on matters that had preoccupied temperance activities only two decades earlier. [...] The new paradigm located the source of addiction not in alcohol per se but in the body and mind of the individual who drank intemperately. (65)

Like Rotskoff, polymathic scholar Mariana Valverde also comments upon the creation of the alcoholic as a social identity in her investigation *Diseases of the Will: Alcohol and the Dilemmas of Freedom*. Noting that “‘Let’s have a drink!’ is a statement made in a large number of diverse situations” (1), she then asks, “Why has alcohol been so important in everyday life, as

⁷ Jellinek would later revise and expand his article into his 1960 book-length study of the same name.

a substance evoking strong feelings of both pleasure and danger, and so problematic from the point of view of the authorities governing both individuals and populations?” (2) She then attempts to answer her (seemingly unanswerable) question by succinctly charting the genealogy of theories of alcohol addiction. Valverde is deeply suspicious, however, of the viewpoint that there is a “linear process of medicalization” (*Diseases* 11) for what she calls diseases of the will, and argues that the history of treatment for alcoholism is more eclectic than it appears: “It is not that medicalization [of the alcoholic] failed: it is rather that alcoholism treatment has been and still is an explicitly hybrid project, borrowing bits from psychiatric science, clinical practice, Christian techniques of the self, high philosophy, New Age spirituality, self-help manuals on success and enterprise, and so forth” (*Diseases* 11). Even Valverde, however, must concede that the United States during the 1950s—the decade and location that lies at the heart of this dissertation—was “probably the golden age of psychiatric authority” (11). As I have argued, psychiatric authority (augmented by emerging legal questions regarding health insurance for the newly created disease) ensured that the alcoholic was well on its way to recognition in American culture.

Furthermore, seismic shifts worldwide since the time of Valverde’s writing stand as testaments to the continuing force Western society grants to both alcoholism as an identity category as well as the medicalized model of alcoholism. In a 2004 report titled *Neuroscience of Psychoactive Substance Use and Dependence*, the World Health Organization, while stopping short of declaring alcoholism a disease, nonetheless noted that an individual’s genetic composition could be a major causal factor for alcoholism, and stated “the effects of ethanol differ widely between individuals because of genetic variation in [...] metabolic enzymes. This may contribute to the fact that some people are more prone than others to the development of

alcohol dependence” (69). More recently, in the United States, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (or NIAAA, one of the institutes collected under the U.S.’s National Institutes of Health) defines alcoholism by immediately directing researchers and web users to the American Psychiatric Association’s fifth edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or *DSM-5*. The *DSM-5* was released in May 2013, and, though it changes its terminology, it still classifies alcoholism as a mental disorder or disease: it integrates alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence, previously two distinct disorders under the *DSM-IV*, into a single condition called “Alcohol Use Disorder,” or AUD, with sub-classifications of mild, moderate, and severe (United States, *Alcohol Use Disorder*). The clinical term of AUD, however, has done little to change the usage of “alcoholic” in common parlance.

Of equal importance to the lengthy history of medical care for alcoholism is that of concomitant treatment for the “sexually perverse.” The early twentieth century saw the medical establishment simultaneously begin work on the curing of queer sexual “disorders” such as male homosexuality, lesbianism, transvestitism, transgenderism, voyeurism, and sadomasochism. These so-called disorders were viewed by heteronormative American society as manifestations of dangerous excess, immorality, and suicidal/homicidal maniacal urges. In her essay “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” theorist and cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin eloquently summarizes the American medical establishment’s relationship to sexualities which it desperately sought to classify as perverse. Predictably, editions of the *DSM* play a major role:

Medicine and psychiatry multiplied the categories of sexual misconduct. The section on psychosexual disorders in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental and Physical Disorders (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association

(APA) is a fairly reliable map of the current moral hierarchy of sexual activities. The APA list is much more elaborate than the traditional condemnations of whoring, sodomy, and adultery. The most recent edition, *DSM-III*⁸, removed homosexuality from the roster of mental disorders after a long political struggle. But [other sexual behaviours] are quite firmly entrenched as psychological malfunctions. Books are still being written about the genesis, etiology, treatment, and cure of these assorted “pathologies.” (12)

Rubin is correct to stress the APA’s declassification of homosexuality; indeed, the removal of homosexuality from the *DSM* was one of the largest successes of the gay liberation movement.

In their collection of interviews with those who catalyzed the APA’s decision, psychiatrists-psychoanalysts Jack Drescher and Joseph P. Merlino provide a précis of the clinical diagnosis of homosexuality before its removal from the *DSM*:

Before 1973, homosexuality per se was classified as an “antisocial” disorder in APA’s first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-I) [in 1952] and as a “perversion” in DSM-II [in 1968]. Although some psychiatrists of that time [...] did not believe homosexuality to be pathological, this was a minority viewpoint. [...] Significant studies included the 1948 and 53 Kinsey reports and Evelyn Hooker’s 1957 study, which showed that nonpathological expressions of homosexuality were common. However, as a conservative, medical organization, APA was not initially receptive to studying the validity of scientific research done in other fields, particularly since those non-psychiatric studies were critical of the

⁸ The edition Rubin here refers to was finally published in 1980, after years of vehement disagreement amongst psychiatrists about both conceptual terminology, and how the new diagnostic model would function. A prominent psychiatrist, and, eventually a member of the *DSM-III* Task Force, William Frosch, put it this way: “Once people realized a lot of icons were being smashed, then everyone wanted a piece of the action” (qtd. in Wilson 407).

psychiatric theory and practice of the time. (1-2)

Furthermore, while the declassification of homosexuality from the *DSM-III* was unquestionably a victory for gay liberationists with positive social and legal repercussions, the new terminology the APA included in its manual was hardly progressive. In the seventh printing of the *DSM-II* in July 1974, a “Special Note” was included that stated that

[s]ince the last printing of this Manual, the trustees of the American Psychiatric Association, in December 1973, voted to eliminate **Homosexuality** per se as a mental disorder and to substitute therefore a new category titled **Sexual Orientation Disturbance**. The change appears on page 44 of this, the seventh printing. In May, 1974 the trustees’ decision was upheld by a substantial majority in a referendum of the voting members of the Association. (qtd. in Mayes and Horwitz 259; emphasis in the original)

It would take two further editions after 1980’s *DSM-III* before homosexuality as a concept was entirely removed (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network): the revised *DSM-III-R* in 1987 and the *DSM-IV* in 1994. One must therefore consider that the decision made by the APA’s Board of Trustees to declassify homosexuality was only made, “after years of bitter dispute” (Bayer 3), five full years after the premiere of my final primary text, Mart Crowley’s *The Boys in the Band*.

The history of the medical establishment’s classification of the alcoholic and the queer demonstrates that these identities were therefore constructed in a type of lockstep. And, while any sort of similarity between the two conditions might seem implausible to readers or audiences today, in reality it was repeatedly emphasized in many different aspects of culture until the beginning of the 1970s. Fifteen years into the new millennium, it is only now that the relation

between alcoholism and queerness might finally begin to weaken, as I explore in my epilogue.

In fact, six year before the watershed year of 1946, the very first year of the first decade in which one of my primary texts was written, Harriet R. Mowrer delineated the history of the medical establishment's interest in the relation between alcoholism and what were then deemed sexual perversions:

Abraham, in 1908, developed the psychological relations between sexuality and alcoholism and stated that drinking is the alcoholic's sexual activity. He concluded that sexuality, alcoholism, and neuroses are all interrelated.

Juliusburger in 1913 stressed unconscious homosexuality as the cause of alcoholism. In 1919, L. Pierce Clark elaborated upon the conclusions of both Abraham and Juliusburger. Alcoholism, he concluded, is a substitute for neurosis and psychosis. In 1925, Sachs characterized drug and alcoholic craving as a compromise between a perversion and a compulsion neurosis. (287)

Mowrer's work demonstrates that a mere eight years into the new century, members of the medical community were seeking links between the two conditions. Though she argues in her own piece for the *American Sociological Review* that previous research had oversimplified things and that the conclusion that latent homosexuality causes alcoholism was "ridiculous" (293), Mowrer still notes that "the association of the sexual factor and alcoholism has long been accepted" (292) and that a strong correlation between alcohol addiction in males and fears surrounding "strength and masculinity" had been conclusively shown in studies (293).

For her part, Valverde has argued that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts found alcoholics "unsuitable and/or unworthy of their attentions" (*Diseases* 11) and instead chose to focus on other disorders (typically sexual ones), but this "either/or" claim of the process of

medicalization, despite her best efforts, remains somewhat specious. For example, S. Israelstam and Sylvia Lambert, research associates with the Addiction Research Foundation in Toronto (what is now part of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, or CAMH), demonstrate the lengthy and complicated history of the psychiatric establishment's consideration of the link between alcoholism and sex perversion in their "Homosexuality as a Cause of Alcoholism: A Historical Review." Israelstam and Lambert draw connections between the conditions in the abstract of their article, and note that

[t]he definitions of homosexuality and of alcoholism have exercised therapists since they first found themselves dealing with the respective behaviours. In both cases, the definition has changed with the change in attitude toward the behavior. Both behaviors have been subject to sanctions of the law. Both have been subdivided into numerous types. Both have social implications that have kept the behaviors "hidden" or "closet." [*sic*]

[...] The reason we are looking at these two subjects conjointly is because the psychoanalysts developed a theory that linked alcoholism causally with homosexuality. (1085)⁹

The psychoanalytic theory of a causal relationship, of course, would eventually receive sustained and well-reasoned challenges. But the fact that a causal relation between the two conditions is now widely discredited has little to no impact on either the correlation of alcoholism and queerness in the cultural imaginary or medicalized models for disordered behaviour. As I argue in greater detail in my epilogue, the queer alcoholic is still very much with us today, though in reconfigured ways, and ones that are likely to change even more in the near

⁹ As I argue in the latter section of my third chapter, though psychoanalysts in the early twentieth century initially postulated this causal link, it was primarily American Neo-Freudians and Ego Psychologists who solidified and popularized toxic origin narratives for the specifically gay male (rather than queer) alcoholic.

future. What I aim to highlight by recounting these debates over appropriate treatment and classification of disordered conditions (which, we must note, continue to rage in 2015) is the symbolic importance of the alcoholic; the specific ways the figure was represented in great works of literature were heavily informed by their appearance in such a complex period of U.S. culture and history.

This context provides an explanation for how multifaceted and varied the relation between alcoholism and queerness has been in American plays themselves during the middle period of the twentieth century. Consider, for example, the monologue spoken by the character of Jimmy Tomorrow in Act IV of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, in which he explains why he has not sought re-employment as a war correspondent:

I didn't resign. I was fired for drunkenness. And that was years ago. I'm much worse now. And it was absurd of me to excuse my drunkenness by pretending it was my wife's adultery that ruined my life.

As Hickey guessed, I was a drunkard before that. Long before. [...]

I have forgotten why I married Marjorie. [...] She soon found *I much preferred drinking all night with my pals to being in bed with her*. I really didn't care. I was *glad to be free*[.] (171-72; emphasis added)

Rather than signify a connection between queer identity and bodily degeneration or psychic disturbance (as I argue happens in several later texts), Jimmy's habitual drunkenness is used to stress how it provides opportunities for moments of pleasurable homosocial bonding as well as an escape from obligatory heterosexual rituals. And due to the fluid nature of queer alcoholism, the figure's connection to an alluring homosociality can easily rub against depictions of it as *separate* or apart from the collective. Jimmy's speech illuminates the extent to which notions of

the two conditions had been braided together in the American unconscious by the mid-1940s.

Their entangled cultural histories notwithstanding, the connection between alcoholism and queerness also exists on a conceptual level. In fact, an antiquated definition of the term “queer” as an adjective reads both “out of sorts; unwell [...] giddy” and “Formerly also (*slang*): drunk” (*OED*, Def. 2). Both conditions are publicly performed; that is, they are inherently theatrical, whether we witness them behind the footlights of a Broadway space or on a darkened street at two o’clock in the morning. They are states that invite the viewer/perceiver to take them in, mull them over, and, most importantly, attempt to read them. As we shall see, they also threaten to spill into, besot, and overwhelm the beholder’s *own* subjectivity. And the linkage goes even further: while, to adapt Justice Potter Stewart’s claim—one of the most famous phrases in the history of U.S. Supreme Court opinions (Gewirtz 1023)—we “know them when we see them,” evidence of both terms is often subjective.

Knowing them when we see them, however, often proves very tricky, as analysis of the doubled symptoms in works from any period in theatrical history well demonstrates. Prior to the twentieth century, there were certainly characters who exhibited both signifiers of drunkenness and queerness at the same time. In August Strindberg’s 1888 *Miss Julie*, for instance, the eponymous heroine initially drinks to lure Jean into her personal sadomasochistic fantasies. She uses the act of drinking in order to simultaneously bond with, and exert control over, her valet:

MISS JULIE. Can you get me something to drink first?

[...JEAN serves her beer.]

Thank you. Won’t you have something to drink yourself?

JEAN. I’m not really a beer drinker; but if it’s an order.

MISS JULIE. Order?—As a gentleman you should keep your lady company, I

think.

JEAN. You're right, of course. (*Opens another bottle, takes a glass*)

MISS JULIE. Now drink my health! [...JEAN does.] Bravo!—Now finish things off properly and kiss my shoe as well! (77-78)

Her boldly flirtatious behaviour, as well as her desire to have Jean perform eroticized subservience, is here both coded by, and married to, the performed consumption of alcohol. Even the choice of which type of alcohol to drink (i.e. “MISS JULIE. What do you mean ‘just’ [beer]? I’ve simple tastes; I prefer it to wine” [77]) comments on the character’s ultimate coarseness, as one might expect the daughter of a Count to have cultivated a sophisticated palette in matters prandial and brandial. Later in the play, Miss Julie becomes depressed and anxious following her sexual encounter with her servant, and Jean admonishes her for what he deems her excessive imbibing:

MISS JULIE. I’m so tired. Give me some wine. [...]

But first we must talk, we’ve still got a little time. (*Drains the glass; holds it out for more*)

JEAN. Don’t drink so much, you’ll get drunk.

MISS JULIE. So what?

JEAN. So what? It’s vulgar. [...] (*She fills her glass and drinks.*)

Don’t drink any more!¹⁰ (92-94)

In this second instance, her act of repeatedly consuming the wine onstage is certainly meant to give audience members insight into Miss Julie’s psychological state.

But two important determinants prevent us from being able to categorize her as a queer

¹⁰ Jean’s directive is echoed by characters addressing queer alcoholics in almost all of my texts: perhaps the clearest example would be Stella’s command to Blanche during Scene Five of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: “But don’t take another drink!” (336)

alcoholic. The first and foremost is that Strindberg's interest in formal experimentation actively works *against* this interpretation. The naturalistic mode of the play ensures that a myriad of different performed actions, psychological motivations, and bodily signifiers thwart the spectator. He or she is unable to diagnose the character in the same way s/he will be able to with figures such as Hickey from *Iceman* or Martha from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In his preface to the play, Strindberg does describe Miss Julie as a "type" "synonymous with degeneration" (*Preface* 60). Representations of degeneration—along with spectatorial fears of *contagious* dissipation—are a key topos of the queer alcoholic's entrancing power, but the playwright is correct in his assertion that there are so many different and competing factors contained within the short play that Miss Julie and Jean become "fairly 'characterless'" characters (58). The audience's categorization of the characters into the tropological figure of the queer alcoholic is made impossible by the numerous different naturalistic "motivations" that Strindberg himself breathlessly lists:

her mother's "bad" basic instincts; her father's improper bringing-up of the girl; her own nature and the influence her fiancé's suggestions had on her weak, degenerate brain; also, and more immediately: the festive atmosphere of Midsummer Night; her father's absence; her period; her preoccupation with animals; the intoxicating effect of the dance; the light summer night; the powerful aphrodisiac influence of the flowers; and finally chance that drives these two people together in a room apart, plus the boldness of the aroused man. (58)

Though he lists the "intoxicating" sensations Miss Julie experiences as a result of the dancing in this catalogue, Strindberg curiously fails to even mention that during the course of the play she is *literally* intoxicated at least twice.

However, Strindberg's use of "'characterless' characters" is only the first reason why spectators are not able to locate and categorize the queer alcoholic in Strindberg's play. The second, and perhaps more important point, is that "knowing" the queer alcoholic when we see him or her onstage presumes an *a priori* diagnostic model for classifying the qualities of the drunk and the queer. And crucially, while many of the same interwoven symptoms have appeared in similar figurations since the beginning of dramatic literature, it was only after the Victorian period's feverish attempts to work them into a categorized model that the queer alcoholic was poured out onto American stages. (And, to a lesser extent, onto screens as well, a point I discuss with particular relevance to four of my texts: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and *The Boys in the Band*.) Therefore Miss Julie cannot be labeled with either condition, let alone the joint figuration this dissertation explores, because the conditions were still in the cultural process of being pathologized.

In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's virtuosic essay "Epidemics of the Will" (the essay that spurred Valverde's composition of her own *Diseases of the Will*), the author explains how opium use in Europe was historically viewed as "a behavior among other behaviors" (131). But then, she notes, "something changed": "[u]nder the taxonomic pressure of the newly ramified and pervasive medical-juridical authority of the late nineteenth century [...] what has been *a question of acts* crystallized into *a question of identities* (131; emphasis added). As with many queer theorists, Sedgwick's thinking is deeply indebted to the Foucauldian "Repressive Hypothesis" from Volume I of his *History of Sexuality*, or the notion that what is specific to "modern societies [...] is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*" (35; emphasis in the original). In fact, the author takes the section of the work in which Foucault famously chronicles the

invention of the homosexual and paraphrases it in relation to the figure of the addict:

The nineteenth-century [addict] became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood. ...[His addiction] was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.... The [opium-eater] had been a temporary aberration; the [addict] was now a species. ("Epidemics" 131-32; ellipses and parentheses in the original)

Though Kosofsky is here making an analogy between the creations of the identity of the (explicitly male) homosexual in particular and that of the identity of the addict in general (i.e. regardless of the addictive substance, such as alcohol, tobacco, opium, etc.), the logic is still eminently sound and applicable to my topics of analysis. For the fact remains that it was only at this point in history that alcoholism and queerness became constructed as identities by a sort of feedback loop generated by both the American medical and theatrical communities.

The United States's particularly vexed relation to both drinking and non-normative sexual behaviour further assisted in the surfacing of this figure. The thirteen years of nation-wide Prohibition impacted the country's collective psyche to an enormous degree. The complex, entrenched histories of Puritanism, social conservatism, and temperance leagues ensured that American society maintained a deep-seated suspicion of behaviours labeled as excessive or perverse, while it simultaneously remained obsessed by them. (This last listed factor, temperance leagues, is best exemplified in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which the character of Hope mockingly refers to when, upon learning of Hickey's sobriety, he asks *The Iceman Cometh*'s protagonist, "Joined the Salvation Army, ain't you? Been elected President of the W.C.T.U.?" [61]) As Sedgwick argues regarding desires defined as addictive and/or homosexual,

the twentieth century saw the startling rise of a cultural perspective (particularly powerful in America) that was unable of moving beyond an absolute binary of voluntarity/compulsion:

the old antisodomic opposition between something called nature and that which is *contra naturam* blended with a treacherous apparent seamlessness into a new opposition between substances that are *natural* (e.g., “food”) and those that are *artificial* (e.g., “drugs”); and hence into the characteristic twentieth-century way of distinguishing desires themselves between those considered natural, called “needs,” and those considered artificial, called “addictions.” (“Epidemics” 136)

In a manner similar to Sedgwick, scholar Avital Ronell has deemed our current culture one of “narcossism”: that is, the “way that our relation to ourselves has now been structured, mediated, that is, by some form of addiction and urge” (qtd. in Laurence). Both theorists focus on how the oppositional binary of voluntarity/compulsion has come to govern the concept of subjectivity during the twentieth century. I extend this analysis by exploring how this binary’s governance is affected in the theatrical context of spectatorship.

As I shall establish in the following chapters, performances which depict compulsive partaking in alcohol and queer sex have the corrosive ability to melt through this discursive oppositional binary that Sedgwick describes as natural/against nature. Spectators are repeatedly lured into reading the queer alcoholic through the figure’s bodily enactment onstage. As my analyses will demonstrate, the medium of theatre is therefore essential to the responses the works seek to produce in their viewers. The specific forms of addiction (and “addiction”) I explicate in *Parched*—alcoholic beverages and queer sexual relations—provide the richest and most profound implications when examined in the performed genre of drama, which is attested to by the prevalence and endurance of plays dealing with the trope. No other study has limned these

rich connections.

The conceptual slipperiness of alcoholism makes a fruitful pairing with contemporary understandings of what is queer: this term has also been interpreted in a multitude of different ways throughout critical history. With the rise of queer theory during the 1990s, it has become de rigueur for those working in the field to express much handwringing over competing definitions of queerness. Indeed, as in much Leftist or progressive discourse, it has often seemed as if the harshest critiques of queer theory have come from self-professed queer theorists themselves. There have been a number of examples of this phenomenon, notably Judith Butler's exchange with Nancy Fraser on the usefulness of gender performativity (i.e. their debate in *Feminist Contentions*), Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism and José Esteban Muñoz's response of queer futurity (i.e. Edelman's remarkable *No Future* and Muñoz's equally influential *Cruising Utopia*), and Tim Edwards's 1998 castigation of what he deemed queer theory's tendency to become "an adjunct to poststructural theory [or] merely an outcome of contemporary urban lesbian and gay politics [...] in short, [...] some kind of uncritical addendum to a limited form of cultural optimism" (482). But like queerness itself, queer theory fundamentally pushes against definition: it obviously cannot be reduced to one overarching claim or approach. As David M. Halperin reminds us, this is because queer "is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (*Saint* 62). In the words of P.B. Harper, E.F. White, and M. Cerullo, "[t]he minute you say 'queer'...you are necessarily calling into question exactly what you mean when you say it...Queer includes within it a necessarily expansive impulse that allows us to think about potential differences within that rubric" (30). To try to fully describe the characteristics of queerness can only result in more questions.

This does not mean, however, that one should not make the attempt, especially as certain

figures like the queer alcoholic become important literary, theatrical, and cultural tropes. I am deeply indebted to Halperin and others in the (now generally acknowledged) firmament of queer theory stars for my own working definition of queerness: Leo Bersani, Butler, Tim Dean, Edelman, Jack Halberstam, Muñoz, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as well as Michael Warner. In addition to Halperin's gloss of the term as anti-normative or, to put it another way, disruptive to stable identitarian positions, I wish to stress that in my view *queerness relates to male homosexual figures, but is not strictly limited to them*. In other words, for me Martha from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is just as queer as her alcoholic predecessor Brick from Williams's *Cat*. While similar signifiers are often used in order to separately connote both gayness and queerness (e.g. gender nonconformity, expressions of same-sex desire, camp, etc.) they are often conflated by readers and viewers in an attempt to reach interpretive certainty.

LeCompte's direction capitalized in a brilliant way on the conflation of queer and gay signifiers in *Vieux Carré* by ensuring that her scenes positively boiled over with depictions of both kinds of non-normative desire. For instance, the Writer's crying in his attic room was preceded by Fliakos simulating masturbation to gay male pornography on a large video screen [11:43] and fantasizing about fellatio with naked men.¹¹ Similarly, the character's orgasm at the hands of Nightingale was played realistically, and the section of the text in which the Writer has a brief dalliance with a strung-out, reeling Tye (41-3)—a hunky yet corrupt strip show barker—was performed with a slow, heightened sensuality, Fliakos straddling Shepherd's legs backwards and nearly licking his bare foot [43:20] after he had “removed his wet shoes” (49). (See Fig. 3.)

Nonetheless, gay male eroticism was only one aspect of the production's “landscape” of

¹¹ The Wooster Group's website for the production credits artist and musician Casey Spooner, of the electroclash duo Fischerspooner, as the “Dancer” on the video screen, though multiple male bodies are shown throughout the piece.



Fig. 3: The Provocative Sequence with Tye's Wet Shoes.

desire.¹² During one sequence, the Writer's fellow lodger Jane (played by the incomparable Kate Valk, a founding Group member) confessed her insatiable craving for her lover Tye, and even performed anilingus on him at centre stage [37:30-38:20]. While in this instance it took place during a heterosexual liaison, anilingus (or rimming) has historically been connected with homosexuality. And the sexual act was clearly an addition to the text; Williams's script makes no such reference during Jane's monologue at the conclusion of Scene Four, instead only noting "[s]he touches his throat with trembling fingers. He leans sensually back against her. She runs her hand down his chest" (34).

LeCompte also adapted Williams's beloved old crones, Mary Maude and Miss Carrie, and placed them onscreen in a hilarious, startling, and queer manner: actor Alan Boyd Kleiman

¹² LeCompte has herself used this term, originally borrowed from the writings of Gertrude Stein, to describe her work (LeCompte, "*Vieux Carré*: Director's Notes" 1:35).

appeared as the spinsters in drag, clutching his bare shoulders above a low-cut gown and wailing at the mention the police had been called [8:20-9:09; 1:01:22-1:03:17]. Even the text's moment of subtextual incest was foregrounded by LeCompte in the emphasis she placed upon Mrs. Wire's attraction to the Writer during a hallucinatory monologue, in which she mistakes him for her estranged son Timmy [1:40:02-1:41:11]:

Things between grownups in love and marriage can't be told to a child. (*She sits on the writer's cot.*) Now lie down and Mommy will sing you a sleepy-time song. [...]

Mummy knows you're scared sleeping alone in the dark. But the Lord gave us the dark for sleep, and Daddy don't like to find you took his rightful place... (106-07)

In this way LeCompte's production blended both gay and queer signifiers in order to represent non-normative sexual behaviours.¹³

In all three following chapters of this dissertation, I investigate the numerous ways in which the queer alcoholic is shown to be fluid, excessive, and liminal: it is these qualities that make boundary-trespass one of its hallmarks. Critics such as Mary Douglas, Susan Sontag, Butler, and Bersani have all previously demonstrated that "the body is a model that can stand for any bounded system" and that cultural anxieties surrounding boundary-trespass and the liminal are located in its representations (qtd. in Bersani, *Homos* 46). LeCompte's focus on the physical form of her actors is a method by which *The Wooster Group's* *Vieux Carré* makes manifest these qualities of queerness and alcoholism. Company members double characters in advantageous ways: Shepherd, for example, plays both the priapic yet feeble Nightingale and the unscrupulous

¹³ See Matthew McMahan's "'*Strange and Imponderable*': *The Wooster Group and Vieux Carré*." McMahan served as an intern with the Group from May to November 2009 and helped document the rehearsal process for the piece. He notes that LeCompte strove to "forcefully confront[t]" the audience with explicit depictions of sexuality in her re-imagining of the Williams text, and that she specifically took "pains to show the different forms sex may take: *romantic, violent, queer, straight, private, [and/or] public*" (29; emphasis added).

Tye, while Valk appears as both the beautiful Jane and the shrewish Mrs. Wire.¹⁴ (See Fig. 4.) The characters swirl into one another with dizzying speed to the sound of the Writer's typing; individual psyches are dissolved into a blur. Other figures appear to interact with the onstage characters solely via recorded footage, such as Nightingale's pickup (11-2)[6:13-7:13], Mary Maude and Miss Carrie, or the male erotic dancers and pornographic models. And still other moments involve characters the audience sees onstage in impossible pre-recorded sequences, such as Jane's first entrance with her discussion of the "*flying* cockroach" (9) [4:56-6:06], or, in his first appearance in Part Two, Scene Eight, the Writer's love interest, Sky [1:10:03-1:11:36]. LeCompte's fluid and doubled stagings of the characters from Williams's original play therefore make use of ghosting, too, since the mechanism of dis/identification is literally modeled onstage by the actors, who are ghosted by their own earlier characterizations both in person and via video recordings. A given performer (say, Kate Valk) is not the same person from one minute to the next—and yet she simultaneously is, in memory, since audience members cannot forget what they have seen.

The doubled, mercurial representations of *The Wooster Group's* Vieux Carré illuminate how the mechanics of the theatre perfectly align with the fluidity and liminality that structure both queerness and alcoholism. Many of the physical symptoms of alcoholism, such as memory problems, blurred or doubled vision, vertigo, and even lapses in consciousness or "blackouts," are routinely simulated for theatre viewers for dramatic effect. Representations of the figure are therefore *best* understood in the genre of theatre. The mechanics of performance, which rely

¹⁴ Initially in 2009 the role of Mrs. Wire was performed by Ellen Mills; Valk, however, took over for the remainder of the work's three-year performance schedule. In an interview with the website *Gothamist*, Valk was remarkably candid about how quickly she took over the part and the different factors that affected her performance: "Well, somebody else played Mrs. Wire for a long time and then had to leave, so I took on someone else's role with a big mask, and so it can happen really fast. And I'm wired. I'm receiving the lines in my ear, so I'm on a track. It can just happen. I'm kind of channeling."



Fig. 4: Kate Valk as Landlady Mrs. Wire.

upon presence, intimacy, sensory activation, movement, and the disappearance of boundaries (particularly that between performer and spectator) all work to engage audience members and initiate them into the otherness of the double state. No other medium is able to promise—and threaten—the same experience.

Above all, however, I detail how the queer alcoholic figure is one that brings together contradictory binary characteristics, blurring them in ways that are both exciting and terrifying for audience members. Qualities and behaviours that seemed entirely definable and easily labeled—for example, taut, muscled arms, or the act of drinking a libation at a bar with male

friends—are placed in a new, queer perspective. Divisions of all sorts begin to melt away. This dissolution forms much of the queer alcoholic’s radical power. In the introduction to her edited collection *Inside/Out*, Diana Fuss notes the far-reaching consequences of questioning, let alone blurring or eradicating, the division between traditional boundaries: she describes the polarity of inside/outside as the “very figure for signification,” or in other words, what allows us to make meaning and identity itself (2). Hence firm binaries are the mechanisms by which meaning is produced, and the queer alcoholic’s ability to disrupt those mechanisms through the dissolution of traditional boundaries is in large part what makes the figure both so fascinating and frightening. Thus to Halperin’s definition of anti-normative I add the characteristics of boundary-trespass and fluidity.

Furthermore, the figure goes far beyond blurring his or her own boundaries, and demonstrates the ability to cause others to replicate addictive behaviour. More than a mere symbol of perversion, transgression, or sin in itself, the figure freely generates the repetition of these acts in unwitting individuals. In both Williams’s source text and LeCompte’s adaptation, Nightingale’s offer of the white port to the Writer easily reads as an initiation into alcoholism and queerness: the old painter himself relies upon the image of liquefying boundaries when he states to the young man, “the plywood *partition between us* has been *dissolved*” (20; emphasis added). LeCompte’s direction and costuming of Fliakos for her staging stressed this point in a beautiful moment of metatheatricality: the performer as the queer alcoholic seduced us as viewers just as Nightingale attempted to seduce the Writer.

According to scholar Robert Bray, the conclusion of the scene between the two men, in which Nightingale manually stimulates the Writer to orgasm (i.e. “Lie back and imagine the paratrooper” [26]), contains “the first unambiguous homosexual liaison Williams ever staged”

(X). It is likely that this direct and unapologetic depiction of queer sexuality played a role in the play's frosty reception from critics and audiences. My six core texts all contain (typically less explicit) variations on this sequence from *The Wooster Group's* Vieux Carré's theme of queer initiation: hapless "straight" characters are exposed to dangerously seductive acts and themselves begin destructive cycles of excess, mimicking the heteronorm's fears of contagion. While I note these instances for each play I discuss, Chapter III's explication of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* is particularly relevant to the concept of induction.

This initiation occurs through the spectator's sexual anxieties and projection: crucially, the spectator is placed in the position of dis/identifying him or herself from the queer alcoholic by labeling the figure as an Other who is both addicted and perverse. But the viewer is simultaneously forced to identify with the figure by recognizing, even on an unconscious level, the similarity between the figure and him or herself. This paradoxical psychic state of dis/identification threatens to obliterate—or, in fluid terms, *liquidate*—the spectator's own subjectivity. The excitement and fear provoked by this destabilizing experience of exposure to alcoholic and queer sexual behaviours are akin to those provoked by the genre of tragedy. This important performative process the figure provides, as well as its connection to tragedy, have never been examined before.

The representation of both queerness and alcohol addiction as contagious is also deeply connected to the final attribute of the figure that I probe: its frequent depiction as the bearer of some form of forbidden knowledge, of the self or in general, which is tantalizing but also devastating. This higher or divine knowledge is a variation on what Boon has deemed "Gnostic" power:

Gnosticism is a vast and diffuse subject, but I will use the word [...] to describe a worldview that sees the material world [...] as a fallen, corrupt, inauthentic place, and man as an alien, trapped within it. To escape, man seeks the flash of gnosis, or knowledge, in the form of a transmission from another cosmos or transcendental dimension in which truth resides [...]his transmission can take various forms, but drugs [...] are certainly one of them. (30)

However, the flash of gnosis that occurs to the queer alcoholic is almost always depicted as being too powerful to contain or control, and threatens to tear the character—as well as others exposed to him or her—apart. It is therefore a type of fatal second sight.¹⁵

This coding is used several times in *Vieux Carré*, and each time in connection with a queer alcoholic figure. Nightingale, for example, refuses to admit that his ceaseless coughing is caused by tuberculosis but can nevertheless quite rightly see that the Writer is turning “into a selfish, callous man” with “literary pretensions,” who is “cold in the heart” (50). Jane warns the Writer that he must take a chance on moving westward with the drifter Sky (“He might not wait, you’d regret it” [115]) but, unlike Nightingale, is able to interpret and accept her own diagnosis from Ochsner’s Clinic as “a sort of a personal, signed rejection slip” (54). And the unstable Mrs. Wire in particular demonstrates moments of uncanny, destructive self-awareness,¹⁶ unsurprisingly while drinking with the Writer:

I only touch this bottle [...] when forced to by such a shocking experience as I had tonight, the discovery that I was completely alone in the world, a solitary ole

¹⁵ Contemporary queer playwright Tony Kushner built upon and adapted this imagery in his groundbreaking *Angels in America*. In Act One, Scene Seven of *Part One: Millennium Approaches*, the AIDS-stricken Prior and the depressed and neurotic Harper share a trancelike state they deem the “Threshold of revelation” (39-40). Both characters are under the influence of powerful narcotics, and Prior is so ill as to be close to death.

¹⁶ LeCompte’s production of Williams’s text stressed moments of the uncanny with repeated unearthly flashbulb effects that boomed across the stage.

woman cared for by no one. You know, I heard some doctor say on the radio that people die of loneliness, specially at my age. They do. Die of it, it kills 'em. Oh, that's not the cause that's put on the death warrant, but that's the *true* cause. I tell you, there's so much loneliness in this house that you can hear it. Set still and you can hear it: a sort of awful—soft—groaning in all the walls. (65; emphasis in the original)

Mrs. Wire's speech makes explicit what is present in both of the other instances: Williams strongly connects the queer alcoholic's astonishing revelatory power with death.

I explore the ur-form of this characteristic of the figure in my first chapter on Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. These plays establish a frame and serve as both a guidepost and a baseline for the other two chapters, since they appear chronologically earliest and therefore can be used to demonstrate how early conceptions of needful subjectivities are staged. Once I have noted how O'Neill embeds certain aspects of the code for the figure, I then move in Chapter II to an investigation of two canonical works by Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. With his signature style, Williams made the subtext of the queer alcoholic more pronounced through his plays. Finally, in Chapter III I illuminate how Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* made the figure even more explicit, much to the delight and horror of mainstream audiences and reviewers. As I make clear through close readings of the text, along with analysis of interviews and reviews of initial productions, the figure brings a type of "interpretive difficulty" to the stage which audience members have historically found deeply appealing and deeply unsettling. I then use Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* as an exegetical tool in contrast with Albee's text: regardless of the playwright's intentions, in Crowley's landmark play, queerness becomes

contained and neutralized under the label of gayness. As a result, I prove that the queer alcoholic is a much more layered, fascinating, and threatening figure than the relatively simple gay one.

Each of the texts this dissertation analyzes has become part of the modern American canon; with the exception of Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, which was relegated to marginal status as an LGBT-related work for reasons I explore in Chapter III, these works are some of the most famous and frequently revived plays in the history of American theatre. In a very real, material way, audiences have become addicted to consuming representations of queer alcoholic figures: they form a large part of our theatrical and literary lineage.

As a result, *Parched* interrogates canonical theatrical representations of Western culture's intertwined pathologies of queer and alcoholic and argues for a renewed interest in, and reevaluation of, the dramatic figure. I examine how the mechanics of the theatre facilitate the legibility of the queer alcoholic, and contend that its disturbing, seductive power is located in the performative, destabilizing process of a dis/identified audience reception. Through augmenting existing work on queer desire and needful subjectivities and combining it with genre-specific analysis, my work in this dissertation provides an expansion of the fields of American modern drama, queer theory and criticism, and addiction studies.

Chapter I:

“Stone Cold Sober and Dead to the World”: The Queer Alcoholic in the Work of O’Neill

I. “A Parched Throat”: *The Iceman Cometh*

The works of Eugene O’Neill have made the playwright a towering figure in modern American theatre. The recipient of no less than three Pulitzer Prizes during his lifetime (*Beyond the Horizon* [1920]; *Anna Christie* [1922]; *Strange Interlude* [1928]), as well as another posthumously awarded Pulitzer for *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*¹⁷ in 1957, O’Neill was so critically lauded that he became the first American Nobel Laureate before he had reached the age of 50. While his personal biography did consist of a series of cruel emotional traumas and estrangements (which, of course, links all four of the playwrights analyzed here), he was not denigrated as a one-hit wonder as Mart Crowley was, nor was he wrongly dismissed and humiliated by reviewers for perceived artistic implosion in his late career like Williams, nor vilified like Albee during the late 1960s and early 1970s for arrogantly purveying works rooted in “preten[sion...], galling sophistication, [...and] ghastly pansy rhetoric and repartee” (Roth).¹⁸

Given O’Neill’s social position as decidedly heterosexual, as well as his undeniable and virtuosic talent for the craft of dramatic writing, his warm critical reception and entrenched

¹⁷ Hereafter referred to in the text as *Journey*.

¹⁸ To my mind Stephen Bottoms’s introduction in the *Cambridge Companion* overstates the degree to which Albee’s status, as both critical success and box-office lure, suffered during what Bottoms refers to as his “long middle period” (5). It is certain that, after the smash success of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* on Broadway, Albee struggled (usually in vain) to be seen as a consistently powerful artistic figure in the American theatre. Nonetheless, even Bottoms must concede that during the period between 1966 and 1981 he received two Pulitzer Prizes (*A Delicate Balance* [1966] and *Seascape* [1975]), and that after the premiere of *Three Tall Women* in 1991 he would be “showered with awards and honors” in a “late career revival” (8). This places him in stark contrast to both Crowley and Williams. After Crowley’s early success with *The Boys in the Band*, critics swiftly relegated him—wrongly, to my mind, given the experimentation present in his later work—to the status of a minor playwright, one who produced antiquated and embarrassing pieces of gay-centric literature. And Williams’s critical and commercial draw-and-quarterming was by far the most grotesque of those suffered by the four artists: as Annette J. Saddik writes concisely in *The Politics of Reputation: The Critical Reception of Tennessee Williams’ Later Plays*, “None of Williams’ work ever achieved the success that the early works had. The later plays were, with few exceptions, viewed by audiences and critics as inferior to his earlier accomplishments” (22).

position in the canon of modern American theatre doubtlessly surprises no one. However, what is likely far less expected is the ease with which such a well-known and ostensibly “straight” male playwright’s work lends itself to a reading of the intertwined semiotics of queerness and alcoholism. In this way, my interpretations of *The Iceman Cometh*¹⁹ and *Journey* parallel one of Kathryn Bond Stockton’s main insights from her research into the queer child. In much the same way as Stockton’s work demonstrates that the queer child lurks in the most heteronormative, canonical texts, this chapter makes evident that the queer alcoholic has seeped into the fabric of the American cultural imaginary via an unlikely reservoir. It is obvious from any cursory glance at O’Neill’s texts that the realm of excess and bodily experience fascinated him; what has yet to be explored by scholars in any meaningful way is how queer alcoholic figures form the core of two of his most famous plays.

As I have posited in my introduction, the textual fixation upon the queer alcoholic in O’Neill’s plays encoded a specific version of the trope in American modern theatre, one which later playwrights could not help but confront in their works. Frankly, with O’Neill’s level of fame and critical acclaim, it would have been impossible for Williams, Albee, and Crowley to have avoided being influenced by his early twentieth-century representations of the queer alcoholic. As a result, each author adapted and manipulated the figure in different ways.

O’Neill populated his tragedies with unforgettable down-and-out characters: drifters, traitors, vagabonds, parasites, failed (con) artists, revolutionaries, and whores. *Iceman* has these memorable grifters in spades—seventeen, in fact.²⁰ These lost souls are all gathered at a location

¹⁹ This play is hereafter referred to as *Iceman* within the text.

²⁰ Of the nineteen characters *Iceman* lists in total, only Moran and Lieb, the police detectives, could be considered even remotely connected with respectable persons—and even their status in that group seems dubious.

that is itself on the outs, Harry Hope's bar.²¹ As Larry Slade explains with his trademark acerbic wit in response to Don Parritt's²² question "What kind of joint is it, anyway?" Harry Hope's establishment is "the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Café, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller!" (19) Although in terms of genre *Iceman* is clearly a tragedy, many of the play's most affecting moments comically revel in an atmosphere of seediness. Nevertheless, though O'Neill's text invites its spectators to grasp his characters' distinct flaws and self-delusions—and sometimes guffaw accordingly—our ability to judge them in any moralistic way is hampered by the uncomfortable implications of the philosophy of human existence the play puts forth.

What is at stake in O'Neill's work is what is at stake in the work of any great playwright: the question of what gives meaning and authenticity to our lives, and how we might go about approaching this ultimate truth or real. But as Leonard Chabrowe has demonstrated in "Dionysus in *The Iceman Cometh*," which explores the author's reformulation of classical Greek theatrical modes in both *Iceman* and his earlier *Lazarus Laughed* [1926], O'Neill's perspective on humanity's existential state is a decidedly bleak one:²³ "In both Hope's saloon and Tiberius' palace life is a living death. It is in these places that man's sickness of soul is manifest, and it is to them that Hickey and Lazarus come in their capacity as saviors" (380). As I will explain later

²¹ As he did in a more obvious manner with *Journey*, O'Neill included small autobiographical details in *Iceman*: Harry Hope's saloon is based upon a real-life bar where the young playwright roomed, which was nicknamed "the Hell Hole."

²² Following accepted critical practice this chapter refers to Hickey, Parritt, Slade, Hope, Moran, and Lieb by their surnames (or in Hickey's case, nickname) and to all other characters by their first names.

²³ Expanding upon the playwright's moral duty to explore the philosophical theme of the meaning of life, O'Neill stated that

[t]he playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it—the death of the Old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new One for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is simply scribbling around on the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlor entertainer. ("On the Playwright Today" 542)

in the chapter, this is precisely how O'Neill represents humankind's state in his plays, as is made most explicit in *Iceman* and *Journey*. Nonetheless, what Chabrowe's statements point to is the privileging of the figure of the queer in these works. The presence of Hickey in *Iceman* is absolutely crucial: the play relies upon this character at the levels of both plot and symbol.

Indeed, Hickey borders on being metonymic for both the desire to consume alcohol and the desire for queer sexual relations. Despite his explanation to the denizens of Hope's bar that he is newly (and queerly) abstinent, his association with drinking remains his defining characteristic throughout the work. But in contrast to the homosocial bonds that permeate the saloon via the men's drinking, Hickey's relation to alcohol is structured to read in an ominous fashion. In fact, even his repudiation of the substance becomes transmuted into his repudiation—or, more to the point, murder—of a woman, his wife Evelyn. He is queerly sober throughout the piece, and yet remains defined by his relation to alcohol. In this way Hickey is coded to stand *apart* from the other characters in the play's representational system. (That is, apart from every other character save for two, whom I shall name presently.) This “apartness” reads in that the other characters rightly interpret Hickey as transformed, an individual concealing a mysterious, dangerous secret from them. In this sense, Hickey is archetypally closeted, and his newfound sobriety speaks volumes. He appears strange and otherworldly to both his onstage audience and the audience members across the proscenium, drawing attention whenever he is visible. In short, he carries a mad presence that makes him appear both like and unlike us.

The queer alcoholic in O'Neill's works (and, of course, as a result of his influence, in the works of the other playwrights this dissertation explores) occupies a paradoxical status: the figure is linked with both the revelation of an ultimate truth or real of human life as well as symbolic death. In *Iceman* this revelatory status is made explicit via Willie Oban's invocation in

Act I: “Let us join in prayer that Hickey, the Great Salesman, will soon arrive bringing the blessed bourgeois long green!” he cries to the others, adding “Would that *Hickey or Death would come!*” (31; emphasis added). Over the course of the play’s four acts, Theodore Hickman will indeed become Death personified for the inhabitants of Hope’s saloon: to use Normand Berlin’s evocative phrase, “he [Hickey] will put them on ice, so to speak” (98). This is accomplished via his bizarre newfound sobriety and concomitant insistence on revealing to the characters the falsity of their individual pipe dreams.

Hickey’s very entrance in the play’s narrative is marked by a queer delay. In fact, the vast majority of Act I functions as a curtain raiser, building up interest in the character’s arrival. (As I explain in depth in Chapter II, Williams was to sexualize Brick by means of such a delayed entrance in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, to brilliant effect.) As Rocky Pioggi, the night bartender, narrates in one of the piece’s shorter sections of expository information, Hickey is a notorious drunk who in the past has arrived at Hope’s bar semiannually to treat the regulars to benders:

Yuh’s never tink all dese bums had a good bed upstairs to go to. Scared if dey hit the hay dey wouldn’t be here when Hickey showed up, and dey’d miss a coupla drinks. [...]

I wonder what’s happened to him [Hickey]. Yuh could set your watch by his periodicals before dis. Always got here a coupla days before Harry’s birthday party, and now he’s on’y got till tonight to make it. I hope he shows soon. (11-12)

Many of the characters voice similar feelings: Joe Mott, for example, wakes up and declares he was “dreamin’ Hickey come in de door, crackin’ one of dem drummer’s jokes, wavin’ a big bankroll” and that the regulars “was all goin’ to be drunk for two weeks” (15), while a full thirty-three pages later Harry Hope himself will “*worriedly*” ask his brother-in-law, “Say, Ed, what the

hell you think's happened to Hickey? I hope he'll turn up. Always got a million funny stories" (48). Finally, Cora's dialogue builds even greater suspense into the moments before Hickey's appearance; she explains that she and Chuck have witnessed him a mere block away. Her remarks, with their connection between the salesman and the Messiah, also underline the character's queerness:

CORA. He was standin' dere. We said, "Welcome to our city. De gang is expectin' yuh wid deir tongues hangin' out a yard long." [...] And he says, "Tell de gang I'll be along in a minute. I'm just finishin' figurin' out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace."

HOPE. (*Chuckles*) Bejees, he's thought up a new gag! [...]

CORA. Yeah, Harry, he was only kiddin'. But he was *funny*, too, somehow. He was *different, or somethin'*. (58; emphasis added)

The repeated references to an unseen person; the promise of a much-needed injection of hilarity and frivolity into the saloon's somber atmosphere; Cora's focalizing of Hickey as queerly "different, or something": all of these textual cues result in the character being symbolically overdetermined in readers and audience members' minds by his arrival on page 59 of the 196-page script.

Hickey's entrance, then, is by far the most significant moment in *Iceman* to that point, as O'Neill's stage directions clearly demonstrate. Once Hickey appears in the doorway with Rocky, all of the characters onstage instantly react to his presence: "[t]hey all stand up and greet him with affectionate acclaim, 'Hello, Hickey!' etc. Even HUGO comes out of his coma to raise his head and blink through his thick spectacles with a welcoming giggle" (59). Hickey responds to this acclaim in turn, since he "*immediately puts on an entrance act*" (59). Singing in a

disorienting tone that alternates between falsetto and bass, Hickey performs what the text describes as a “*burlesque*,” which is made “*really funny*” by way of “*his personality*” (59). Hickey’s burlesque is a perfect example of how theatricality augments the relationship between queerness and alcoholism: his movements, singing, and facial expressions seduce both the onstage and offstage audiences into reading him as a figure, and possibly even joining him in song. Furthermore, the format of burlesque itself relies upon the performative present: Hickey’s entrance act requires that we experience it in an intimate way, rather than merely read about it in the pages of O’Neill’s text. Unsurprisingly, the lyrics of this burlesque act are explicitly concerned with the consumption of alcoholic beverages: “It’s always fair weather, when good fellows get together! / And another *little drink* won’t do us any harm!” (59; emphasis added). His next action—the second one since the character has appeared onstage—is to order a round of alcohol for the gang: “Do your duty, Brother Rocky. Bring on the rat poison” (59-60).

In this line we recognize the paradoxical status of Hickey as a queer alcoholic figure. Though we witness him consume very little alcohol himself, he functions via his providing of alcohol as both saviour and tempter for the denizens of Hope’s saloon. By referring to Rocky with the title “Brother,” Hickey positions him as some sort of holy figure, such as a monk, Puritan, or preacher. However, his joke regarding the drinks that he instructs Rocky to pour for the gang—“rat poison”—evokes vermin, torture, and suicidal impulses. (In its connection to self-obliteration, alcohol dovetails perfectly with queerness: see, for example, Leo Bersani’s theorizing of sodomy as the rupturing of one’s own subjectivity, a point to which I return in Chapter II.) As Chabrowe has brilliantly argued, O’Neill uses Hickey in order to comment upon what he views as the cruel absurdity that structures human existence:

Reality is thus ultimately a choice between psychological and physical death. If

the pipe dream which is psychological death is shattered, there is no choice but physical death inasmuch as life is unlivable.

[...Hickey] attempts to make men accept themselves by revealing them to themselves as they really are and thus release them from their burdens of guilt. He fails because men are unable to accept a reality wherein the only hope of escaping the pain of life is to destroy themselves. (380-81)

Hickey is therefore set apart from the other characters, with the exception of Slade and Parritt: he appears to be privy to a mystic, revelatory understanding of existence, albeit one that will be revealed to be rather dangerous and misguided in the play's final moments.

O'Neill's fixation upon this "Catch-22" aspect of human existence—the tug of war between psychological death and physical death—will be revisited and reworked in turn by Williams, Albee, and Crowley. However, there are significant differences in the approaches to the human condition taken by the later playwrights, most notably Albee. The playwright himself has commented that *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* functions as a paired text with *Iceman*, one in which Albee depicts characters who take a markedly contrasting tactic to dealing with pipe dreams. Albee made this connection explicit in an interview with Matthew Roudané: "It's about going against the 'pipe-dreams.' After all, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* just says have your pipe-dreams if you want to but realize you are kidding yourself" (qtd. in "*Virginia Woolf*" *Companion* 46).²⁴ As Roudané shrewdly observes, while both playwrights recognize the power of alcohol (and, I would add, queerly alcoholic figures), it is Albee who emphasizes its true danger to the self:

Albee concedes that the ever-real presence of human fallibility, mutability, and the potency of self-annihilating myths lurk as destructive temptations. This explains,

²⁴ Note that Albee uses "pipe-dreams," the exact same term as O'Neill's play.

in part, the playwright's comment on O'Neill. *Virginia Woolf*, Albee has said for nearly a half a century, stands as a response to *The Iceman Cometh* (1940), a response acknowledging that the abrogation of the self, of the will to being, is but a drink or fiction away. *For O'Neill's heroes, illusions help. For Albee's, they destroy.* (46; emphasis added)

As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, Roudané's clever summarization of the two playwrights' positions with regard to alcohol is completely correct. In fact, though the titular Iceman has numerous associations throughout O'Neill's play (several of which I explicate shortly), I argue that one of the most important is the complex symbolism of ice in relation to alcoholic and queer behaviours. The gang at Hope's saloon are psychically frozen: drinking Hope's "rot-gut" (9) booze chills desire and allows them to remain in a state of suspended animation. Hope's saloon is a winter that keeps the characters warm, as in the first section of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, covering them in an icy forgetfulness.²⁵ The omnipresent ice the characters swirl in their shots of whiskey and gin or dump into wicker baskets for Hickey's quarts of champagne (87) functions as a metaphor, one which structures both *Iceman* and, to a certain degree, Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? In O'Neill's work, a certain amount of ice can coat and soothe, while for later playwrights, most notably Albee, it melts into despair without leaving a trace.

The play's very setting and dialogue generates and reinforces its refrigerated tone. Even Hugo Kalmar's refrain, spoken in the midst of a "*half-awake alcoholic daze*" (26) with Anarchist revolutionary trappings, takes on shivery, moribund connotations by referencing the "*cool beneath [Babylon's] willow trees!*" (26; emphasis added). Travis Bogard states of the characters in *Iceman* that "[t]he world in which they live exists beyond desire. Whiskey alone sustains

²⁵ See T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers" (5-7).

physical life. Hunger for food is not expressed, [...] and no movement of sexual desire disturbs the quiet” (55).

Nonetheless, Bogard’s assessment of the lack of sexual desire represented in *Iceman* is strikingly heteronormative. Crucially, Hope’s bar is largely a male homosocial environment: only three characters out of the nineteen are women, and the most important feminine figures in the play are offstage characters, and ones who are either dead or close to death themselves: Parritt’s incarcerated mother, Rosa, and Hickey’s murdered wife, Evelyn. And despite the onstage female characters being “*street walkers*,” the men do not react to Pearl, Margie, and Cora in explicitly flirtatious or sexual ways (ix). A rare action still from the original Broadway production—as opposed to the publicity shots taken for each character—emphasizes this fact: Cora and Chuck are depicted in a moment together in one dingy corner of the bar (see Fig. 5). As actor Joe Marr (Chuck) looks on, actress Marcella Markham (Cora) is raising her skirt above the garter line of her stocking on her left leg, a gesture which is startlingly incongruous with the still’s overall tone. This moment is marked in both the text’s stage directions (i.e. “*She hikes her skirt up and reaches inside the top of her stocking*”) and dialogue (i.e. “CHUCK. And don’t show off your legs to dese bums when yuh’re goin’ to be married, if yuh don’t want a sock in de puss!”) (140). However, the still’s atmosphere is much closer to chilly despair than erotic friction. Markham’s eyes are downcast and there is a look of disgust on her face; she seems completely alienated from the situation. Marr is staring at the actress’s face and reaching out his left arm, but even his motions seem duty-bound and non-sexual. The set door upstage right bears the words “THIS IS IT,” the capitalization reinforcing the arctic existential tone. Heterosexual relations in the play certainly seem in dire need of thawing out. Despite Hope’s complaints that the “dumb hookers” are turning the saloon into a “cathouse” (55), and that they need to “cut the



Fig. 5: Chuck and Cora in the Original Broadway Premiere.

loud talk,” talk, and not sexual activity, is all the characters do engage in (50).

And yet even as he observes this fact (i.e. “The three whores arouse no one to lust [...] Hope’s saloon is a world without women” [55]), Bogard cannot recognize in the play clear

signifiers of queerness. Andrew Warnsing argues in his essay “Homoeroticism Greek Style: Passion and Celibacy in O’Neill’s *Iceman*” that the most passionate relationships on display in *Iceman* are male same-sex ones: “for patrons in Harry Hope’s saloon, devotion, esteem, and reverence are intended primarily for the male to male relationship; simply put, some of these men would rather be among men than with a woman.” This assertion is unquestionably true: consider, for example, the homoerotic subtext found in Jimmy Tomorrow’s Act-IV speech from which I quoted in my introduction. Indeed, many of the most heated discussions in the play take place between male couples romanticized all but in name. Warnsing, for example, spends much of his essay detailing the deep emotional bonds between military men Piet Wetjoen and Cecil Lewis, as well as circus man Ed Mosher and former Police Lieutenant Pat McGloin (n.p.).

It is into this male homosocial environment that Hickey maniacally bursts as the play’s plot engine. (Berlin wryly notes that the play’s title could have been “‘Waiting for Hickey,’” both because of his delayed entrance and because he “causes whatever happens in the play to happen” [98].) In an ironic twist, Hickey, well known for travelling to Hope’s bar “twice a year regularly on a periodical drunk and blow[ing] in [*sic*] all his money” (19), has decided to stop drinking. This is a large part of the queer difference that Cora is able to apprehend when she first spots Hickey outside the bar. Her lover Chuck is able to put it succinctly and comically after Cora remarks that Hickey seemed different. “Sure,” he tells her, “he was sober, Baby. Dat’s what made him different. We ain’t never seen him when he wasn’t on a drunk, or had de willies gettin’ over it” (58). In other words, Hickey’s past state has consistently been one of intoxication (or withdrawal), and the characters have come to recognize him by it. His conduct at the saloon during the play’s action demonstrates a pronounced change in Hickey’s behaviour: though he encourages the denizens of Hope’s bar to continue imbibing, he refuses to partake in alcohol

himself. But even in his sobriety, an association with alcohol marks Hickey; the substance is related less to an action than to a figural identity. O'Neill's text establishes this connection through repeated references to the "many good times" (62) Hickey has experienced under the influence with the gang in the past.

The barflies unconsciously grasp Hickey's status as an alcoholic, so much so that his revelation that he has given up the bottle causes genuine shock and awe:

HICKEY. (*Heartily*) Drink hearty, boys and girls! (*They all drink, but Hickey drinks only his chaser.*)

HOPE. Bejees, is that a new stunt, drinking your chaser first?

HICKEY. No, I forgot to tell Rocky—You'll have to excuse me, boys and girls, but I'm off the stuff. For keeps. (*They all stare at him in amazed incredulity.*)

(61; emphasis added)

This is the first of only two instances in the play in which Hickey consumes fluid in view of the other characters (and, of course, the audience members), and it is only in the second moment that Hickey actually drinks an alcoholic beverage. The "chaser" Hickey imbibes here is very likely water; presumably Hope's rotgut whiskey is so biting that the barflies use the shots in order to "chase" the spirit down their throats and cleanse their mouths of its bitter taste. Hickey's following lines make clear his newfound sobriety: "Cora was right, Harry. I have changed. I mean, about booze. I don't need it any more" (61).

Hickey breaks his sobriety in front of the group, he explains, in order to prove that he is unafraid alcohol will make him loose-lipped, as Larry has speculated: "(*He catches LARRY's eyes on the glass in his hand*) Yes, Larry, I'm going to drink with you this time. To prove I'm not teetotal because I'm afraid booze would make me spill my secrets, as you think" (109).

Hickey's drinking takes place as he encourages the gang to raise their glasses to Hope in a seemingly heartfelt toast:

HICKEY. Here's wishing you all the luck there is, Harry, and long life and happiness! Come on, everybody! To Harry! Bottoms up!

(They have all caught his sincerity with eager relief. They raise their schooners with an enthusiastic chorus of "Here's how, Harry!" "Here's luck, Harry!" etc., and gulp half the wine down, HICKEY leading them in this.) [...]

And I mean it when I say I hope today will be the biggest day in your life, and in the lives of everyone here, the beginning of a new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreams can ever nag at you again. Here's to that, Harry!

(He drains the remainder of his drink, but this time he drinks alone.) (110)

The toast sequence reinforces two important points for the audience: it forms a strong linkage between Hickey, alcohol, and the frosty peace of death, and it separates the character from the other denizens of the bar by having him drink alone. The text therefore constructs Hickey as a queer character, imbued with a form of dangerous knowledge the other characters clearly lack: as he expounds to the gang later, in Act IV, "This peace is real! [...] I know! [...] You see *the difference* in me!" (113; emphasis added).

Alcoholic behaviour, then, is also paradoxically coded within *Iceman*: it represents both norm and perversion. The traditional drinking at Hope's bar in order to escape the pain and suffering of life normalizes it, while the connection with Hickey makes it seem eerily (and queerly) sinister. However, as the action of the play progresses and Hickey begins to mercilessly shatter the barflies' illusions of themselves, they notice that the soothing power of alcohol begins

to ebb away. Hickey's revelation to them of their inner selves saps liquor's freezing, and therefore stabilizing, qualities. Before the final act has even started, Harry "*tosses down his drink with a lifeless, automatic movement*" and complains "Bejees, what did you do to the booze, Hickey? There's no damned life left in it" (154). A mere seven pages later Rocky realizes that booze "don't do no good" and that he "can't get drunk right" (161); two pages after this confession Parritt will then observe that Larry "kept himself locked in his room until a while ago, along with a bottle of booze, but he couldn't make it work! He couldn't even get drunk!" (163). During Act II Parritt even goes so far as to suggest something infernal is responsible for Hickey's transformation and seemingly alchemical powers: "I'm scared of him, honest. There's something not human behind his damned grinning and kidding" (97).

It is far from coincidence that the text designates Parritt to voice this insight into Hickey's odd appearance and behaviour. The two characters are paired throughout *Iceman*. To begin with, both characters have extremely dysfunctional relations with women: they have personally betrayed Rosa Parritt and Evelyn Hickman, respectively, and their intertwined confessions of these acts form the play's climax (173-83). Both also use the same unfortunate epithet, "bitch," in order to describe the absent women in their lives (55; 183). In a startling moment of twisted prophetic knowledge, Hickey is able to diagnose "what's behind" Parritt's alcoholic ennui: "[I]t's a woman," he tells Larry. "I recognize the *symptoms*" (91; emphasis added). Of course Hickey's divination will ironically prove to be correct: in a plot point practically lifted from Strindberg, Freud, or even Hitchcock's *Psycho*, there is an unspoken, yet pronounced, incestuous psychosexual dynamic between Parritt and his unseen mother. Having "hardly spoken to" Parritt, Hickey is still able to recognize their commonalities: "[T]here's something familiar about him," he opines, "something between us" (90). The text then connects

the queer “feeling” Hickey has about Parritt to the characters’ shared dysfunctional relation with women by immediately juxtaposing these lines against Hickey’s next question to Larry, “For instance, I don’t imagine he’s married, is he?” (90)

In point of fact, right from the moment of their first meeting, Hickey voices an uncanny connection between Parritt and himself:

HICKEY. (*Regards him with surprise at first, then with a puzzled interest*) Hello.

A stranger in our midst. I didn’t notice you before, Brother.

PARRITT. (*Embarrassed, his eyes shifting away*) My name’s Parritt. I’m an old friend of Larry’s. (*His eyes come back to Hickey to find him still sizing him up—defensively*) Well? What are you staring at?

HICKEY. (*Continuing to stare—puzzledly*) [...] Haven’t we met before some place?

PARRITT. (*Reassured*) No. First time I’ve ever been East.

HICKEY. No, you’re right. [...] But still I know damned well I recognized something about you. We’re *members of the same lodge—in some way*.

(65-6; emphasis added)

Terms like “stranger” and “members of the same lodge” ensure that there are strong, queer subtextual cues during this encounter between the two men. This queer connection upon their first meeting is made explicit by another character in the play, Larry, who observes at the start of Act II that Hickey’s “like that damned kid” and that “[i]t’s strange the queer way he [Hickey] seemed to recognize him” (84). While on one level Hickey and Parritt’s initial dialogue signals menace and aggression in an almost Pinteresque fashion, on another level the moment becomes reminiscent of a failed pick-up in a bar—Hickey, after all, is “*sizing him up*.”

And given Hickey's queerness, perhaps not without reason: O'Neill's description of Parritt stresses his attractiveness, stating he is "*eighteen, tall and broad-shouldered*" and that "[h]is face is goodlooking, with blond curly hair and large regular features"(16). He is also dressed in new clothes, "*sporty in style*"(16), which clearly sets him apart from the group of down-and-outs in Harry's saloon. In casting the role is often given to an attractive rising star, typically fairly boyish. For example, the 2012 production of the play at Chicago's Goodman Theatre featured the youthful Patrick Andrews in the role (see Fig. 6). Paul Crabtree, who originated the role in the Broadway premiere, had similarly delicate facial features and was much younger in appearance than his co-stars (see Fig. 7). And in the critically and commercially successful Almeida Theatre production directed by Howard Davies, which subsequently transferred to the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on Broadway, a thinly mustached Robert Sean Leonard played the role. Leonard, though noticeably older at the time of the Davies production than most performers in the role, has had a long history of playing young lover or "heartthrob" parts in films such as *Swing Kids*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Last Days of Disco*.

Of all of Leonard's similar film roles from his early career, however, none has been more famous than that of Neil Perry in *Dead Poets Society*. During the course of the movie's narrative, Perry, a quiet, sensitive student, is encouraged by his uniquely inspiring English teacher (memorably played by Robin Williams) to audition for the role of Puck in his school's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Upon learning about the performance, Perry's domineering father is furious and disapproving, and punishes him by declaring that he will be sent to military school, and then onto Harvard University, in order to prepare him for a career in medicine. In despair, Perry commits suicide. Leonard's best-known character was therefore already coded as queer (e.g. his interest in theatre and the twink-like role of Puck, his subtle



Fig. 6: Patrick Andrews in Rehearsal for Director Robert Falls's Production at Chicago's Goodman Theatre.

effeminacy, his torment over his “difference,” etc.) and, importantly, suicidal, just as Parritt will become over the course of the play. This had large ramifications for both the Davies production of *Iceman* as well as the Plymouth Theatre production of *Journey*.

The Davies production of *Iceman*, headlined by actor Kevin Spacey, who during the last decade and a half has become one of the most important interpreters of O’Neill’s work, was an enormous success. It also emphasized—often in ways unarticulated by the creative team—the subtext of Hickey’s status as a queer addict figure and the eroticized relationship between Hickey and Parritt. To begin with, for years Spacey has dodged rumours about his sexuality: the actor is



Fig. 7: Actor Paul Crabtree as Don Parritt in the Broadway Premiere.

unmarried and has frequently refused to discuss the subject. For like Hickey, Spacey would appear to have a secret. In fact, in 1997, two full years before he would star in *Iceman*, *Esquire* magazine published a profile titled “Kevin Spacey Has a Secret,” in which writer Tom Junod openly ruminated on the actor’s orientation (see Fig. 8). Spacey swiftly denounced the magazine for allowing what he claimed were Junod’s imaginings to be treated “as fact,” and released the following statement via his publicist, Staci Wolfe Newman, announcing: “[w]hile Mr. Spacey



Fig. 8: A Reproduction of Junod's Controversial Cover Story for *Esquire*.

respects many diverse life styles [*sic*, ...] he has always maintained a separation between his professional and personal life, and will continue to do so” (Pogrebin). Spacey has shown no signs of reversing his position. As recently as this past April, the actor fiercely declined to answer questions regarding his sexuality during an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter*, stating “Let’s let people live their lives and do it the way they want to do it. All the chips will fall in the end, and we’ll all be judged by a much higher power than *Entertainment Weekly*” (Rose).

Spacey’s real-life performances have only served to increase the media frenzy surrounding the issue. Close to 4:00AM on the morning of 18 April 2004, the actor stumbled into

the Kennington Police Station in South London, with blood pouring from a wound in his head (Bracchi). Though he initially claimed to have been “brutally mugged” (Iggulden) while walking his dog in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, the actor eventually changed his story. The following day, Spacey told the BBC’s *Today* program that he tripped and hit his head as he tried to pursue a youth who had stolen his cell phone, stating “I am very well and I am also glad to set the record straight here and also to apologise [...] What actually happened is, I fell for a con” (qtd. in Bracchi). Pundits and writers, particularly those in LGBT-related media outlets, were quick to point out that Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park is a notorious gay cruising location, and that the actor’s explanation of his presence there so early in the morning (i.e. that his “doggy had to go!” [Iggulden]) seemed far-fetched, if not downright bizarre.

Spacey’s behaviour since the alleged mugging incident has only served to fan the flames. In 2008 the actor appeared at a wild party in Croatia and apparently pulled down a man’s pants and groped his bare buttocks (see Fig. 9). The story was broken by the U.K.’s *Sun* newspaper, and ran with an accompanying photo depicting an ogling Spacey directly above the partygoer’s bottom, his glassy-eyed facial expression and slumped over body language showing tell-tale signs of inebriation (Nixon). Gossip websites had a field day.²⁶ Adding fuel to the fire was Spacey’s well-documented friendship and working relationship with director Bryan Singer, who himself had recently faced allegations of sexual abuse with underage men (Masters and Handel). In terms of addiction, there is no evidence to suggest that Spacey has ever suffered from alcoholism. Nonetheless, the actor did acknowledge recreational drug use in an interview with *Maxim Fashion* in 2001, claiming “the last time [he] did cocaine was a very long time ago, in 1986” and that he has “[n]ever touched it since” (Welch). He even spoke about how he felt he

²⁶ *Gawker*, for instance, cheekily punned on the actor’s Oscar-winning success for *American Beauty*, parodying one of the film’s best-known catchphrases with the title “Sometimes There’s So Much Booty in the World, It Feels Like Kevin Spacey Can’t Take It” (Buchanan).



Fig. 9: Papparazzi Photos of Spacey from Croatia.

had avoided various addictions in his life, including alcohol, through watching some of his friends struggle:

Of course, a couple of friends dying is the only lesson you need about drugs. And I feel lucky because I'm the type of personality that if I had gone down that road, down the *road of drinking*, I'd be sitting on a barstool right now saying 'It should have been me, it should have been me.' *But I stopped*. I literally recognized that if I continued to experiment in that fashion I'd be done. (Welch; emphasis added)

The taped performance from 15 July 1999 of the Davies production, held at the Theatre on Film Archive at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, however, suggests otherwise.

Though much of Spacey's manic energy onstage could be a result of acting decisions for his performance of the character Hickey, he was simply so progressively frantic during the course of

the play that this explanation seems unlikely: his voice became hysterical, his gestures wild, and his face twisted and twitching. During one sequence [at run-time 27:55 of Reel II of the taped production]²⁷ he perspired so much that he soaked through his shirt. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times*, one of the country's foremost theatre reviewers, while ultimately praising Spacey in the role, still referenced a feeling of narcotic-induced frenzy with his question, "Has any Hickey ever spoken quite this fast, like a carnival barker *on speed*?" ("Bottoms Up"; emphasis added) In this sense, the subject of whether or not Spacey actually used alcohol or other drugs during the run of *Iceman* quickly becomes inconsequential: his recorded performance already registers multiple signifiers of an altered state.

The result of all of this was that public perception of Spacey as a man who was, in effect, "keeping a secret" served to underscore *Iceman*'s subtext of queerness and addiction. Spacey's performance invited questions about his private life via his affected rendition of Hickey, a resolutely teetotaler character, and this ambiguity made manifest dynamics that are already latent in O'Neill's play. The ghosting of Spacey by his public persona is not merely about Spacey as an individual, but rather points to the larger issue of queer coding in theatre. In contrast, director Robert Falls, long considered one of the leading interpreters of O'Neill's work, toured his production of *Iceman* for Chicago's Goodman Theatre to the BAM Harvey Theatre in New York City for an exceptionally successful run. Actor Nathan Lane played the role of Hickey; ironically, the out actor's performance was rooted much more in a "butch" reading of the character than the closeted Spacey's iteration for the Davies production. Lane's playing involved much more of a build towards the character's lengthy concluding monologue about his murder of Evelyn; his Hickey had none of the spastic movements or high-pitched wails found in Spacey's

²⁷ All run-times taken from the five reels are approximate, as the taped footage held at the Theatre on Film Archive in the Billy Rose Collection is too fragile to pause for accurate readings.

performance. And crucially, Lane's Hickey was not as queerly sober as that of Spacey: the audience was shown the character continually drinking throughout the play's climactic fourth act. While Falls and Lane's interpretation was an inspired take on a notoriously difficult role, it ultimately worked against this aspect of O'Neill's text. Falls did maintain the queer "separateness" of Hickey in other ways, however. Lane was the only character onstage costumed in brilliant white, and an otherworldly glow followed him throughout the production—so much so that the stage visibly darkened upon his final exit.

In a manner opposite that of Lane, Spacey's casting in the Davies production was particularly resonant, and even more so when he was placed onstage alongside Robert Sean Leonard. Drawing upon this resonance in his review of the Davies production, Brantley, consciously or not, echoed the wording of Junod's 1997 *Esquire* piece; in a piece slyly titled "Bottoms Up," he notes "[a]s a movie actor in films like 'The Usual Suspects' and 'L.A. Confidential,' Spacey has made a specialty of intricately layered characters with a secret at their center." And while on the whole he was complimentary towards Leonard's talents as a performer, he observed that his casting was problematic in terms of star qualities and appearance: "As Don Parritt, the son of an anarchist mother who carries his own corrosive secret, Robert Sean Leonard, a fine and sensitive young actor, is perhaps too much the leading man to present the requisite irritating mixture of defensiveness and eagerness to please" ("Bottoms Up").

Nonetheless, while there was a clear intensity between the two actors in the Davies production that highlighted the queer relation between Hickey and Parritt easily located within the play, there were clues that the creative team had—at least on some level—worked to minimize this aspect of the text. For instance, Larry explains the reason for Parritt's appearance

at Hope's bar in this manner: "You've read in the papers about that bombing on the Coast when several people got killed? Well, the one woman they pinched, Rosa Parritt, is his mother. [...] She'll get life, I think. I'm telling you this so you'll know why if Don acts a bit *queer*, and not jump on him" (16; emphasis added). However, in the taped production, the actor playing Larry, Tim Pigott-Smith, spoke the above lines but omitted the sentence in which the term "queer" appears. This was no accident: the rehearsal script for the Davies production, which is housed in the Billy Rose Theatre Archive in the New York Library for the Performing Arts, proves that Pigott-Smith did not merely forget this line: it has clearly been omitted. (See Fig. 10 for an image of this section from the prompt script.) Davies sought to minimize the use of the term in

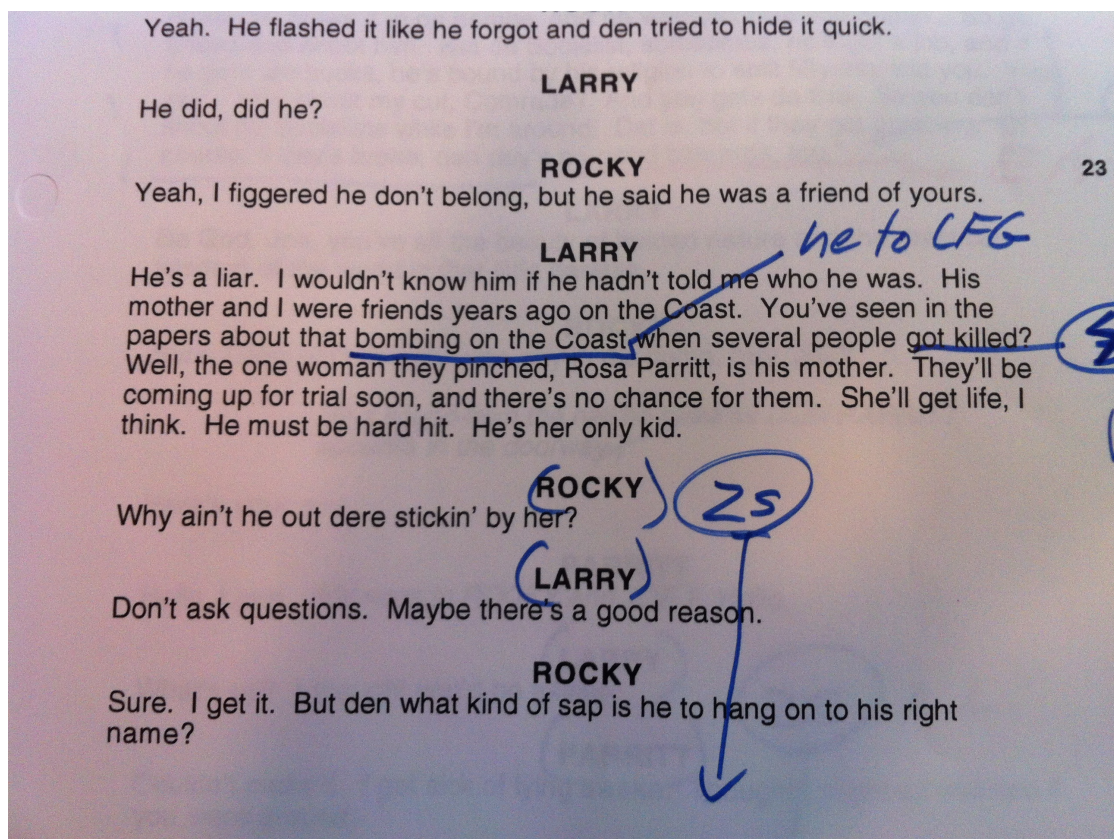


Fig. 10: The Rehearsal Script from Director Howard Davies's Production.

Note the absence of the line containing the word "queer."

connection with the character of Parritt because its use as a label for the character threatened to spread to the character of Hickey—and to Spacey himself. Additionally, when Leonard first spoke of “going around with tarts” (25) he seemed embarrassed and uncomfortable, glancing down at the floor, and later shouting the line “To hell with them! I never want to see a whore again!” (29) with particular vitriol. Following his malicious and offensive declaration, “I hate every bitch that ever lived!” (55), upon which Leonard again placed an emphasis, the actresses visibly recoiled from him. Rather than reading as troubled and queer (e.g. speaking his lines about the prostitutes “*confusedly*” [29] or “*guiltily*” [55]), Leonard’s Parritt often appeared to be viciously misogynistic, a dangerous sexual sadist.

A similar “straight-washing” occurred with the character of Hickey. Spacey’s actions with the prostitutes were quite deliberate, involved, and rakish: he smiled and flirted with them, and slapped them on their behinds during his most energetic moments [e.g. 23:23, Reel II]. At the close of Act I, for example, as Hickey was dozing off, Margie and Pearl (Catherine Kellner and Dina Spybey) kissed him slyly on the cheeks. In the original text, however, Hickey’s relation to the prostitutes, and by extension, prostitution in general, is much more ambiguous. Though he stresses the sexual nature of their profession—for instance, in one darkly comic moment he blithely hails them as “the best little scouts in the world” and comments that he purchased the quarts of champagne for Hope’s party after he thought to himself “I’ll bet this is what will please those whores more than anything” (86)—there is no mention in the script of the character openly flirting with the women. If anything, Hickey himself carries the taint of whoredom: known as “the Great Salesman” (31), who can “size up guys, and turn ’em inside out” (89), he reveals in Act IV that it was Mollie Arlington, “the madame of the cathouse,” who bankrolled his initial “railroad fare” (175). Even his admission that he caught a sexually

transmitted infection from a prostitute carries a queer connotation, as he tells the gang that he “picked up a nail from some tart in Altoona” (178). This statement inverts the traditional positioning of heterosexual intercourse, as Hickey is “nail[ed]” by the prostitute. And though audience members, along with the other characters, likely assume the prostitute was a woman, Hickey’s “lying and stalling” to his wife Evelyn only underscores the queer male intimacy of the story’s subtext: he tells her that he came down with the STI because “traveling men get things from drinking cups on trains” (178).

In the Davies production, Spacey also frequently used a mocking, affected, and effeminate tone, complete with a lisp and a raised vocal register, in order to mark crucial lines, such as telling Larry, “We’ve always been good pals, haven’t we? I’ve always liked you a lot” (66) [33:45, Reel II] or reminiscing about his marriage during his final monologue: “So as soon as I got enough saved to start us off, I sent for her and we got married” (177). Davies’s direction also ensured that the tension between Hickey and Parritt was figured in a more aggressive way. During the pair’s confrontation in Act IV, as he was speaking the lines “I wish you’d get rid of that bastard, Larry. I can’t have him pretending there’s something in common between him and me” (170), Spacey actually raised his fist and reached out his other hand in order to grasp Leonard’s shirt. In these way the production team attempted to defuse the erotically charged relation between the two characters by repeatedly insisting upon their shared status as heterosexuals.

But though Parritt and Hickey are both queer alcoholic figures, O’Neill takes pains to differentiate the characters’ representations. Hickey, as we have learned, makes things happen: his newly acquired second sight is what drives the play’s action forward. To return to the ice metaphor I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Hickey’s fiery revelations about the

characters melt away their self-delusions. This is often shown through eerie symbols of lethal fluidity that are directly connected to Theodore Hickman. For example, once Hope has experienced his own anagnorisis that he is destined never to take his walk around the ward, he is a pathetic and pitiable sight:

HOPE. (*In the voice of one reiterating mechanically a hopeless complaint*) When
are you going to do something about this booze, Hickey? Bejees, we all know
you did something to take the life out of it. It's like drinking dishwater! We
can't pass out! And you promised us peace.

(*His group all join in in a dull, complaining chorus, "We can't pass out! You
promised us peace!"*) (167)

Paradoxically, Hickey's transformation into the Iceman results in the dissolution of the barflies' self-denials. "Oh, I know it knocks you *cold*. But only for a minute," Hickey warns Hope of the truth about himself at the end of Act III, his wordplay once again relying upon freezing imagery (155; emphasis added). In practice, forcing his friends to give up their life-lies boils away their very understanding of themselves. As the drunks' experiences demonstrate over the course of the play, Hickey's earlier description of the peace that finds you "once you're cured" with a dose of his "bitter medicine" (89) is actually much more accurate: "You can let go of yourself at last," he sighs at them, "Let yourself sink down to the bottom of the sea"²⁸ [...]—Drink up, everybody—on me" (67). His oceanic metaphor points to a claim that I expand upon in my next chapter on the work of Williams: this self-shattering of letting go of one's self has everything to do with a fluid queerness. In fact, the title itself registers this fluidity, by slyly blending biblical speech with the crudely sexual meaning of "to ejaculate" in the archaic form of the verb "to come."

²⁸ An image O'Neill would repeat in *Journey*: see Edmund's comment "It was like walking on the bottom of the sea" after his trip along the road near the beach (319).

Dudley Nichols, a fellow writer and friend of O'Neill's, has commented that

[O'Neill] told me at the time he was writing the play that he meant a combination of the poetic and the biblical "Death cometh"—that is, cometh to all living things—and the old bawdy story, a typical Hickey story, of the man who calls upstairs, "Has the Iceman come yet?" and his wife calls back, "No, but he's breathin' hard." [...] It is a strange and poetic intermingling of the exalted and the vulgar, that title. (qtd. in Berlin 98-99)

Moreover, the vulgar connotation of the verb in the title only serves to highlight Hickey's queerness even further: he metaphorically "comes" for a group of men through the revelation of his dark sexual secret.

While Hickey's queer power brings such dissipating destruction to the egos of the inhabitants of Hope's saloon, in contrast Parritt remains frozen by his indecision. Tortured by his betrayal of Rosa, his substitute sexual object, he yearns for the release of death but is unable to face himself. After Hickey is dragged away by the police, he tells his confidant and paternal replacement, Larry, "He's lucky. He's through, now. It's all decided for him. I wish it was decided for me. I've never been any good at deciding things" (187). His lack of decision-making skills is undeniable: Hickey even indirectly brings about Parritt's suicide via Larry's comments. Hickey's response to Parritt's insistence that Larry has "got to help" him in Act III ominously foreshadow both Larry's own adoption of the salesman's frightening philosophy as well as the young man's death: "Yes, Larry, you've got to settle with him. I'm leaving you entirely in his hands" (148).

However, with the exception of Larry and Parritt's "conver[sions]" (195), Hickey's destabilizing power ultimately proves fleeting. The other denizens of the saloon return to their

life-lies in the final lines of the play, scrambling for the cool of Hugo's Babylonian willow trees; as Berlin notes, "[t]hey end as they began—O'Neill ever fond of the circle—frozen to their conditions and their seats, whiskey-soaked, talking of tomorrow" (97). (The circular structure of the piece, with the first three acts ending on the loaded word "happy," means that the play's dramaturgy recreates its thematic focus on addictive cycles.) And Hickey's queer clairvoyance, which allows him to reveal the other characters' true selves to themselves, ironically does not even extend to himself: he leaves the bar clinging to his own delusion "*with a strange mad earnestness*," utterly convinced that he murdered Evelyn not because he unconsciously hated her, but because he was "a raving rotten lunatic" at the time (185; 186). Once Hickey is escorted away by Moran and Lieb, the other characters sink back into the chilly comfort of Hope's rotgut, which, as the proprietor explains, mysteriously regains its protective force:

HOPE. (*Jubilantly*) Bejees, fellers, I'm feeling the old kick, or I'm a liar! It's putting life back in me! Bejees, if all I've lapped up begins to hit me, I'll be paralyzed before I know it! It was Hickey kept it from— Bejees, I know that sounds crazy, but he was crazy, and he'd got all of us as bughouse as he was. Bejees, it does queer things to you, having to listen day and night to a lunatic's pipe dreams [...] It's dangerous, too. (189)

In his dialogue Hope unknowingly presents the now-familiar paradoxical perspective on alcohol in that he assigns it dual, contradictory functions: it both "put[s] life back" into you but can also "paralyze" you. His lines also emphasize O'Neill's thesis for the play—that a certain lack of self-knowledge is necessary, and that the queer figures that threaten this ignorance are very dangerous indeed. In a fascinating twist, he was to return to explore new aspects of the figure in his complex, final masterwork.

II. “Drink hearty, lad”: *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*

In his famous dedication to his wife, Carlotta, O’Neill describes *Long Day’s Journey into Night* as “play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood” (7). Completed when the playwright was sixty-three and only published and performed after his death, *Journey* is perhaps the paradigmatic O’Neillian text: scathingly realist, powerfully autobiographical, and, clocking in at an average of just under four hours of stage time, extremely lengthy. An exploration of the dysfunctional and painful family dynamic that exists in the Tyrone household, the text is an attempt, as he so memorably stated, to depict “all four haunted Tyrones” with “deep pity and understanding and forgiveness” (7). With an honesty and directness at once brutal and empathetic, the play makes clear that the specters haunting the Tyrones are those of addiction.

O’Neill wrote *Journey* only a year and half after its predecessor, and there are many similarities between the two texts. Nevertheless, while with *Iceman*’s Hickey and Parritt the playwright presents queer alcoholic characters who seem to step onto the stage fully formed, with *Journey* the figure gets somewhat foggier. The murkiness of the figure is hardly due to O’Neill abandoning addiction as a previously explored topic, however; despite lacking *Iceman*’s squalid barroom atmosphere, it can often seem that *Journey* as a text is focused upon metaphors of addiction to an even greater degree than the earlier play. This saturation of metaphor means addiction imagery is spread over almost every aspect of the text. Indeed, in *Journey* addiction is a true family affair: like *Iceman*, each and every main character is clearly addicted to a specific substance (morphine for Mary Tyrone, alcohol for all three male Tyrones), but here the audience gets to witness a symbolic generational spreading of addictive patterns. And, as in the earlier produced work, we see the connotations of alcoholic behaviour swing between two conflicting

poles: it is both creative and destructive; true and false; simultaneously healthy and robust and sick and damaged. *Journey* carries the embryonic form of the queer alcoholic figure, which will grow to maturity in the work of later authors: in it the images begin to constellate and coalesce.

Before I proceed further in my analysis, however, I wish to provide an important caveat. Though in this dissertation as a whole I examine addiction in the specific form of the queer alcoholic, for the remainder of this chapter I broaden my scope to include Mary as a queer addict figure. While typically it is simplistic to equate one addictive substance with another, there are four reasons for this inclusion. Firstly, as Michael Manheim has pointed out in his essay “The Stature of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*,” the text itself subtly but concretely parallels Mary’s drug dependency with the alcohol dependency of all three men (214). Jamie’s wretched comments in his drunken stupor of Act IV demonstrate the similitude: “I’d begun to hope,” he sobs, “if she’d beaten the game, I could, too” (162). Secondly, since each of the play’s main characters struggles with addiction, and as the addictive cycle is such a weighty subject within *Journey*, it would be illogical to only explicate the imagery linked with the male characters. Thirdly, as I further elucidate shortly, the text highlights the link between Mary and her son Edmund, underscoring the queerness attached to both characters’ “conditions” and correlating it to their respective addictions. And fourthly, O’Neill includes the equation of alcoholism and morphine addiction not only in *Journey*, but in *Iceman* as well. Though no character is presented as a dope fiend in *Iceman*, the play’s “Foolosopher” Larry makes the comparison (9), calling both substances “an answer” to the pain of human existence, and even quoting a couplet from Heine’s poem on morphine: ““Lo, sleep is good; better is death; in sooth, / The best of all were never to be born”” (25).

Richard B. Sewall notes in the revised edition to his collection *The Vision of Tragedy* that

Journey is structured via a “pattern of encounters” that proceed through moments of “blame, counterblame, [and then] uneasy truce” (164). But by examining the family members’ dialogue and interactions in another way, we can deduce that their interactions also reflect the addictive cycle itself. The characters repeat wild vacillations: they circle through the psychological stages of addiction, often within a single conversation. Consider, for instance, Mary and Tyrone’s pitiful exchange at the conclusion of the first scene of Act II:

MARY. Is my hair coming down? [...] I thought I’d better lie down this morning.

I drowsed off and had a nice refreshing nap. But I’m sure I fixed my hair again when I woke up. (*Forcing a laugh.*) Although, as usual, I couldn’t find my glasses. (*Sharply.*) Please stop staring! One would think you were accusing me— (*Then pleadingly.*) James! You don’t understand!

TYRONE. (*With dull anger.*) I understand that I’ve been a God-damned fool to believe in you! (*He walks away from her to pour himself a big drink.*)

MARY. (*Her face again sets in stubborn defiance.*) I don’t know what you mean by “believing in me.” All I’ve felt was distrust and spying and suspicion. (*Then accusingly.*) Why are you having another drink? You never have more than one before lunch. (*Bitterly.*) I know what to expect. You will be drunk tonight. Well, it won’t be the first time, will it—or the thousandth? (*Again she bursts out pleadingly.*) Oh, James, please! You don’t understand! I’m so worried about Edmund! I’m so afraid he—

TYRONE. I don’t want to listen to your excuses, Mary.

MARY. (*Strickenly.*) Excuses? You mean—? Oh, you can’t believe that of me! You mustn’t believe that, James! (*Then slipping away into her strange*

detachment—quite casually.) Shall we not go into lunch, dear? I don't want anything but I know you're hungry. (68-9)

Each aspect of the addictive cycle is present in this brief, yet meaningful, confrontation: the emotional triggers (i.e. Mary fears about Edmund's illness and dealing with the men folk's suspicions; Tyrone's own worries about Mary relapsing); the cravings (i.e. Tyrone pouring a second drink of whiskey); the rituals (i.e. Mary's pretense of looking for her glasses and obsession with fixing her hair); the use (i.e. Mary's lies to cover her absence for the morphine shots; Tyrone's explicit drinking); and the guilt (i.e. Mary's "*pleading*" and "*stricke[n]*" tones). In fact, O'Neill's text so successfully recreates the effects of addiction upon individuals and familial structures that one acclaimed production, that of director Joe Dowling for the Guthrie Theater in 2013, was used as part of a continuing medical educational program for practicing health professionals (Perry). When asked how accurately the play depicts the horrors of addiction, Mayo Clinic psychiatrist Dr. Timothy Lineberry responded, "It's really remarkable. It speaks to issues that we're struggling with now, like opioid dependence and the prescription opioid epidemic, as well as the issues with alcohol dependence. It's probably even more relevant today than it was in the 1950s" (Perry).

Furthermore, the play's emphasis on the medical model for the diagnosis and treatment of addiction (which, I argue, can be extended to so-called sex perversions) makes its contemporary relevance even stronger. In this text we find the beginnings of the queer addict/alcoholic figure that will be studied, labeled, and institutionalized. Mary, for example, comments upon her great hatred and fear of doctors in one of the play's pivotal scenes:

MARY. (*More excitedly.*) [...] But please don't try to tell me! I know all about Doctor Hardy. Heaven knows I ought to after all these years. He's an ignorant

fool! There should be a law to keep men like him from practicing. He hasn't the slightest idea— When you're in agony and half insane, he sits and holds your hand and delivers sermons on will power!

(Her face is drawn in an expression of intense suffering by the memory. For the moment, she loses all caution. With bitter hatred.)

He deliberately humiliates you! He makes you beg and plead! He treats you like a criminal! He understands nothing! And yet it was exactly the same type of cheap quack who first gave you the medicine—and you never knew what it was until too late! *(Passionately.)* I hate doctors! They'll do anything—anything to keep you coming to them. They'll sell their souls! What's worse, they'll sell yours, and you never know it till one day you find yourself in hell! (74)

I quote at length from this section of the play because Mary's screed against doctors—famously portrayed by a deranged, plate-smashing Katharine Hepburn in Sidney Lumet's 1962 film adaptation (Fig. 11)—demonstrates yet another of the paradoxes modern American theatre presents when confronting the issue of treatment for the queer addict: the medical establishment is responsible for treating and “curing” individuals of the interlaced maladies of addiction (typically alcoholism) and queerness, but its treatments are frequently revealed to be inhumane, warping, and more often than not, startlingly ineffective. In her breathless speech (the section quoted above contains eleven exclamation marks), Mary asserts that the medical establishment actually *caused* her addiction: a hotel doctor first gave her morphine in order to dull the pain after the difficult birth of Edmund. Her dialogue then elides the difference between the substance (the morphine) and the purveyor (the hotel doctor); she suggests that by doing “anything” in



Fig. 11: Katharine Hepburn as Mary Tyrone in Sidney Lumet's Screen Adaptation of *Journey*.

order to keep addicts returning to them, doctors themselves create addictive behaviours in their patients. Jamie voices a related concern in Act IV, confiding to Edmund, “Doctors lot of fakers. Told me years ago to cut out booze or I’d soon be dead—and here I am. They’re all con men. Anything to grab your dough” (164).

While Tyrone does not follow Mary and Jamie’s lead in squarely placing the blame on doctors, he, too, expresses serious doubts about the efficacy of the medical establishment’s treatments.²⁹ In Act IV, when Edmund confronts his father about Mary’s drug dependence, Tyrone conveys a deep cynicism about the very notion of curing an addict:

²⁹ Lineberry has observed that the attitudes towards addiction treatment the play puts forward are almost uncannily historically accurate:

It’s interesting because the play is set in the early 1900s, before World War I. There really weren’t options related to effective treatments then. In fact, there was a stigma associated with treatment. Nor was there an understanding of the biological framework and the other issues associated with substance abuse and addiction. (Perry)

EDMUND. I'll bet you told her all she had to do was use a little will power!

That's what you still believe in your heart, in spite of what doctors, who really know something about it, have told you!

TYRONE. You lie again! [...] I thought she'd never got over her sickness, that's all. Why didn't I send her to a cure, you say? (*Bitterly.*) Haven't I? I've spent thousands upon thousands in cures! A waste. What good have they done her? She always started again. (141)

The dubious success rate of the various "cures" the medical establishment has put forward for dealing with addiction and sex perversions will be emphasized in many later works, from the terrifying doctor and matron nurse team of *A Streetcar Named Desire*'s conclusion or the jauntily useless Doc Baugh of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, to the twisted theories of the Neo-Freudian analysts in *The Boys in the Band*.

Nevertheless, the text is at a loss for alternative coping mechanisms. As a result of the parallel medicalizations of addiction and homosexuality that were taking place in the United States during the period in which O'Neill wrote, the disease model is the only option with which his work is able to grapple. And ironically, it is not medical therapies but rather their alcoholic and dope-fueled confessions that allow the characters to reach some form of connection or understanding. Sewall argues that

[t]he progress, or "journey," of the play is toward a deeper understanding of each other's nature on the part of the four Tyrones. [...] What is new is the degree of understanding each of them achieves. The climax comes in the alcoholic unburdenings of the men and in Mary's dope-induced finale at the end.

[...] It is as if the truth has had to wait until every other route

(and they themselves) has been exhausted. [...] This is the true within-ness of the play, the true suffering. (168)

The play's closing tableau, with its crucial closing stage direction, emphasizes how the characters' respective addictions have enabled them to reach a level of the within-ness Sewall describes. After Mary's descent to the main floor of the house clutching her wedding dress and before her final monologue, the script specifies:

JAMIE pushes the bottle toward him [Tyrone]. He pours a drink without disarranging the wedding gown he holds carefully over his other arm and on his lap, and shoves the bottle back. JAMIE pours his and passes the bottle to EDMUND, who, in turn, pours one. TYRONE lifts his glass and his sons follow suit mechanically, but before they can drink MARY speaks and they slowly lower their drinks to the table, forgetting them. (175)

Unlike Hickey's lethal "cure" from *Iceman* that can knock one cold with horrifying speed, the Tyrones appear to have reached an ideal level of inebriation by the play's conclusion. The men "forget" their fresh drinks as they listen to and absorb Mary's stories from her girlhood. But it is left to the reader or viewer to decide how long this state of equilibrium can last—after all, the last words of the text, Mary's "I fell in love with James Tyrone and was *so happy* for a time" (176; emphasis added), strangely parody the conclusions of the first three acts of *Iceman*.

The emphasis O'Neill placed on medical treatments will be picked up and reworked by later authors, and it is in *Journey* that we first encounter another related, key aspect of the queer alcoholic figure—characters musing about the root causes of their disorders. Besides Mary's insistence on the doctor's guilt in introducing her to opioids, the characters spend a great deal of time discussing generational linkages. For example, in Act III Mary and Edmund accuse Tyrone

of spreading his alcoholism to his sons:

MARY. (*Her face hardens and she stares at her husband with accusing hostility.*)

No, it isn't at all. You brought him up to be a boozier. Since he first opened his eyes, he's seen you drinking. Always a bottle on the bureau in the cheap hotel rooms! And if he had a nightmare when he was little, or a stomach-ache, your remedy was to give him a teaspoonful of whiskey to quiet him.

TYRONE. (*Stung.*) So I'm to blame because that lazy hulk has made a drunken loafer of himself? [...]

EDMUND. Papa! You told me not to pay attention. (*Then, resentfully.*) Anyway it's true. You did the same thing with me. I can remember that teaspoonful of booze every time I woke up with a nightmare. (110-11)

In this brief passage, addiction is equated with contagion, and its cause is decidedly cultural: Tyrone, Mary claims, has essentially nurtured his children into their shared illness via introducing them to alcohol at an early age and frequently being seen abusing the substance himself. Nonetheless, earlier in the play during Act II, after Tyrone has acquiesced to Jamie and Edmund imbibing as “an appetizer” before lunch (65), Mary's furious comments, while still explicitly blaming her husband, hint at a different model of transmission:

MARY. (*Her eyes become fixed on the whiskey glass on the table beside him sharply.*) Why is that glass there? Did you [Edmund] take a drink? Oh, how can you be such a fool? Don't you know it's the worst thing? (*She turns on TYRONE.*) You're to blame, James. How could you let him? Do you want to kill him? Don't you remember my father? He wouldn't stop after he was stricken. He said doctors were fools! He thought, like you, that whiskey is a

good tonic! (67)

Mary's comments contradict her statements about not trusting doctors that she will make a mere three pages later, and we must be careful not to confuse the character's seemingly ever-changing perspectives on the causes of alcoholism and addiction with those the text itself presents. Her allusion to her father, nevertheless, implies some form of genetic root for the family members' predispositions: while the addictions are still passed through imitative behaviour (i.e. Mary's father and Tyrone share the belief that "whiskey is a good tonic"), her speech suggests some form of biological cause, as the behaviour is found on both sides of the family tree and in successive generations.

Tyrone's comments in Act IV further gloss Mary's father's drinking:

Her father wasn't the great, generous, noble Irish gentleman she makes out. He was a nice enough man, [...] but he had his weakness. She condemns my drinking but she forgets his. It's true he never touched a drop till he was forty, but after that he made up for lost time. He became a steady champagne drinker, the worst kind. That was his grand pose, to drink only champagne. (137)

These statements are indeed curious: working *against* the disease model of addiction the play has advanced thus far, Tyrone argues that Mary's father's alcoholism was a moral failing, a "weakness." And, he posits, one can be weak in ways that qualify as better or worse. In taking the form of a steady champagne drinker—in blending substance abuse with pretension and effete social performance—Mary's father is decidedly a member of the latter category. Shakespeare, on the other hand, only suffered from what Tyrone describes as a "good man's failing" (135). After Edmund teases his father with the provocation, "They say he was a souse, too," his father angrily shouts, "They lie! [...] He knew how to drink so it didn't poison his brain with morbidness and

filth!” (135)

In fact, Mary’s unseen father is a crucial presence in the text for more than just his alcoholism. Paralleling the passing down of his addiction is a patrilineal transmission of physical weakness, extreme anxiety, and/or gender nonconformity. But importantly, not all of the characters suffer from these symptoms: *Journey* pays careful attention to the bodies of Edmund and Mary, correlating their shared conditions as “bad” (read: queer) addicts with their dissipated bodies. Again relying upon metaphors of hereditary illness, the text presents other illnesses in order to symbolize Edmund and Mary’s shared difference: tuberculosis and rheumatism are directly referenced, and hysteria is implied. Like addiction, Tyrone traces tuberculosis back to Mary’s father; for example, in a piece of early exposition in Act I, he states to Jamie that Edmund’s presumed illness will emotionally destroy Mary because she lost her father to the disease: “What makes it worse is her father died of consumption. She worshiped him and she’s never forgotten” (37). Later in the play, immediately following his aforementioned comments about her father being a champagne alcoholic, he remarks, “Well, it finished him quick—that and the consumption—” (137). Tyrone’s brief, elliptical line pairs addiction and consumption together while giving them an inescapable, foreboding tone. To have the “wrong” kind of one illness appears to invite others.

In the play’s second act, once Doc Hardy has confirmed via telephone that Edmund is suffering from consumption, Tyrone scrambles to gird himself from blame for the genetic scourge. Explaining to Jamie that his brother will have to leave home for treatment at a sanatorium, the patriarch is quick to clarify which side of the family the apparently feminizing disease stems from: “*He sighs—gloomily and resentfully.* / I never thought a child of mine— It doesn’t come from my side of the family. There wasn’t one of us that didn’t have lungs as strong

as an ox” (79). And perversely, the play supports Tyrone’s sentiments: its stage directions and dialogue clearly demonstrate which parent each of the boys takes after. In typical O’Neillian fashion, the text includes voluminous descriptions of each character upon his or her entrance, and the sections describing the boys are especially telling:

JAMIE, the elder, is thirty-three. He has his father’s broad-shouldered, deep-chested physique, is an inch taller and weighs less, but appears shorter and stouter because he lacks TYRONE’s bearing and graceful carriage. [...His face] has never been handsome like TYRONE’s, although JAMIE resembles him rather than his mother. [...]

EDMUND is ten years younger than his brother, a couple of inches taller, thin and wiry. Where JAMIE takes after his father, with little resemblance to his mother, EDMUND looks like both his parents, but is more like his mother. Her big, dark eyes are the dominant feature in his long, narrow Irish face. His mouth has the same quality of hypersensitiveness hers possesses. His high forehead is hers accentuated [...]. EDMUND’s hands are noticeably like his mother’s, with the same exceptionally long fingers. They even have to a minor degree the same nervousness. It is in the quality of extreme nervous sensibility that the likeness of EDMUND to his mother is most marked. (19-20; emphasis added)

The portraits of the young men could not be more different: Jamie takes after his namesake, while Edmund’s most pronounced physical characteristics follow Mary, down to that most marked of characteristics, their shared anxious dispositions. The figure’s connection with acquiring secondary illnesses appears to include not just consumption, but a form of hysteria as well. The association with the imagery of hysteria is logical, as it is explicitly gendered female,

and connotes non-normative and theatrical behaviour. O'Neill even makes this point explicit during the secretive discussion Jamie has with his father early in Act I, with Tyrone telling his elder son "You're a healthy hulk like me—or you were at [Edmund's] age—but he's always been a bundle of nerves like his mother" (33). In the play's lengthy production history, directors have traditionally used casting in order to emphasize this point. Director Arvin Brown's 1971 version at the Promenade Theatre on Broadway, for example, featured Geraldine Fitzgerald as Mary and James Naughton as Edmund, actors who shared the quality of a long, thin, facial structure. Brown's design team then used costuming in order to underline their similar height (see Fig. 12). Similarly, Robert Falls's 2003 Broadway revival at the Plymouth Theatre relied upon casting for a sharp dichotomy: Brian Dennehy as Tyrone was paired with a bull-like Philip Seymour Hoffman,³⁰ and Vanessa Redgrave as Mary³¹ was matched by a lanky Robert Sean Leonard (see Fig. 13, below).

Leonard's physical attributes as a performer would prove to perfectly capture a character described as "[m]uch thinner than he should be" (20). As I have argued in the first section of this chapter, it is far from coincidental that Leonard performed in such a pivotal remount of *Iceman*, one of O'Neill's most important works. Falls and his creative team then cast him as Edmund in *Journey* four years later, and the actor brought to the role all of the associations he had accrued from his previous performances as sad young—not to mention queerly alcoholic—men. Leonard is another significant example of Carlson's concept of ghosting in action: the contagious connections he had acquired as a performer mark a further breaching of boundaries. In this way

³⁰ In a cruel and bizarre coincidence, Hoffman would die of a heroin overdose—a semi-synthetic opioid, often considered the street-drug sister to morphine—on 2 Feb. 2014.

³¹ Though Mary's initial description in the stage directions states that she is "a trifle plump, but showing little evidence of middle-aged waist and hips" (12) directors have historically chosen slender actors for the role (e.g. Laurie Metcalf). While disturbing and unrealistic cultural beauty standards for women could certainly be to blame, the use of the word "plump" also appears to contradict Mary's repeated refusal to eat at mealtimes.



Fig. 12: Actors James Naughton and Geraldine Fitzgerald.

the queer alcoholic figure breaks down textual borders, moving fluidly from work to work, which will only continue in later decades of theatrical production.

Like Parritt before him, the younger Tyrone son identifies with his mother. The text makes the connection clear in dialogue late in Act IV when Edmund, “*kidding a bit drunkenly*,” speaks the line “I’m like Mama, I can’t help liking you, in spite of everything” (142-43). As I explicate in Chapter III, Crowley reworks the maternal identification found in these two O’Neill texts in his later *The Boys in the Band*, and makes its connection with queer and addictive



Fig. 13: Vanessa Redgrave and Robert Sean Leonard in Director Robert Falls's 2003 *Journey*.

behaviour even more explicit. Furthermore, the characters' similar physical attributes mean that their addictions are literally marked on their bodies: Edmund's sunken cheeks and "*parched sallowness*"³² are matched only by Mary's hands, with their "*ugly crippled look*"³³ (20; 12). They share a warped, dissipated corporeality. While O'Neill does note early in the stage directions that Jamie shows signs of "*premature disintegration*" (19), the elder Tyrone son, like his father, is not made freakish by his addiction. On the contrary, Jamie and Tyrone's predilection for, as Mary puts it, "entertain[ing ...] friends in barrooms" (67) only reinforces their status as normal, masculine, heterosexual men. For instance, Cathleen, the family's second girl, unknowingly mimics Tyrone by describing drinking as "a good man's failing" and claiming she "wouldn't

³² Writing in 1998, Manheim reminds us that there are further queer echoes in the stigma which was historically attached to consumption: "Edmund's [...] disease [...] at the time of the play was still looked upon the way many look upon AIDS in this day" (211).

³³ Calling the actor's performance her "best work in years and among her best ever," Brantley commented on Redgrave's physical transformation for the role, noting that she had "seldom looked more beautiful or more ravaged" than in Falls's production ("*A Mother's Haunting*").

give a trauneen for a teetotaler” as “[t]hey’ve no high spirits” (101). Jamie’s virility, though never in doubt from the play’s first scene, is buttressed by his narration of his encounter with the prostitute Fat Violet at Mamie Burns’s brothel (158-61). Mary’s story of a drunken Tyrone being brought home by his bar mates while they were still on their honeymoon (113) is used as evidence of his strapping, uncontrollable masculinity—the exact same behaviour made queer by *Iceman*’s homosocial atmosphere. While Jamie has “the constitution” to “play the Broadway sport” (33) and cannot “sweat [...] the booze fat off [his] middle” (41), Tyrone claims to have “warned [Edmund] for years his body couldn’t stand it,” and notes that even before Edmund was “fired from college [...] he began dissipating” (33). His chauvinistic toast, “Drink hearty, lad” (136), which connects and celebrates a perceived healthy relation between masculinity and alcohol consumption, appears to only affect his elder son. Tyrone and Jamie’s alcoholism, the text implies, exists on a different level than the “worse” afflictions Mary and Edmund suffer from: while the former pair grow more corpulent, the latter two dissipate and decay. Mary and Edmund’s difference means their strength wanes—as “Jamie’s trick” (100) of replacing liquor with water causes the whiskey in the bottle of Bourbon, one of the play’s central props, to become weaker and weaker.

Despite their bodily dissipation, however, both Edmund and Mary still encourage others to consume alcohol. Tyrone and Jamie, though alcoholics themselves, never quite fulfill this role to the same degree for different reasons: Tyrone frequently refuses to offer drinks to others due to his miserly disposition,³⁴ and Jamie is both too broke and too genuinely concerned for his brother’s welfare to provide spirits. Conversely, Edmund is a veritable Dionysian force. In

³⁴ Though Tyrone does “treat” the boys, and later Edmund again, to single glasses of whiskey during Acts I and IV, he only does so in order to medicate Edmund with a “tonic” in the first instance (65), and to placate his son in the second, during which the stage directions state that he passes his son the bottle “*mechanically*” (129). He clearly lacks what one might deem Edmund’s “heavy pour,” or Mary’s ability to use whiskey in order to persuade the help to do her bidding.

response to his father's admonishment that he's "had enough already," he pours "*a big drink*" and responds with what might be considered an addict's credo: "Enough is *not* as good as a feast" (129-30). Mocking Tyrone's quotation from *The Tempest*, he claims "We are such stuff as manure is made on, so let's drink up and forget it" is "more [his] idea" (131). His love of the decadent poets means he spouts lines from the works of Ernest Dowson, especially his "Cynara" poem, with its famous "They are not long, the days of wine and roses" (131).³⁵ Edmund even recites to his father sections of Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*³⁶:

"Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually.

Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will.

But be drunken." (132)

Edmund's mother similarly persuades other characters to drink, but with more calculation. Her manipulation of Cathleen into keeping her mistress company by plying the young woman with whiskey during Act III is the play's great (and, arguably, only) comic set piece. In the same way, her method for soothing the family's irritated cook is more alcohol: "Don't worry about Bridget. I'll tell her I kept you with me, and you can take a big drink of whiskey to her when you go. She won't mind then" (100).

But while the characters are paired via their connection with offering others liquor, they

³⁵ The year 1962 (already notable in the context of representations of alcoholics as the year *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* opened on Broadway) saw a further intertextual gloss added to Edmund's "Cynara" reference. Director Blake Edwards and screenwriter JP Miller would use the line for their film *Days of Wine and Roses*—a searing examination of a love affair between two alcoholics played by Jack Lemmon and Lee Remick. The film is notable for its implicit support of Alcoholics Anonymous: Lemmon's character, Joe Clay, enters recovery after beginning to attend AA meetings. It remains a standard of what one might deem "Recovery Narrative" films.

³⁶ In Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris*, the section appears as prose poem XXXIII under the title "Enivrez-Vous":
 Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là: c'est l'unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve.
 Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous. (337)

differ in their relations to solitude. Mary makes use of liquor in order to ensure that she isn't left alone and frequently bemoans that she feels "so horribly lonely" (108), yearning for both her husband and sons and "the female companionship she knew at the convent" (Barlow 173). Edmund, contrastingly, works to isolate himself from his family members. Shortly after the curtain rises on Act IV and Edmund enters, we learn that rather than heading uptown with his brother—as James, Sr. assumes he has—he has "walked all the way to the beach, [...] dropp[ing] in at the Inn on the way out and back" for more drinks (130).³⁷ (In his lone hike the character recalls *Iceman's* Hickey and his meditative walk to Hope's saloon "[a]ll the way from the wilds of darkest Astoria" [63].) O'Neill's inclusion of Edmund's long, solitary walk only serves to remind audience members of his past as a sailor; previously in the first act Tyrone and Jamie have discussed "the mad life he's led ever since he was fired from college" (33), in which he "work[ed] his way all over the map as a sailor [...] being on the beach in South America [...], living in filthy dives, drinking rotgut" (35).

By escaping the claustrophobic summer house and its inhabitants, Edmund is free to seek out the "unreal" beach, and fantasize that he walks "on the bottom of the sea" as a "peaceful [...] ghost within a ghost" (131). "That's what I wanted—" he tells his worried father in a moment of drunken clarity, "to be alone with myself in another world where truth is untrue and life can hide from itself" (131). Moments later, he reminisces about the "ecstatic" moments in his life when he was alone and able to become "dissolved in the sea" (153). Ultimately describing himself in a manner which echoes Hickey's diagnosis of Parritt, he states: "It was a great mistake, my being

³⁷ As Manheim observes, it is Edmund's altercation with his mother regarding her addiction that initiates his walk. The critic posits, to my mind only half-convincingly, that Edmund's escape from the house is motivated primarily by his remorse for having hurt his mother, to the point of him considering self-harm:

Edmund is finally goaded into his famous "It's pretty hard at times, having a dope fiend for a mother!" – a still point in the breakdown of their relationship. It is this attack that sends Edmund off into his most guilt-ridden flight – into the night, with the same, we must suppose, suicidal thoughts that provoked him to the earlier actual suicide attempt he alludes to in his subsequent conversation with James. (*Long Day's Journey* 210-11)

born a man, I would have been much more successful as a sea gull or a fish. As it is, I will always be a *stranger* who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can *never belong*, who must always be a little in love with death!³⁸ (153-54; emphasis added)

Mary and Edmund's "apartness," their shared distance from other people, is a crucial signifier of their queerness. Both of their reactions to this solitude—Mary's anxious, fearful outbursts and Edmund's craving for illusion and a dissolved subjectivity—will ghost later characters in numerous works: Blanche's hysterical exclamations to her sister in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Brick's compulsive need to hide from his wife and extended family members in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; the obsessive fantasies of Martha and George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* As with so many other attributes of the figure, it is in O'Neill's works that the concept of the queer alcoholic/addict as separate from the collective is first brought to light.

The representations O'Neill placed onstage in *Iceman* and *Journey* were to structure the semiotics of the figure for later generations of playwrights, who presented their own adapted and altered depictions. The fascinating and paradoxical signifiers that his texts used to signify the queer addict spliced classical notions of divine communion, ecstatic release, and forbidden knowledge with modern medical conceptualizations of diagnostics and cures. But one element of O'Neill's multiple representations was to remain a constant: the figure's tragic allure. As Manheim eloquently states, "[t]ragedy is by its nature both devastating and uplifting" (216). The figure of the queer addict clearly raises both of these emotional responses, as we shall see in my analysis of the reactions to the work of Williams in my next chapter.

³⁸ The character's death fantasies were apparently expertly emphasized in Anthony Page's recent production: In his review, the *Times*'s Brantley praised actor Kyle Soller's layered portrayal of Edmund as one "who both fears and luxuriates in the prospect of his own extinction" ("Mary Tyrone").

Chapter II:

Gettin' Softer on Hard Liquor: The Queer Alcoholic's Body in the Work of Williams

The wide eyes that fix the spectator with the magnetic gaze; the plump lips with that seductive and enigmatic expression; the delicate white gown that shrouds the supple form; the dainty arm extended towards the camera with its conspicuous offering: "Will you—have a drink?" (*A Streetcar Named Desire* 337).³⁹ The image of Vivien Leigh advancing on Wright King as Blanche attempts her seduction of the Young Man collecting for the *Evening Star* is one of the most iconic moments from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947),⁴⁰ a text that has itself become the most recognizable symbol of Tennessee Williams's titanic oeuvre. In both the 1951 Hollywood adaptation mentioned above, as well as the original play, this image is remarkable for its depiction of alcoholic and queer behaviours. Leigh's iteration of Blanche focuses the spectator's eye on her physical form: the viewer's attention is focused on these intertwined bodily conditions via the actor's body. Noticeably transfixed by the Young Man's presence throughout the scene, her actions and speech patterns are encoded as both alcoholic and queer. She dabs at her perspiring, tear-streaked face with her handkerchief, and appears weak and dizzy. Her eyes dart back and forth between her full whiskey glass and the bashful Collector. She touches the area of her face—always quite close to her mouth—roughly seven times during her brief encounter with the Young Man. Soon she is caressing his shoulders and leaning in to kiss him. Moments earlier, her sister Stella had reassured her that soon she'll be able to "breathe quietly again" (335), and yet also warned her "Only, don't take another drink."⁴¹ But Blanche

³⁹ Following the editorial practices of the *Annual Tennessee Williams Review*, all citations to Williams's works come from the New Directions multi-volume collection *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁰ To increase readability, the play is hereafter cited within the text as *Streetcar*.

⁴¹ Stella's line in the film has been slightly altered from the play text's original: "But don't take another drink!" (336).

can't seem to "be good—and keep [her] hands off children" (339)—or liquor, for that matter.

It would be difficult to identify a modern dramatist whose work has focused more on representations of both alcoholism and queerness than Williams. The pages of his plays are nearly soaked through with characters who exhibit alcoholic behaviour and queer sexual desires, including male homosexuality, lesbianism, pederasty, promiscuity, voyeurism, and sado-masochism. Indeed, *Streetcar* is unthinkable without either the copious waves of spirits required for the deluge of its denouement, or the revelation that Blanche's white clothing and exaggerated genteel manner mask strange desires. Though often overlooked in favour of highlighting other qualities of the play, in fact Williams's most famous text includes striking representations of both queerness and alcoholism, which are swirled together in the figure of Blanche DuBois.

At first Blanche's shared, related conditions might seem unsurprising, given Williams's sexual orientation and queerness as well as his lifelong struggles with alcohol abuse, but it becomes a key analytical entry point into the text when viewed in connection with how both elements had been previously depicted on the mid-twentieth-century American stage. Certainly Blanche DuBois is one of theatre's great "queer bird[s]," to adapt critic D.A. Miller's term, fanning her tragic plumage for all to see (115). The character continues the pattern of the queer alcoholic within the canon of American drama: O'Neill had explored and capitalized upon the twin themes deftly in *Iceman* and *Journey*, and as this chapter argues, Williams was to entrench this pattern in his later works, most notably via Brick Pollitt in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.⁴²

There is a definite lineage of the representations of queerness and alcoholism in Williams's texts, and seeds planted in the earlier *Streetcar* come to fruition in explicit ways in *Cat*. The critic Felicia Hardison Londré helpfully lists a number of startling similarities between the two characters:

⁴² This play is hereafter cited as *Cat* within the text.

Blanche is like Brick in [...that b]oth loved someone who was probably homosexual and who committed suicide after his implicit pleas for help met rejection. Just as Blanche carries a sense of guilt for what she said to Allan Grey on the dance floor, Brick knows that he was at fault for hanging up the phone on his friend Skipper. Both turn to drink, Brick drinking until he hears the click in his head that makes him peaceful, just as Blanche in scene 9 remains gripped by the polka tune in her head until she hears “the shot! It always stops after that.” (47)

It is hardly unusual for an author to return to image structures, unusual turns of phrase, plot devices, and major themes: indeed, many authors reuse and recycle creative elements as their writing careers develop and mature. Nonetheless, the character of Brick echoes that of Blanche in so many crucial ways that the latter clearly foreshadows and embeds the symbolism of the queer alcoholic for the former.

The revelation that Blanche is not what she appears to be occurs in Scene Nine during her final confrontation with her suitor, Mitch:

BLANCHE. Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. [...]

MITCH. (*slowly and bitterly*) I don't mind you being older than what I thought.

But all the rest of it—Christ! That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you've dished out all summer. Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen any more. But I was fool enough to believe you was straight.

BLANCHE. Who told you I wasn't—"straight"? (385)

Even bearing in mind that the term “straight” has not yet fully acquired the current valence of

heterosexual in American society, its placement and emphasis within the dialogue directly signals to audience members what the previous eight scenes have implied: Blanche is different, apart from the heteronorm. (The punctuation assists both reader and viewer in this interpretive act, as Williams carefully places scare quotation marks around the word, and the actor playing Blanche must inflect and vocally indicate the unusual way the term registers.) And thus, Blanche's straightness, her status of exemplary heteronormativity, is revealed as so much white-washing. Her earlier translation of her name that she gives to Mitch in Scene Three, "white woods" (299), now takes on a very different tone. The refined, elegant schoolmarm has been revealed as a queer woman who married a homosexual, seduced young students under her tutelage, and had numerous "goings-on" with "young soldiers" and drifters in Laurel (360; 389).

To my mind this structure of revelation best explains the varying degrees of success achieved by two recent productions of *Streetcar*: Liv Ullman's 2009 version for the Sydney Theater Company starring Cate Blanchett (which subsequently transferred to the Brooklyn Academy of Music), and Emily Mann's 2012 version for Simon Says Entertainment/Dancap Productions starring Nicole Ari Parker. While there were admirable elements in Parker's performance as Blanche, overall her portrayal lacked depth and variation. As a spectator I had no sense that her Blanche was concealing anything; Parker began the show with the same intensity with which she ended it. (In fact, while aspects of the character's behaviour can certainly be labeled "hysteric," with all of the misogynistic baggage the term carries, Parker's vision of Blanche repeatedly overemphasized these elements, and as a result verged on grotesque parody.) Contrastingly, Blanchett's performance (see Fig. 14) contained multitudes, and crucially she stepped on stage displaying what Brantley deemed "the upper hand of a prim martinet" ("Fragile Flower").



Fig. 14: Cate Blanchett as a Distressed Blanche in Director Liv Ullmann's 2009 Production of *Streetcar*.

After viewing a video recording of Ullman's production (held at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts' Theatre on Film and Tape Archive), I noted with pleasure how Blanchett's portrayal of the character anchored Blanche in buttoned-down prudishness, only to unleash the debauched deviant underneath. Underscoring both this unveiling and its reliance upon drunken behaviour, Brantley stated that

[T]here's a see-sawing between strength and fragility in Blanche, and too often those who play her fall irrevocably onto one side or another. [...] That delicate balance assumes its most wrenching form in her climactic face-off with Stanley, as Blanche tries to defy not only her predatory brother-in-law but also the drunkenness that keeps pulling her to the floor. Gravity is not on her side. ("Fragile Flower")

Indeed, Williams's stage directions and dialogue stress that it is the alcoholic behaviour Blanche struggles with that foments this revelation of her queerness. Consider this telling exchange between the Blanche and Mitch which signals the unraveling of their relationship:

BLANCHE. What am I looking around her for? Oh, yes—liquor! We've had so much excitement around here this evening that I *am* boxed out of my mind! (*She pretends suddenly to find the bottle. He draws his foot up on the bed and stares at her contemptuously.*) Here's something. Southern Comfort! What is that, I wonder?

MITCH. If you don't know, it must belong to Stan.

BLANCHE. Take your foot off the bed. [...] Of course, you boys don't notice things like [a light cover]. I've done so much with this place since I've been here. [...] This room is almost—dainty! I want to keep it that way. I wonder if this stuff ought to be mixed with something? Ummm, it's sweet, so sweet! It's terribly, terribly sweet! Why, it's a *liqueur*, I believe! Yes, that's what it *is*, a liqueur! [...] I'm afraid you won't like it, but try it, and maybe you will.

(382-83)

This section of the text demonstrates the character's dual condition to the viewer more directly than the previous eight scenes. Blanche admits that she is "boxed out of her mind" as Mitch has put it, but then feigns locating the bottle of Southern Comfort for the first time. She has previously hotly argued upon offering Mitch a drink, "Everything here isn't Stan's. Some things on the premises are actually mine!" (381); and yet now she must contrarily act as if she has never seen the bottle of spirits before—hence her manipulative performance of tasting the Southern Comfort and labeling it a sweet liqueur. Her dramatic pronouncements of delicate femininity are

used as a distraction in order to conceal her alcoholism: she tells Mitch to remove his feet from the “light cover” of the bedspread, as “boys” don’t pay attention to décor; she argues her creative design skills have made the room “almost—dainty”; she, the hyper-feminine Southern belle, enjoys “terribly sweet” drinks such as Southern Comfort, whereas the robust and manly Mitch presumably does not. (Note how the very name of the spirit has associations with Blanche’s qualities: the first term references her proud Southern heritage, and the second keenly alludes to her addiction to alcoholic drinks in order to settle her nerves.) Nevertheless, it is precisely this overblown and exaggerated parody of traditional heterosexual femininity that calls attention to Blanche’s alcohol addiction; the focus upon a hyper-feminine, seductive, performing body incites Mitch, as well as the spectator, to analyze the character’s other abnormal state. And crucially, Blanche’s performance backfires: immediately after her breathy offer, Mitch snaps, “You ought to lay off his liquor. He says you been lapping it up all summer like a wild cat!” (383). It is not despite her exaggerated and sexualized performances, but rather because of them, that the spectator is able to classify the figure as both queer and alcoholic.

While her *tête-à-tête* with Mitch marks the moment of Blanche’s exposure, even from the very beginning of *Streetcar* Williams ensures that Blanche’s queerness and alcoholism are subtly marked by her appearance and actions. In Scene One, for example, she is described as being “*incongruous*” to the setting (245); the queer is already a figure set apart, or differentiated, from the other characters present onstage. She stands out. Williams’s descriptions of her costume assist in achieving this effect, as she is described as being “*daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat*” (245). Foreshadowing the diagnostic perspective which *Cat*’s dramatic narrative necessitates, the behaviour Williams scripts for Blanche during the opening scene carefully directs the spectator’s attention to the

question of neurosis or illness. Blanche's first spoken line is infused "*with a faintly hysterical humor*" (246), and upon entering the apartment at 632 Elysian Fields, she "*sits in a chair very stiffly with her shoulders slightly hunched [...] her legs pressed close together [...] her hands tightly clutching her purse*" and a "*blind look*" in her eyes (250). Her fourth action once she is alone in the apartment is the procurement of alcohol and the satiation of her craving:

(Suddenly she notices something in a half opened closet. She springs up and crosses to it, and removes a whiskey bottle. She pours a half tumbler of whiskey and tosses it down. She carefully replaces the bottle and washes out the tumbler at the sink. Then she resumes her seat in front of the table.)

BLANCHE. *(faintly to herself)* I've got to keep hold of myself!

(250; emphasis added)

Despite her veneer of respectability and refinement, the playwright presents a figure with visible—though coded—symptoms of addiction and emotional distress: Blanche is clearly abusing alcohol in order to "keep hold" of a stable mental state. Here we are reminded of the connotations of hysteria found in O'Neill's nervous and agitated Mary and Edmund, but in Blanche the symptoms are more pronounced. After Stella has arrived, Blanche runs to her while emitting a "*wild cry*" and speaks to her sister with a "*feverish vivacity*" (250) while she "look[s] around for some liquor" (251). Pretending to catch sight of the liquor for the first time, just as she will during her encounter with Mitch during Scene Nine, Blanche "*rushes*" to fetch the whiskey bottle while "*shaking all over and panting for breath as she tries to laugh*"; her emotional excitement is described as so great that "[t]he bottle nearly slips from her grasp" (251). She is, as she will describe later to Stella, "*not very well...*" (257; emphasis in the original). Williams's representation of the character dovetails excessive drinking and hysteric behaviour,

and as a result further entrenches the sign system that O'Neill had put forward via Mary and Edmund in *Journey*.

Audience members are then cued to pay close attention by the onstage spectator, Stella, who “*notic[es]*” Blanche’s small mishap with the bottle, and suggests Blanche mix the drink with Coke. Underscoring her addicted behaviour, Williams inserts a careful denial into Blanche’s following lines: “[n]o coke, honey, not with my nerves tonight! [...] Just water, baby, to chase it! 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!” (251-52). *Drunkard*: the character thus announces to the audience a colloquial term for her own condition during the first scene of the play. Her claim to not occupy that category is a symptomatic negation that only draws attention to itself.

Blanche’s agitation is highly symbolic, and her anxious manner can be read as signifying signs of both addicted and erotic mania. Presumably the actor playing Blanche is perspiring and moving about the stage in an animated and feverish manner: panting, shaking, laughing, and being unable to form coherent sentences are physiological signifiers which imply states of narcotic or sexual craving and excitation. Blanche’s own descriptors for her feelings (e.g. “shaken up,” “hot,” and “dirty”) are similarly double-coded.

Like Brick, Blanche is noticeably associated with oral imagery: she instructs Stella to “open [her] pretty *mouth*,” and later, in the memorable sequence in Scene Five with which I began this chapter, the characters discuss “cherry soda” (251). Blanche will tell the Young Man, “You make my *mouth water*,” and that she wants to kiss him “softly and sweetly on [the] *mouth*” (338-39, emphasis added). Numerous moments in *Streetcar* allude to Blanche actually consuming fluids, alcoholic or otherwise: Stella repeatedly fixes drinks for her sister (a “lemon Coke with plenty of chipped ice in it” [280], or Coke with a shot of whiskey [332]); Blanche

slurs her words upon first meeting Mitch (“Show me a person who hasn’t known any sorrow and I’ll show you a shuperficial—Listen to me!—My tongue is a little—thick!” [299]); and Blanche pours drinks for Mitch and herself after their first date (“[j]ust enough for two shots without any dividends, honey” [344]). The spectator thus figuratively drinks in the sight of numerous instances of Blanche literally drinking in liquids and/or referencing the mouth. And though an oral fixation in itself is not necessarily queer, when read alongside Blanche’s other qualities such as her hypergendered performance, her theatricality and love of illusion, as well as her striking difference from the setting and other characters, it aids in establishing this aspect of the figure. Williams’s descriptions of Blanche’s oral fixation are one of the playwright’s key steps in moving towards characters exuding a queer, destabilizing, and consuming force; Blanche’s drinking mouth envelops and pulls in the spectator’s gaze as Brick’s will in *Cat*.

Through Blanche Williams establishes the pattern he will ensconce more directly in the character of Brick: a Trojan Horse of destabilizing desires and “feverish excesses” (Nietzsche 26). In Nietzschean terms, Blanche’s rigid Apollonian temperament has been revealed as careful camouflage for her Dionysian deliriums.⁴³ The philosopher’s elegant description of the effect of this revelation upon the Greek audience member in his *Birth of Tragedy* (1870-71) may be easily associated with the effect produced upon the spectators by Williams’s mutable heroine in *Streetcar*:

In order to comprehend this total emancipation of all the symbolic powers one must have reached the same measure of inner freedom those powers themselves were making manifest; which is to say that the votary of Dionysos could not be understood except by his own kind. It is not difficult to imagine the awed surprise

⁴³ For a fascinating, if overly prescriptive, perspective on *Streetcar* which utilizes a Nietzschean analysis, see Joseph N. Riddel’s “*A Streetcar Named Desire*—Nietzsche Descending.”

with which the Apollonian Greek must have looked on him [the Dionysiac reveler]. And that surprise would be further increased as the latter realized, with a shudder, that all this was not so alien to him after all, that his Apollonian consciousness was but a thin veil hiding from him the whole Dionysiac realm.

(28)

To adapt Blanche's line from the rape sequence in the penultimate Scene Ten, "something awful" may indeed have "happen[ed]" (131) for the spectator by the conclusion of *Streetcar*: Blanche's refined, sober, and heteronormative façade has shattered as irreversibly as the glass liquor bottle she brandishes at Stanley during the play's climax. It is only with the familiar shudder Nietzsche describes that the audience member may realize that Blanche was always already queer.⁴⁴

With his second major Broadway critical and box-office success, 1955's *Cat*, the playwright created a character in which these twinned elements were even more startlingly overt. Despite critic David Savran's well-reasoned argument in *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers* that the play does not contain one protagonist but three (99), I argue that there is, in fact, a main figure in Williams's masterpiece: the enigmatic figure of Brick Pollitt. Without Brick, the play's dramatic action simply falls apart, as the youngest Pollitt is the great hope on which the family—not to mention Margaret, or even the Pollitt estate and patriarchal lineage—rests. That is, while it is possible to imagine versions of the play that reduced the playing times of, or perhaps even omitted altogether, the characters of Margaret or Big Daddy, the text's fundamental narrative structure—an alcoholic, emotionally tortured man is unhappy in his marriage, and remains positioned to take possession of his family's Mississippi delta estate—collapses.

⁴⁴ Williams's famous statement "I am Blanche DuBois" (qtd. in Bronski 115) speaks to this revelation. Long interpreted as proof that the character of Blanche is a Williams surrogate, and therefore a gay man in drag, it is far likelier that his claim speaks to secrets and closeting in general, rather than specifically gay male desire.

Brick is, of course, a drunk, and as we watch the play's characters endure one truly unfortunate birthday party, this fact is as explicit as any author could make it. Initially, I had planned to chronicle the number of times his drinking is referenced (either in didascalia or dialogue); the incidents proved so frequent, however, that as I lost count it occurred to me that more to the point is the frankness with which the author treats the subject. What is perhaps even more surprising than the explicit quality of his alcoholism is the corollary condition of explicit queerness, and the extent to which Williams obsesses over Brick's sexual orientation, murky erotic desires, and, paradoxically, sexual frigidity. The text's focus upon this queer condition impels the spectator to decipher its formal components, that is, the semiotics of Brick: *Cat* excites, misdirects, and ultimately frustrates spectator desire, and then spectacularizes the character in order to heighten the disorienting—and pleasurable—effect.

George W. Crandell provides an accurate assessment of *Cat*'s privileging of the character when he notes that though there are many differing viewpoints in terms of the play's central theme, "critics almost unanimously characterize the theme in terms of [...] a dilemma primarily for Brick, who must come to terms with mendacity, his sexual identity, and the prospect of death—his father's and his own" ("*Cat*" 111). Such critical agreement that there is a "primary" crisis—and that said crisis is "for" the character of Brick—cannot be coincidental. Similarly, Douglas Arrell observes how

[c]ritical discussion of the play has tended to focus on precisely how Brick's behaviour in the play is to be understood. Much of it has dealt with his sexuality: is he a gay man in the closet, a "latent" or "repressed" homosexual as understood in the 1950s, or a homophobic heterosexual? Or is his sexuality deliberately presented as indeterminate or ambiguous? (60-1)

In an endnote attached to these perplexing questions regarding Brick's actions, Arrell goes on to skillfully list wildly contrasting scholarly stances: Nicholas de Jongh, for example, views Brick as a latent homosexual; Dean Shackelford describes the character as gay; John S. Bak passionately argues that Brick is heterosexual; Michael P. Bibler states that Brick's sexual orientation is ambiguous; and Savran articulately posits that the character destabilizes "normative constructions of sexuality" (qtd. in Arrell 70). In other words, clearly there has been a critical fascination with the character since the initial reception of *Cat*, and more often than not this fascination has focused upon his perceived queer behaviour.

Brick's initial appearance onstage simultaneously connects him with images of fluidity and themes of ambiguous and non-normative desire: the curtain rises, and "*someone is taking a shower in the bathroom, the door of which is half open*" (17). Something spectral hides within that small room which is "half open"; indeed, the stage is set to foster fear and excitement. These feelings are only intensified further by the fact that, immediately before Brick's revelatory appearance, audience members are presented with the sight of a sexualized Maggie, who "*steps out of her dress,*" gorgeous in her "*slip of ivory satin and lace*" (18). She is ostensibly changing her clothes because she has been smeared with a "hot buttered biscuit" by one of Gooper and Mae's children (17), though this seems a rather flimsy pretext for displaying her partially exposed body to the audience members. Stripped of a garment still gleaming with butter, her appearance is surely fetishistic enough for even the most oversexed of dramatists—especially in conjunction with that of the concealed Brick. The moment is suspenseful, erotic, and menacing: the masculine voice, which hides "*indifference, or worse,*" calls out to the "*pretty young*" woman (17), anxious, alone, and half dressed in her room. Thus Williams foregrounds the queer relation between Brick and Maggie he will build over the course of the play in *Cat*'s very first moments.

Few critics would accuse Williams of subtlety in his writing, but the intensity of symbolism in the playwright's first description of Brick verges on mania. Witness the breathless pace and obsessive tone of the stage directions:

He stands there in the bathroom doorway drying his hair with a towel and hanging onto the towel rack because one ankle is broken, plastered and bound. He is still slim and firm as a boy. [...] He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle. But now and then, when disturbed, something flashes behind it, like lightning in a fair sky [...T]he fading, still warm, light from the gallery treats him gently. (19-20)

What to make of this vision, then? Brick is boyish and appears young, yet he must be of a certain age so that actors who are categorized as leading men can play the role. He has given up on life—but something must “flash” within him. He is emotionally cool, but somehow treated in a “warm” way by the light. The effect is paradoxical and unsettling: the viewer is instructed to look, and somehow still cautioned to look away, especially from that which “flashes behind.”⁴⁵ These lengthy and contradictory stage directions work to establish Brick's troubled encoding as queer addict, and as a result the character blurs numerous binaries. He is an amalgam of boy and man, hot and cold; somehow he is both dark and calm, but light and disturbed. Most importantly for my analysis of the spectacle of the queer alcoholic, the representation of Brick in *Cat* collapses the division between hard and soft, a liquefying to which I shall return in detail later in the chapter.

As a direct consequence of Williams's introduction of this protean character, desire is

⁴⁵ Brick is therefore subtly connected with another queer sex act or perversion via the stage direction: those who willfully expose intimate parts of their bodies are deemed “flashers” in common parlance. The term “behind” is also of crucial importance to theories of queerness. See Miller's “Visual Pleasure in 1959” and Edelman's chapter “Seeing Things” in *Homographesis* for elaborate ruminations upon the use of the term.

opened up for audience members from their first glimpse of Brick. His contradictory qualities ensure that spectators are unable to articulate this ambiguous, more fluid desire; upon his entrance an element of the unspeakable enters the play. The first scene of *Cat* turns out to be slippery for spectators, with desire becoming as slick as both objects' bodies.

This opening sequence also has unfortunate misogynistic undertones, however, as Maggie functions as a sort of libidinally charged prologue or "teaser" before the main event of the unveiling of Brick. In accordance with the compulsory heterosexual societal norms of the mid-1950s—norms that are still very much present now, despite LGBT political activists' significant achievements during the past fifty-seven years—Maggie's feminine appearance is used to arouse the spectators' desires. This desire is then transferred to, or at least overshadowed by, the masculine Brick, once the hidden man appears. The theatrical bait-and-switch is representative of two of the play's foremost concerns, the male form—and not the female—as erotic object, and the toxic and tortured relation between a closeted gay/bisexual/ambiguously oriented (but above all, queer) male and his female "beard" counterpart.

This process of misdirected desire is one which Williams made his stock-in-trade throughout his career: see, for example, D. A. Miller's magisterial analysis of the complex libidinal circuit operating in the spectator in the film adaptation of *Suddenly, Last Summer* ("Visual Pleasure"). Only one year after the MGM film adaptation of *Cat*, which allows the viewer to revel in the eroticism of Paul Newman's granite form and brooding features via Elizabeth Taylor's accentuated, ornamented, and emphatically recognizable corporeality, Columbia Pictures was to take the same avenue in order to transfix its spectators (see Figs. 15 and 16). *Suddenly, Last Summer* is the suspenseful, sad tale of Catharine Holly, a young woman who appears to have been driven insane after the mysterious death of her cousin Sebastian



Fig. 15: Elizabeth Taylor as Maggie and Paul Newman as Brick in the MGM Film Adaptation of *Cat*.

Note the angle at which the camera places the viewer in proportion to Taylor's famous figure.

Venable. At the behest of Catharine's mother, Violet (Katharine Hepburn), Catharine receives psychiatric treatment from Dr. John Cukrowicz (Montgomery Clift). Over the course of the film, it is revealed that Sebastian was using his unknowing cousin in order to procure young men with which to satiate his sexual desires. Sebastian's deployment of Catharine finally comes to an end in the Spanish town of Cabeza de Lobo; a flashback shows how, to Catharine's horror, a group of boys swarmed him at the top of a hill and tore him apart in an act of cannibalism. Miller



Fig. 16: Another Still from Richard Brooks's Film.

The mirror reflects Brick's crutch back at the viewer.

article explores how the structure and editing techniques of the film replicate Sebastian's sexual manipulation of his cousin. Tellingly, it is that identical hyper-feminine, voluptuous, and eroticized body from the film version of *Cat* which is used to reveal the phantasm of queerness; as I explore in greater depth in the following chapter, Taylor's form had become ghosted with desire. Miller writes of Taylor's body in *Suddenly, Last Summer* that

[t]he same body [Taylor's], then, that only seconds ago seemed to constitute the very icon of normal male desire, and whose bright, broad beaming self-evidence as such appeared more than adequate to subdue the queer incandescence that was serving for backlighting—this same body now stands in some need of shade itself. Too plainly has Cathy's flesh come to bait men with the anal erotics that, by dropping the usual requirement for an "opposite" sex, must fail to guarantee their desire as having a *female* object, and so [...] direct[s] them to a *male* one. (112)

The coded misdirection of desire towards queer excitation in fact has now become an entrenched trope in contemporary gay male pornography: like Sebastian's skillful direction of Catharine, the ruse involves an ostensibly straight male performer being "seduced" into copulating with a willing gay male participant through the promise of oral or anal sex with an eroticized heterosexual woman. (See, for example, the existence of pornographic websites such as "The Bait Bus," "Ungloryhole," or "Bait Buddies.") *Cat*, both the play and its film adaptation, also participates in the substitution of what Miller has deemed "the nightmare" of queer desire after the initial obligatory heterosexual excitation. In *Cat* this nightmare transition from connotation to denotation will become all the more apparent, as a result of this unutterable queerness being spoken aloud onstage ("Visual Pleasure" 115, 100).

Having aroused the spectator's desire via Maggie's eroticized body and disturbing and transferring this desire to a queer male object, Williams then relies upon spectacle for emphasis and exaggeration. Brick's cast at once immobilizes and re-invigorates him: he is forced as a result of the plaster to continually "*break loos[e]*" from the other characters and "*hobbl[e]*" about the stage (103). In fact, this stage direction appears a total of eleven times throughout the original

script (78, 94, 103, 111, 114, 122, 125, 136-37, 163, 175, 183). Not only does the plaster conceal his (presumably shapely and eroticized) leg, but it also visibly marks and queers his body. He moves (and, quite simply, *exists*) in a different manner than all of the other characters present onstage; consider, for example, the stress that the text places upon individuating him from the rest of the collective. At the start of Act II, after the stage becomes crowded with characters, all of who are so animated they sound like “*a great aviary of chattering birds*,” the stage directions state that “[o]nly *Brick remains unengaged, leaning upon the liquor cabinet with his faraway smile* [emphasis added]” (65). Later in the scene, once the characters sing “Happy Birthday” to Big Daddy and present him with his birthday cake, the text’s blocking again separate him from the Pollitt “flock”: “*everybody, including the Negroes and the Children, joins in. Only Brick remains aloof*” (68; emphasis added).

Thus Brick *is* a type of spectacle: curiously, by attempting to work against the theatrics all around him and remain unremarkable, the character only emphasizes his difference all the more. Brick’s version of queer theatricality functions in a markedly distinct way than that of Blanche, no doubt because of Williams’s contrasting and complex depictions of their opposing genders: Blanche works to make herself stand out (or, at least, a *version* of herself), while Brick desperately tries to conceal himself, to no avail. In addition to moving differently and remaining cut off from groups in the play’s *mise-en-scène*, his movements are also tracked and categorized by Big Mama, Big Daddy, Margaret, and Gooper and Mae as the narrative continues to its tragic conclusion. His family members repeatedly ask where he is, what he has done, what he is currently doing, and most importantly, why he is doing it: the character is nothing short of a textual fixation. As a result of this dramaturgical overdetermination, Williams’s text invites the spectator to work alongside the Pollitts in order to locate some sort of diagnosis and subsequent

“cure”—for both his queerness and his alcoholism—even as the play attempts to transmit these contagious desires to him or her.

With respect to the search for this elusive double-cure, Williams’s biographical details are of course germane. Prominent scholars such as Michael Paller have previously investigated and explored Williams’s own entrance into psychoanalysis under Dr. Lawrence S. Kubie during the composition of *Cat* (“The Couch and Tennessee”); there have been many articles and book-length studies on homosexuality in Williams’s works (Clum, etc.); and a myriad of critics since the 1950s have explored the intersections of psychoanalytic theory and Williams’s characters (Savran; Miller, “Visual Pleasure”; Bruhm, “Blackmailed,” etc.). My work moves beyond existing Williams scholarship by seeking to trace and explicate how the dual codes of graphic queerness and alcoholism correlate in canonical plays such as *Cat*.

Like much of Williams’s work, *Cat* contains dialogue which explores the topic of curing addictions: the Broadway playing version of the text, for instance, includes actual discussion of scientifico-medical treatments with which several members of the Pollitt family hope to reform Brick’s state.⁴⁶ The original text omits this important, uncomfortable discussion about medical cures, thereby missing the opportunity to amplify the audience’s fears of contagion via the intimacy of performance. In this way, William’s original script for *Cat* is much more of a literary document, and the queer alcoholic therefore does not read as legibly as in production: as I have

⁴⁶ In 1879, Dr. Leslie Keeley announced he had found a chemical cure for alcoholism. The first Keeley Institute opened in Dwight, Illinois that same year, and Keeley began to regularly pump his patients full of “bichloride of gold” four times per day. In reality, these injections were mostly strychnine; the doctor then administered a “strong emetic” used to induce vomiting (Heron 144). The Keeley Cure (or “Gold Cure” as it was eventually named) became immensely popular—at one point over 200 Keeley Institutes existed. Doc Baugh’s phrase “kill their taste for the stuff” is perhaps too apt: “anti-bust” tablets refers to disulfiram (tetraethylthiuram disulphide), commonly known as Antabuse. This was the most popular aversion drug in the treatment of alcoholics, and involved prescribing a daily 0.5gm dose of Antabuse along with a tiny dose of alcohol. When taken together the two substances produced a myriad of uncomfortable symptoms, including flushing, vomiting, acceleration of the heart, and a “feeling of impending death” (Keller 31). Without proper management, the mixture often resulted in circulatory collapse (Keller 31).

argued, the figure is best understood via the machinery of the theatre.

The figurative language that the Pollitt family members use in their discussion of Brick's alcoholism is carefully layered and psychosexually symbolic:

GOOPER. That boy's gone to pieces—he's just gone t'pieces.

DOCTOR BAUGH. Y'know, in my day they used to have somethin'

they called the Keeley cure for drinkers. [...] But nowadays, I understand

they take some kind of tablets that kill their taste for the stuff.

GOOPER. (*turns to Dr. Baugh*) Call 'em anti-bust tablets.

BIG MAMA. Brick don't need to take nothin'. That boy is just broken up over

Skipper's death. You know how poor Skipper died. They gave him a big, big

dose of that sodium amytal stuff at his home an' that an' all the alcohol in his

system [...] just proved too much[. I]'m scared of needles!⁴⁷ (181)

Gooper and Doctor Baugh's discussion of the Keeley cure and "anti-bust tablets" implies that something biological in men like Brick and Skipper that needs to be altered, or better yet, eradicated: repressive 1950s American society requires a medical or psychotherapeutic authority in order to "kill" certain "taste[s]" the men share. Big Mama's statements regarding the death of Skipper also have undeniable thematic resonances, as they quickly shift from a proposed treatment for her alcoholic son to the circumstances of his friend Skipper's death: in a noteworthy exploitation of the heteronormative fear of the penetrated male form, Skipper is repeatedly injected with a phallic needle containing "big, big dos[es]." A Dantesque *contrapasso*, Skipper's overdose duplicates both of the supposed "sins" of queer sex and alcoholism: literally and figuratively punctured and flooded with fluids, his circulatory system is

⁴⁷ This section is taken from the Broadway playing version, though a majority of the text appears slightly out of sequence in the original text.

overloaded, and so shuts down. Crucially, Skipper's "excesses" are deadly, and this gruesome image of overdose is then associated with the grieving, tortured, and above all, alcoholic Brick.

The most significant aspect of the passage quoted above, however, is that the language used to describe Brick's mental state is itself physicalized: to speak of Brick and his condition(s) is to speak of his body. The text heavily inflects the dialogue with images of bodily degeneration and disintegration, a point which Savran makes with reference to Maggie (106). However, the dismemberment of the characters' bodies is in fact more pronounced with Brick, from Gooper's telling idiomatic phrase that his brother has "gone to pieces" to Big Mama's paradoxical counter-claim that Brick is fine, but has merely become "broken up" over the death of his intimate mate Skipper. And yet, Williams insists on troubling the play's symbol-structure, crafted as it is with images of degenerescence, through the use of Brick's casted leg: the leg and the character may have gone to pieces, but just as the cast supports as it confines Brick's leg, so too does it become an image of a subjectivity hardening, shrinking, reifying, and/or fossilizing.

Williams's stage directions and dialogue demonstrate a preoccupation with the stage property. The semiotic significance of the cast is immense, as it blurs the binary of rigidity and fluidity. One can deduce this from the very name "Brick": it is peculiar enough as a character's moniker that careful readers and spectators cannot ignore it. Williams slyly imbues the name with a heavy sense of irony: the word is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a substance formed of clay, kneaded, moulded, and *hardened* by baking with fire; [...] used instead of stone as a *building material* [my emphasis]." Brick is a natural, but more importantly, foundational material: it is the bedrock upon which structures such as houses and plantation homes are built.⁴⁸ The culture of compulsory heterosexuality in which Williams wrote views the

⁴⁸ One might connect the term with the rather coarse expression "built like a brick shithouse," with its numerous associations of power, physical strength, and intimate space.

heterosexual couple—particularly the male figure, as it is the male name that is passed down from generation to generation in patriarchal systems—as its foundation. The playwright critiques the belief that hard, strong, unyielding, masculine, and heterosexual men are the bricks of society, supporting growth and continuance. But the Pollitt’s foundation is crumbling: not only is the current patriarch Big Daddy suffering from that most Williamsian problem, bowel cancer—which Savran claims may be seen as “the wages of sodomy [or, at least, of ‘knocking around’] (101)—but the favourite (and, according to Big Mama, “only”) son also has a big secret (142).

I have previously quoted from the initial lengthy section of the stage directions describing Brick’s first entrance in *Cat*, but there is an important sentence which follows the note that Brick is “*firm*” and youthful: “*His liquor hasn’t started tearing him down outside*” (19). Williams’s authorial voice then proceeds to explain that in a “*stronger light*” than that present from the gallery Brick might “[p]erhaps show some signs of deliquescence,” but that ultimately this impending bodily dissolution is kept hidden from view (19-20). Were the viewer presented with the character in a harsher glare, the direction implies, there would be clues: Brick’s breakdown has already been subtly written upon the body.

Note how closely the reference to a spectator examining and categorizing the state of Brick’s body—via a strong light—resembles the aforementioned revelation scene from *Streetcar*. In Scene Nine, before his proclamation that Blanche isn’t straight, Mitch confronts her about her careful manipulation of his ability to view her body:

MITCH. I don’t think I ever seen you in the light. (*Blanche laughs breathlessly*)

That’s a fact! [...] What [that] means [is] I’ve never had a real good look at you, Blanche. [...] Let’s turn the light on here [...]o I can take a look at you good and plain! [...]

(Mitch crosses to the switch. He turns the light on and stares at her. She cries out and covers her face. He turns the light off again.) (383-85)

While Brick never directly attempts to control the amount of light present onstage in *Cat*, he does consciously and repeatedly move into areas without strong light: the bathroom (42); in some productions the bedroom's closet, in order to retrieve his pajamas; just outside the gallery doors (94, 111); and of course the “*long gallery in the fading, much faded [...] light*” (52). The texts of *Streetcar* and *Cat* place careful emphasis upon viewing the bodies of those who are alcoholic and queer, but the figures themselves ensure that they cannot be easily viewed: Brick and Blanche very rarely, if ever at all, appear in direct stage light.

As previously stated, the symbolism that is placed upon these paradoxical bodies is immensely layered. In *Cat* sections of Margaret's dialogue function in order to point out the interrelation between queerness and alcoholism which meets in Brick's enigmatic, hypermasculine form: in Act I she comments upon the bizarre state of Brick's Dorian Gray-like status, telling her husband “I actually believe you've gotten better looking since you've gone on the bottle” and that he looks as if he'd “never had a tense nerve in [his] body or a strained muscle” (30). Maggie's bewildered (and bewildering) claim—that Brick increases in physical attractiveness the more he abuses his body with alcohol—inverts the logic of an age-old bartender/drunken joke: “I get better looking the more you drink.” Her repressed sexual desire for him has an intoxicating effect upon her senses, and yet strangely he is the one literally under the influence of alcohol.

In 2011, director Eda Holmes's version of *Cat* for the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake was exceptionally effective in emphasizing both the frustration and misdirection of desire and the correlation between queerness and alcoholism. Veteran company actors Gray Powell and

Moya O'Connell played the roles of Brick and Maggie, and theatre reviewers for the major Canadian daily newspapers were almost unanimous in their high praise of the show (see Cushman; Nestruck, "*Cat*"). Holmes's production was striking in its straightforward eroticization of the character of Brick. Powell, already traditionally cast by both Festival and independent directors in the role of romantic leading man or young lover, appeared to have committed to a strict regimen of physical exercise in order to accentuate the character's well-established athletic prowess. Holmes's blocking functioned to stress Powell's musculature: her blocking ensured that he was frequently downstage centre, or splayed on a chaise-lounge mid-stage left. The production began and ended with Brick onstage: a sequence in which Powell, half-dressed, lay on the chaise lounge and attempted to scratch his casted leg was added to the play's very start, and Holmes ensured Brick and Maggie sat provocatively close to one another on the bed for the conventional tableau at the end of Act III. The silky white pajamas Powell wore during part of the play appeared to have been made from a special luminescent fabric; the garment glimmered and sparkled under the dim stage lights.

Holmes's direction demonstrated an expert understanding of Brick as textual problem, as both barely legible object and the play's central enigma. Powell's performance of Brick smouldered with sexual heat, and his scenes together with O'Connell's fresh-faced and feisty Maggie were thrilling to watch. In Fig. 17,⁴⁹ for example, O'Connell and Powell are seen side by side in a sequence from Act I of *Cat*. Observe the position of the actors' bodies: O'Connell is tilted towards Powell in a moment of laughter, her left hand adjusting her sheer stocking and sensually lifting the hemline of her camisole. Her "*lovely bare ar[m]*" (20) is so close to Powell's it nearly grazes it. The actor's smile is wide, and her lipstick is a bright, candy-apple

⁴⁹ My thanks to photographers David and Emily Cooper, as well as Odette Yazbeck, the Shaw Festival's Publicist, for their permission to use this image from Holmes's production.



Fig. 17: Moya O'Connell as Maggie and Gray Powell as Brick in Director Eda Holmes's
Production for the Shaw Festival.

red. The cosmetic powder on O'Connell's cheeks and forehead is very heavy, and the lace front of her slip (not to mention the looped pearl necklace she is wearing) call attention to her décolletage. Her feet are arched, and the butter-smeared party dress lies on the floor at the foot of the bed. Everything about the staging and displaying of the actor's body recalls a model from a 1950s softcore pin-up calendar. Powell's positioning is even more sexualized, if that is possible: clad in nothing but two towels, one of which is draped around his neck, he sits with his legs spread apart and his arms on his hips. His right leg prominently thrusts forward the large, white, hard cast towards the audience members, and his tilted left foot has its toes curled towards the floor. The damp towel fabric—which is a symbolic masculine blue—clings to his skin, echoing

the enhancing effect found in classical Greek sculptures,⁵⁰ and, as with O’Connell’s positioning, the towel around his waist is hiked up, barely concealing his genitals.

Yet for all of our invited leering, Holmes’s blocking ensures we won’t find a release from this erotic excitement. In point of fact, the performers’ positions and expressions mirror those of the actors playing Cora and Chuck in the still from the original *Iceman*. Powell’s face, partly in shadow, is tilted away from O’Connell’s flirtatious pose: his expression is one of a slight grimace or frown, his jaw and neck clenched. His eyes appear to stare past O’Connell; all of the repressed and frustrated sexual tension on display will not result in the characters experiencing a genuine coming together, a physical and emotional *jouissance*—at least not until the play’s final harrowing moments, in which heterosexual congress is an act of despair and deceit. And as Savran has noted (109), even this act is ghosted by queer sex: Maggie and Brick will “make the lie true” (165) in the bed once shared by that “pair of old bachelors” Jack Straw and Peter Ochello (15).⁵¹

As seen in Figure 17 above, here Maggie again serves to re-direct the spectator’s gaze to

⁵⁰ See D.A. Miller’s analysis of the power of suggestion and the damp “transparent” swimsuit material used to cover Taylor’s body in the film adaptation of *Suddenly, Last Summer*: “Announce an emperor in new clothes, and though he may be wearing nothing at all, everyone but the dullest child is capable of imagining their splendor; allege a bathing suit to turn transparent in the water, then for good measure actually wet it, and it will excite a vivid dream of denudation without ever having to disappear” (105). A different—and yet related—principle is at work by draping Powell’s muscular form with damp towels.

⁵¹ Williams was well known for being a chronic rewriter, and Brick and Maggie’s narrative shifts somewhat throughout the text’s history of development. However, only in the MGM adaptation of *Cat* does Brick decide to emphatically return Maggie’s affections: this was required under the Hays Code of the time. In both theatrical versions, Maggie forces Brick to return to a sexual relationship by confiscating his liquor. In the play’s originating short story, “Three Players of a Summer Game,” Brick begins an affair (the exact nature of which is never specified) with the widow of his nextdoor neighbour, Mrs. Grey. Nonetheless, even in the narrative’s first iteration, published in 1952, Margaret triumphs, and in what is likely the most decisive manner of all four versions: Mrs. Grey and her daughter move away from the town, and the last image the reader has of Brick he is one in which he is seated in a Pierce Arrow touring car driven by Maggie. The story concludes:

Margaret blew the car’s silver trumpet at every intersection. She leaned this way and that way, elevating or thrusting out an arm as she shouted gay greetings to people [...] calling them all by their familiar names, as if she were running for office in the town, while Brick nodded and grinned with senseless amiability behind her. It was exactly the way that some ancient conqueror, such as Casar or Alexander the Great or Hannibal, might have led in chains through a capital city the pince of a state newly conquered. (325)

the body of the actor playing Brick: in effect, she is a prism through which the audience is directed in order to view his queer and eroticized form. Williams overloads her lines in the sequence leading up to the famous titular line (“—What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof?—I wish I knew...” [31]) with veiled references to seduction and arousal: she questions whether Brick feels “fresh” after his shower (28), and, when Brick gives her his uninterested response (“Fresher...” [29]), Maggie importantly offers to give her husband “[a]n alcohol rub” (29). With the auditorium already echoing with the clinking of ice cubes in Brick’s lowball glass, the symbolic resonance of rubbing Brick’s exposed flesh with alcohol is potent: sexual arousal quashed by repression, frigidity, or aloofness—here a stand-in for male queerness—is again married to images of alcohol and fluidity.

After Brick’s rejection of her offer of a massage by stating that alcohol rubs are only effective “after a workout,” Maggie becomes more direct; the conversation quickly turns to how Brick has kept in “good shape” (29). This second seduction attempt in the space of two pages is met with again with an “*indifferen[t]*” response (29), and Maggie’s rumination upon Brick’s eerie and almost unearthly beauty leads her to cast her mind back to that other mysterious, supple, and ghostly body:

MARGARET. I always thought drinkin’ men lost their looks, but I was plainly mistaken.

BRICK. (*wryly*) Why, thanks, Maggie.

MARGARET. You’re the only drinkin’ man I know that it never seems t’ put fat on.

BRICK. I’m gettin’ softer, Maggie.

MARGARET. Well, sooner or later it was bound to soften you up. It was just

beginning to soften up Skipper when—[...] I'm sorry. I never could keep my fingers off a sore—I wish you *would* lose your looks.

(29-30; emphasis in the original)

For both the character and the audience, the gender binary is obvious and assumed: the masculine is hard, strong, and healthy, while the feminine—particularly any form of the queerly effeminate—is soft, weak, and unwell. (See, for example, the comment from Big Daddy, the play's *ne plus ultra* male figure, during Act II concerning masculine rigidity or hardness: “All my life I been like a doubled up fist [...]—Poundin’, smashin’, drivin’!” [92]) Without his cast, in both senses of the word, Brick risks crumbling. The Pollitt family works to foment solidity in their favourite son, even going so far as to name him “Brick,” but the character's fluid nature continually resists the familial prescriptions.

Separate drinkin’ men, who were strangely still together; men apart; men coming apart at the seams; men falling to pieces; rigid male bodies that have—or will—become less male, and/or soft. Maggie's lines interweave, and interrelate, deliquescent forms (“sof[t]” bodies), the erotic male form (Brick's muscled figure), and homosexual sex acts (the queer relationship between the two men). Maggie represents Brick as being strangely apart or separate from the other “drinkin’ men” she has known, and this strangeness is then linked with the image of another oddly malleable man: Skipper. Maggie's free associative slip replicates and underlines the horror with which the dominant heteronormative culture regards the queer logic at work in *Cat*. In attempting to differentiate between the two men, their similarities become paradoxically highlighted: problematically, she cannot seem to keep them straight. There is a softening not just of bodies, but also of the distinction between difference and sameness; hard, defined structures bleed into ones which are more fluid, and this fluidity is linked with an unarticulated, horrific

death. In *Cat* the figure of the alcoholic is undeniably linked to the figure of the queer: the alcohol addict is very much the aberrant sex addict, and vice versa.

As with his representation of Blanche in *Streetcar*, Williams floods *Cat* with a preponderance of mouth imagery related to Brick. He warns Maggie that her “voice” is “spoiling his liquor” (39), and “wipes [his mouth] *with the back of his hand*” (78) after she kisses him. Later he tells his father that Big Daddy “kept a tight mouth” about his fear of dying (91). In performance he repeatedly “*freshens his drink*” (99), and the actor playing the role is compelled to continually hold his glass to his lips. Even with his “little short trip[s]” to “Echo Spring” (88)—that is, the liquor cabinet—he has a “mouth full of cotton” (84) that must be wetted/whetted.

Williams’s textual emphasis upon Brick’s drinking means that the character is symbolically liquidated and, in a sense, boiled down, with one body part dominating all the others: he is all mouth, a monstrous hole constantly pulling fluid inwards. Another orifice is then added to the play’s imagery of drinking mouths in Brick’s excoriation of homosexuality during Act II: the anus. After Big Daddy argues that he began drinking after Skipper died, Brick begins a swift string of homophobic epithets: “Oh, *you* think so, too, you call me your son and a queer” (117). Williams’s dialogue further places emphasis upon this moment by directing the actor playing Brick to first shout the question (i.e. “YOU THINK SO, TOO? [117]). After Big Daddy’s animated “*Shhh!*”, Brick then asks the question again—twice. Of the approximately 470 lines Brick speaks in the original playing text of *Cat*, only four of them are in all capital letters.⁵²

Indeed, from a psychoanalytic perspective this sequence in the second act becomes all but anally fixated, from the double entendre in Big Daddy’s admission that he “knocked around in

⁵² These calculations are my own, and must remain approximations as a result of Williams’s frequent use of dashes in his lines of dialogue.

[his] time” and “bummed [...] bummed this country” in “hobo jungles and railroad Y’s and flophouses,” (115) to the interrupting appearance of Rev. Tooker, with his “*practised [...] smile, sincere as a bird call blown on a hustler’s whistle*” as he claims to look for the “gentleman’s lavatory” (116). The appearance of Tooker indisputably references the gay male subculture known as “cruising” (or, in the United Kingdom, “cottaging”) and alludes to male bathrooms as sites of queer sexuality—a point to which I shall return later in the chapter.

With the mention of the word “queer,” Brick “*is transformed*,” and importantly, “*hurls his [liquor] glass across the room*” (117). While in the earlier *Streetcar* the playwright had relied upon veiled allusions and euphemisms in order to telegraph to the audience Blanche’s secret sexual fears and obsessions, with *Cat Williams* allows himself for the first time to explicitly name queer sex acts in dialogue:

BRICK. You think me an’ Skipper did, did, did!—*sodomy!*—together? [...] You think we did dirty things between us, Skipper an’—

BIG DADDY. Why are you shouting like that? Why are you—

BRICK. —Me, is that what you think of Skipper, is that—

BIG DADDY. —so excited? I don’t think nothing. I don’t know nothing. I’m simply telling you what—

BRICK. You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men? [...]

Straw? Ochello? A couple of— [...] —ducking sissies? Queers? (117-18)

Brick’s vitriolic “*volcanic*” eruption here is surely one of the most significant moments in the play (117); the character’s status as an alcoholic enables him to state aloud the sex perversion that audience members are otherwise left to assume is at the centre of the play’s narrative: anal intercourse or sodomy. The dialogue implies a correlation between the character’s oral and anal

behaviours.

Via the explosive Act-II argument between Big Daddy and Brick about “drinkin’ men,” the queer body is reduced through synecdoche to one consuming (mouth/anus) orifice that ceaselessly sucks in—and expels—liquid; in effect, Williams has dramatized critic Leo Bersani’s theorizing of cultural anxieties surrounding male anal receptivity.⁵³ The queer alcoholic’s mouth and anus are conflated into one bodily site associated with an “insatiable, unstoppable”—and destructive—effeminate sexuality (“Rectum” 222). To “start drinking” (117) from Echo Spring, as Big Daddy correctly explains Brick has done after Skipper’s death, is to associate with dirty things.

The direct representation of both alcoholism and queerness was shocking and completely exceptional on the American stage during the 1950s. In fact, this correlated representation of the queer alcoholic was so shocking that the original Broadway premiere of *Cat*, directed by Elia Kazan, minimized the eroticized queerness of the play. While tracing and analyzing the different versions of the script for *Cat* would require a dissertation-length project of its own (see, for example, the *Cat* chapter in Paller’s *Gentleman Callers*), the psychodynamics of Kazan’s dramaturgical suggestions to Williams are undeniable. In his “Note of Explanation” after the collected works, Williams describes how Kazan had three distinct reservations about the original script: he felt that Margaret should be “more clearly sympathetic” to the audience; he felt that Brick should “undergo some apparent mutation” as a result of the “virtual vivisection” he endures in Act II; and, perhaps most importantly, he felt that Big Daddy was “too vivid and

⁵³ If we were to apply a more explicitly psychoanalytic lens to the synecdoche of one consuming orifice, the mouth and anus are here superimposed upon one another as erotigenized rims. These melded rims have strong resonances with the Lacanian notion of the “*vel*,” or a “functioning rim [...] with a vectorial direction” (Lacan 209). In observing this concatenation of signifiers, the spectator as subject performs the blurring of boundaries. This may serve as another phrasing of where I have elsewhere written of the spectator performing identification and dis/identification simultaneously.

important a character” to vanish from the play after the second act (*Plays* 977). Each of Kazan’s suggestions required a shift *away* from the queer relation of Brick to Maggie; there was an obvious unease with the final act of the play remaining focused upon Big Daddy’s demise and the emotionally fraught relationship between the married couple.⁵⁴ This movement away from the relation reaches its apotheosis in the Richard Brooks film adaptation, which concludes with Maggie happily running up the stairs for cheerful congress with Brick (see Palmer and Bray). This is not to argue that the later revised versions of the playscript lacked creative improvements, but rather that the original script was deemed lacking because its emphasis upon the queer and alcoholic desires of “weak, beautiful people” (*Plays* 976) were viewed as too explicit. When heterosexual spectators such as Kazan were able to consciously apprehend their own voyeurism and transference, they judged the work an aesthetic failure and pushed it away.

The actors cast in the roles of Maggie and Brick in the Broadway premiere, Barbara Bel Geddes and Ben Gazzara, were decidedly buttoned-down. Both Bel Geddes and Gazzara read on stage as almost grave, and Costume Designer Lucinda Ballard’s designs accentuated the actors’ earnest appearances. Figure 18, for example, depicts Bel Geddes and Gazzara in a sequence from Act I: Bel Geddes’s party dress is quite demure, with a high ruffled neckline, and a hemline that obviously descends well below the knee. Her slip, as viewed in different production stills on file at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, was similarly far less revealing than in later productions—including the famous combination bustier-négligée worn by Taylor in the 1958 film adaptation by Richard Brooks. Taylor’s well-known garment was remarkably tight.⁵⁵

Gazzara does not fare any better: while the “*white towel-cloth robe*” he is wearing in the

⁵⁴ As Arrell notes in his article, Kazan had directed Robert Anderson’s *Tea and Sympathy* “shortly before” he directed *Cat*; in the former “a woman ‘cures’ a teen-age boy of homosexuality” (69).

⁵⁵ It has been documented that in the later *BUTTERFIELD 8*, Taylor was actually sewn into her white slip costume (Salon Staff, “Paglia on Taylor”). It is highly likely the same technique was used in the MGM adaptation of *Cat*.



Fig. 18: Barbara Bel Geddes as Maggie and Ben Gazzara as Brick in the Broadway Premiere of *Cat*.

still is admittedly called for in the script (32), it is distinctly boxy and unbecoming, and reaches to well below his mid-calf. Even taking into consideration that women's and men's fashions were much more conservative during the mid-1950s, the costume design for the original Broadway production was particularly unflattering. Under Kazan's direction, Bel Geddes and Gazzara, already arguably miscast in a text as sultry and sticky as *Cat*, were emphatically desexualized. The misdirection of desire was completely missing; audience members could not be

redirected to the male body as erotic object once it was entirely concealed in a thick, shapeless robe or full-length wide-leg pajamas (see Fig. 19). The text's meanings are lost in Kazan and Ballard's interpretation.

The next major revival of the play, director Michael Kahn's 1974 production for the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Connecticut featured Elizabeth Ashley and Keir Dullea in the roles of Maggie and Brick. This production was noteworthy, as according to



Fig. 19: Ben Gazzara and Burl Ives as Big Daddy in Director Elia Kazan's 1955 Premiere.



Fig. 20: Keir Dullea as Brick and Elizabeth Ashley as Maggie in the 1974 Revival of *Cat*.

Ashley, Williams was heavily involved in the rehearsal process, and the cast was allowed unprecedented access to the original notes and drafts of the play (qtd. in Folliard)⁵⁶: the result was a rewritten third act, along with “other substantial revisions” (Rev. ed. *Cat* 12). A mere glance at stills from Kahn’s production (see Figs. 20 and 21) shows the effects of the beginnings of the sexual revolution and gay liberation in the West on cultural texts: the costumes which the actors are wearing are obviously more provocative than the original production which took place

⁵⁶ Ashley humourously notes how the playwright would arrive at “rehearsal carrying Brioni bags overflowing with papers. He’d pull out an old draft and say ‘Let’s try it this way today and see how that goes’” (qtd. in Folliard).



Fig. 21: The Provocative Costumes of Director Michael Kahn's American Shakespeare Theatre Production.

less than two decades earlier. Though not as eroticized as O'Connell and Powell were in Holmes's twenty-first century vision, the queer seduction of the audience member has become more insistent, more forward. Figure 20 depicts Dullea sporting a loose, dark robe which gapes open at least a foot above the knee, while Ashley's slip enhances her statuesque beauty. Unsurprisingly, the length of her garment has come to mimic Taylor's short skirt from the film

adaptation. Figure 21 is an image of Dullea as he would spend most of the three acts of *Cat*—wearing tapered silk pajama bottoms as well as a loose, almost jacket-like pajama top which was crucially *left open* for much of the play’s duration: the actor’s chest and clavicle are clearly visible in the photo.⁵⁷ The misdirection and frustration of desire is emphasized by the more explicit arousing nature of designer Jane Greenwood’s costumes; in 2011 Holmes and her design team would raise hemlines even further.⁵⁸

However, as unfortunate as the priggish and wrongheaded directorial choices made for the original Broadway production were, one can perhaps understand what Kazan and Williams were faced with during the cruelly homophobic and anti-sex period when the play premiered. In his *A History of the Pulitzer Prize Plays*, John L. Toohey notes the difficulty of presenting such provocative material in 1955:

This Tennessee Williams play [*Cat*], which embedded the phrase “Big Daddy” in our language, spared absolutely nothing in its frankness, particularly in sexual matters, and it came in for some heavy criticism on that score.

[...Commissioner of Licences Edward T.] McCaffrey went to see the play because of a complaint by the Children’s Aid Society.

At a backstage conference, he was assured that the four child actors (“no-neck monsters” was the happy description Williams had for them in the play) were invariably safe in the dressing rooms while the saltier portions of the dialogue

⁵⁷ For more information, see the videorecorded copy of the Kahn production in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

⁵⁸ Scarlett Johansson, who recently starred in a Broadway revival directed by Rob Ashford, curiously contradicts herself when questioned on the topic of Maggie’s erotic allure by the online editions of *The Daily Mail* and *The Huffington-Post*: strangely it is both “overplayed and over-appreciated [...] such an unimportant part of the story” and also “already there” and “[in] the circumstance [...] and the settling [*sic*] and the words.” Johansson’s confused and contradictory remarks signal how the queer desires on display in the text have captivated both critics and audiences since its premiere. How can such frustration and misdirection of desire be unimportant to the story when in fact it *is* the story? Ironically, the very title of the piece references Taylor’s *négligée* (Betiku and Carpenter).

were sputtering onstage. (268)

The fact that McCaffrey was so concerned about the child actors witnessing the explicit dialogue that he had a special “conference” with the production team speaks to extreme cultural anxiety about queer art, noted in the work of critics such as Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman—not to mention fears of that age-old *bête noire*, the antitheatrical prejudice (see Barish)—both of which persist to this day.

The initial reviewers of *Cat* themselves were not immune to these “saltier portions” of dialogue. John Chapman of *The Daily News*, while conceding that *Cat* had “vivid characters” and “a great deal of fine theatre,” ultimately concluded that the play was another of the Williams’s “drama[s] of *frustration*” with a “considerable amount of *dirty talk* in it” which was “mere boyish bravado and rather pointless” (“Cat” 343-44; emphasis added). George Jean Nathan, a reviewer for *The Journal-American*, went further:

I am no psychiatrist and don’t know what Tennessee Williams, with his almost maniacal preoccupation with the more emphatic impulses and sensational aspects of sex, is trying to prove to himself. [...H]e seems to be trying awfully hard to conceal from himself and from us his immaturity and torment. (qtd. in Toohey 272)

These more emphatic or pointless impulses Williams’s plays present, which Chapman, Nathan, and the majority of their contemporaries were so dismissive of, are at the very core of both human life and art, and the sensational aspects of so-called dirty subjects such as queer and alcoholic desires are precisely what make *Cat* such a powerful work. The fact that over the course of its run-time critics and audiences came to recognize Brick as, in Chapman’s succinct words, “a drunkard and queer,” is what has given the play its lasting power (qtd. in Paller 101).

After all, it is self-evident to observe that Williams's direct representation was new, controversial, and much remarked upon by critics; what is crucial is to examine the reasons why this might be so. As I have previously pointed out, Williams's use of queer alcoholic figures such as Blanche and Brick demonstrates the erosion of boundaries. The settings, in which the alcoholic exists queerly apart from the other characters, are themselves symbolically liminal: Stanley and Stella's apartment at 632 Elysian Fields and Brick and Maggie's room at Big Daddy's plantation home are both intimate "bed-sitting-room" spaces in which privacy melts away (*Cat* 15). As Blanche ruefully and frequently notes about the Kowalskis's New Orleans flat, "there's no door between the two rooms" (256), which means "there's no privacy [t]here" (251); stage directions in Scene One stress that the spaces are "*not too clearly defined*" (248). Brick and Maggie's room is constantly infiltrated by family members through the "two pairs of very wide doors" which connect the galleria to the main space (15). Savran elaborates by noting that "[f]rom the very beginning of the play, the private interactions of Maggie and Brick (in act 1) and Brick and Big Daddy (in act 2) are almost continually invaded or interrupted by the various comings and goings, the screaming, songs, and laughter of Big Mama, Gooper, Mae, and the 'no-neck monsters'" (103).⁵⁹ The penetrability of Maggie and Brick's private space is particularly evident in production stills of the play, such as Holmes's production for the Shaw. In the upper left-hand corner of Figure 17, above, for example, a tall set of French doors yawns open, revealing the "*fair summer sky*" (15) and the railing of the gallery. While certainly pleasant to look at, the half-open doors also signal in a vaguely ominous fashion: the viewer is given the sense that anyone could intrude during Brick and Maggie's private moments and conversations

⁵⁹ Rather than view the liminal space Brick inhabits in terms of the liquefying of boundaries, Savran provides two different glosses on the room: as both "what Roland Barthes calls the Racinian Antechamber: a space between, a room in which one waits, a 'site of language,' of debate, that stands in opposition to the turbulence outside" and as "the space of the *closet*, of the open secret, a chamber in which the reign of hom(m)o-sexual patriarchy was conceived and delivered" (104).

and disrupt them—and, in fact, many characters do.

Even when Blanche and Brick retreat to the bathrooms of their respective spaces, there is an emphasis placed upon the permeable, the fluid. Blanche is heard singing songs awash with liquid imagery about “sky blue water” and “cardboard sea[s]” (270, 260); the men gather together to take the inebriated Stanley and “*lead him to the bathroom*” (305); he then “*comes out of the bathroom dripping water and still in his clinging wet polka dot drawers*” (305); during one of Blanche’s many “soaks [...] in a hot tub” (358) the stage directions note that “[i]n the bathroom the water goes on loud; little breathless cries and peals of laughter are heard as if a child were frolicking in the tub” (362). (In 2010, Polish director Kzysztow Warlikowski sought to capitalize upon this thematic permeability in his loose adaptation of the play *A Streetcar* [Fr: *Un Tramway*]: the piece was entirely set in an enormous washroom.) Similarly, the first sound effect in *Cat* is of Brick taking a shower, and several moments in the text emphasize the small size and close proximity of the bathroom to the main room, such as Maggie’s line of reassurance “He can hear you, Big Mama” (44), and Brick’s question “Has Big Mama gone?” which is “*call[ed] out*” to his wife once the “*bathroom door opens a little*” (48).

The bathroom, that space which is the most protected, separate, unmentionable, and cloistered away, becomes in Williams’s plays a penetrated and socialized zone. As mentioned earlier, the specter of queer sex haunts the bathroom, particularly in the case of *Cat*. In her study *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination*, Sheila L. Cavanagh describes the abject horror with which heteronormative majorities view and fantasize about the space, with its possibilities of non-normative sexual acts:

Sex in public not only reorganizes divisions between private and public; it invites us to question the nature of gender positions solidified through sexual

prohibitions. Body boundaries are precarious when orifices open and fluids shed.

[...] When bodies intermingle and touch, caress, penetrate, and trade in culturally abject fluids, normative gender identifications are sometimes upset. Nothing is or remains as it was. (173)

It is inconsequential that, in the case of Williams's plays, the "sex" or dirty acts occurring in the bathrooms just offstage are entirely imaginary. The phantasm and/or psychic threat of queer activities is enough to disrupt the heterosexual matrix and warrant cultural policing. The dominant order requires separations, hard and firm divides, clear demarcations. Building on the work of cultural critic S. R. Munt, Robyn Luckhurst has referred to bathrooms as "liminal zones," and notes that "it is difficult to speak of liminal zones. These zones, and their articulation in language, may cause us to feel uncertain, uncomfortable, confused and/or maybe repulsed. Liminal zones are often unspeakable" (131).

How unspeakable, and yet how thrilling! Since both queerness and alcoholism are publicly performed conditions, the dominant order must witness and diagnose them, even if it means travelling to intimate spaces which are traditionally, to quote the cruel nickname the Laurel soldiers give Blanche, "Out-of-Bounds" (361). By placing Blanche and Brick inside a room dedicated to both the elimination of wastes such as urine, feces, and vomit and the cleansing of perspiring bodies in tubs and showers, Williams's texts again symbolically associate the queer alcoholic with abject death. The figure is one constantly surrounded by scum, excrement, and other foul waters because of its dual addiction: both elements of excess draw the character back to the intimate space for evacuation and purification.

Williams's texts therefore depict the queer alcoholic body as one that is terrifyingly porous. When hard masculine bodies melt away into feminine softness, what is to be done? I

argue that this focus upon the queer alcoholic body's liminality constitutes it as a dangerous and exciting "leaky vessel"; as spectators and readers we are lead to the bodies of so-called straight characters such as Blanche and Brick only to have them shown to us as excessive, destabilizing, and mutable. If Hamlet's dictum that art's purpose is to "hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" (3.2.21-2), then surely what Williams's queer alcoholics reflect back to us as spectators is at once fearful and arousing: the possibility that we, too, might become uncontrollable and unspeakable. After viewing Williams's plays, what one is finally left with is the actor's liminal, excitable, frustrated—and frustrating—body. And who could claim to have never been betrayed, at one point or another, by one's own bodily cravings and desires?

Chapter III:

Ripped to the Tits: The Figure From Queer to Gay

I. Peeling Our Labels: Edward Albee's Early Work and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

It must always circle back around to Elizabeth Taylor—ever the raven-haired lightning rod—or in critic and scholar Camille Paglia's characteristically rapid-fire growl, that "luscious, opulent, ripe fruit!" (Salon Staff, "Paglia on Taylor"). When Taylor, then thirty-three, was cast in the role of Martha in the film adaptation of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*⁶⁰, with director Mike Nichols helming the production in his feature film debut, playwright Edward Albee expressed concern over the decision: "[...] I was even a little apprehensive about the actual casting. Especially Elizabeth Taylor" (Flanagan 50). When speaking about this apprehension, Albee went on to claim that his concern came not from the fact that Elizabeth Taylor was starring alongside her then equally famous husband, Richard Burton, but rather from the fact that it was implausible for the actress to portray a fifty-two year old woman.⁶¹ There is, of course, no way to verify the source of Albee's personal apprehension about Taylor portraying one of his characters—and furthermore, even if this real "reason" for Albee's feelings about casting were to somehow appear, it is doubtful it would shed light on little more than Albee's already well-documented craving for full artistic, even auteurist, control of his works. Nevertheless, there is much more than meets the eye in this particular comment by the notoriously cantankerous playwright. In a frequently referenced interview with the *Paris Review*, the playwright is pressed

⁶⁰ Hereafter referred to within the text as *Virginia Woolf*.

⁶¹ Earlier in the interview, Albee uneasily notes that he "assumed they would put Doris Day in it, and maybe Rock Hudson" (Flanagan 50). Given Rock Hudson's status as a closeted gay man, and the coded gay references at work in a film like *Pillow Talk* (1959), the remark is retrospectively particularly humorous. For more on the semiotics of Rock Hudson's body, see Richard Meyer's essay "Rock Hudson's Body" in Fuss's collection *Inside/Out*. For an examination of Doris Day's connections with queer theory, see Eric Savoy's "'That Ain't All She Ain't': Doris Day and Queer Performativity" in Ellis Hanson's *Outtakes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film*.

on a critical interpretation that was to gain traction in the years following the 1962 Broadway premiere of what remains his most famous work: the assertion that *Virginia Woolf*, for all its emphasis on straight men, straight women, and the potential quagmires involved in bearing and raising children, was, in fact, a play about four homosexual men. Addressing what colleague and interviewer William Flanagan calls “the oft-repeated evaluation of [*Virginia Woolf*] as a play about four homosexuals who are, for the sake of convention, disguised as heterosexual,” Albee’s demeanor—which until this point during the interview has been rather polished, professional, and cool—cracks: “This comment first appeared around the time the play was produced. I was fascinated by it. [...] The facts are simple: *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was written about two heterosexual couples. If I had wanted to write a play about four homosexuals, I would have done so” (Flanagan 52).

And there one has it, straight, as it were, from the horse’s mouth: Albee is insistent that his play is *not* a piece in which two gay male couples are semiotically coded as two heterosexual couples. In the following two and half lengthy paragraphs, Albee is quick to sneer at this evaluation of his play. He bitingly remarks that he is “sure that all the actresses from Uta Hagen to Elizabeth Taylor who’ve played the role of Martha would be absolutely astonished to learn they’ve been playing men,” and that the “ultimate judgment of a work of art, whether it be a masterpiece or a lesser event, must be solely in terms of its artistic success and not on *Freudian guesswork*” (Flanagan 53; emphasis added).

Guesswork is indeed a perilous thing when it comes to dramatic criticism, and the playwright has here skillfully and slyly guarded his work against interpretive frameworks (namely, that of psychoanalytic and semiotic approaches to, and gay-centric re-evaluations of, literature) that he finds particularly lacking in depth and coherence. Through an appeal to what

one (should one be feeling generous) might deem “common sense objectivity,” the playwright characteristically ensures that readers of the interview follow streams of logic which appear self-evident: *Virginia Woolf* has four characters listed in its dramatis personae, two of which are men and two of which are women; and, directors and producers have (usually) complied with the playwright’s instructions when making their casting choices for all previous productions.⁶² Martha, Albee asserts, is a *woman*, and therefore it follows that historically famous actresses⁶³ such as Elizabeth Taylor and Uta Hagen have played the role.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter II (*vis à vis* the meticulous work of Miller), representations of Elizabeth Taylor onscreen during the late 1950s and early 1960s have an immense symbolic complexity. This symbolic complexity, of course, does have something to do with Taylor’s status as a gay male icon, for during the height of her career she was indeed to become a type of screen goddess worshipped by gay men in the grand tradition of actresses such as Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Ava Gardner, and Mae West. But the key to the symbolic importance of Elizabeth Taylor’s appearance in the film adaptation of *Virginia Woolf* does not *only* reside in her status as a gay icon; rather, her appearance onscreen in the film points to the very problem which Albee and Flanagan discuss in the *Paris Review*. For in applying their interpretive faculties to Albee’s play, a number of critics and audience members *did* believe the

⁶² In fact, as Stephen J. Bottoms carefully details in his thorough *Albee: Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, after the hidden gay subtext interpretation became increasingly reported by mainstream media outlets such as *Variety* after the film’s release, producer Richard Barr and Albee decided to alter the play’s permission contracts “for both professional and amateur performing rights, which stipulated that all the roles must be played by actors of the prescribed gender” (107). Bottom’s text is invaluable for any serious critic or student of the play, as it provides detailed summaries of five well-known commercial stagings of *Virginia Woolf*.

To my knowledge, the only professional performance of *Virginia Woolf* which has cross-cast the roles through the use of drag was produced by New York-based director Kevin Maloney in his “Fractured Classics” Series. Maloney was able to avoid litigation on a technicality: the cease and desist letter from Albee’s legal representation arrived one day too late (Gobert, Personal Interview).

⁶³ Though I have been tempted to comply with contemporary style guidelines that suggest gender neutral nouns for professions (i.e. the use of “actor” for performers of any and all gender identities), due to this chapter’s focus upon queer codes and performance I rely upon the traditional distinction of “actress” and “actor” for cis-gendered performers such as Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

play, in fact, to be a story about four gay men. In this sense, then, Albee's frustration with Flanagan's vocalizing of this interpretation is understandable.

In the interest of being direct, the purpose of this chapter is not to support the claim that George and Martha and Nick and Honey are "really" double-coded gay men, and that this will become clear if we as readers and spectators are able to merely correctly decode the textual signs. Rather, it is to explore what occurs when readings of queerness are *conflated* with gayness: the crypto-gay reading of *Virginia Woolf* misreads queerness as gayness, resulting in an interpretive rupture. And as I have attempted to demonstrate with my analysis of Williams's *Streetcar* and *Cat*, the best method of exploring this rupture is through examining the body of the queer in conjunction with the thematics of representations of alcohol addiction. The second section of the chapter, which relies upon Mart Crowley's text as an exegetical tool, emphasizes how critics have attempted to gloss over these ruptures. Their explanations show us the relative simplicity of the gay alcoholic when placed alongside the queer one; the former lacks the latter's dis/identifying power to truly excite and terrify audience members.

Before delving into an analysis of the queer relations of alcoholic bodies in *Virginia Woolf*, however, it bears asking: how did this reading—which Albee claims to have been so "fascinated by"—come about? What would drive critics and audience members to the conclusion that the subtext of *Virginia Woolf* is a specifically "gay" one? In David M. Halperin's recent *How to Be Gay*, the critic puts forth what initially seems like a persuasive argument. *Virginia Woolf*, the author argues, is a "crypto-gay play"(21); to prove this status, Halperin points to a well-known section of the play in which Albee makes a carefully veiled intertextual reference. Precisely ten lines into *Virginia Woolf*'s first act, as George and Martha are meant to be returning home from the "faculty part[y]"(New American 28) which Martha's father has organized, the

following dialogue occurs:

MARTHA. (*Looks about the room. Imitates Bette Davis*) What a dump.

Hey, what's that from? "What a dump!"

GEORGE. How would I know what...

MARTHA. Aw, come on! What's it from? *You* know...

GEORGE. ...Martha...

MARTHA. WHAT'S IT FROM, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE?

GEORGE. (*Wearily*) What's what from?

MARTHA. I just told you; I just did it. "What a dump!" Hunh? What's that from?

GEORGE. I haven't the faintest idea what...

MARTHA. Dumbbell! It's from some goddamn Bette Davis picture...
some goddamn Warner Brothers epic... (New American 4-5)

According to Halperin, this allusion is a classic, theatricalized instance of the gay male practice of "selectively appropriat[ing], recod[ing], and recirculat[ing] certain bits, often quite obscure bits, of mainstream culture" (24). As the scene continues, Martha continues to berate George during the next two and a half pages of dialogue for being unable to remember which film the "now-classic" Davis line comes from (Halperin 21). While mocking George's forgetfulness ("Nobody's asking you to remember every goddamn Warner Brothers epic...just one!" [New American 5]), she herself struggles to summarize the plot of the unnamed film:

MARTHA. Bette Davis gets peritonitis in the end...she's got this big black fright wig she wears all through the picture and she gets peritonitis, and she's married to Joseph Cotten or something....

GEORGE. ...*Somebody*...

MARTHA. ...*somebody*...and she wants to go to Chicago all the time, 'cause she's in love with that actor with the scar...But she gets sick [...] This picture...Bette Davis comes home from a hard day at the grocery store...

GEORGE. She works in a grocery store?

MARTHA. She's a housewife; she buys things...and she comes home with the groceries, and she walks into the modest living room of the modest cottage modest Joseph Cotten has set her up in....

GEORGE. Are they married?

MARTHA. (*Impatiently*) Yes. They're married. To each other. Cluck! And she comes in, and she looks around, and she puts her groceries down, and she says, "What a dump!"

GEORGE. (*Pause*) Oh.

MARTHA. (*Pause*) She's discontent. (New American 5-7)

I quote at length from this first section of Albee's play in order to demonstrate that Halperin's assertion that *Virginia Woolf* contains coded references to gay cultural (and importantly, *theatrical*) icons such as Bette Davis is certainly correct. Readers, and more to the point, spectators of Albee's play who are familiar with the gay subculture surrounding the film performances of Bette Davis may grasp the reference Martha makes to the campy 1949 film *Beyond the Forest*. In Halperin's terms, Martha's citation of Bette Davis's performance as the film's bitchy heroine Rosa Moline functions as a "failed attempt at gay initiation" (23); in other words, she attempts to instruct George in a basic working knowledge of the ins and outs of diva worship. In describing the gendered relation at work in this failed attempt, the author notes dryly,

“It’s actually a bit difficult to imagine a straight couple having that conversation, though it comes off plausibly enough on stage” (23).

It is this interpretive “difficulty,” of which Halperin writes, in viewing George and Martha and Nick and Honey as heterosexual couples that is so telling. While this opening citation to what Halperin calls the “exaggerated performance, or reperformance” (23) of Davis’s line is the only example of the play’s crypto-gayness the scholar dissects in *How to Be Gay*, there are certainly others. Another famously loaded, and theatrical, reference—this time connected with the melodramatic, hyperfeminine, and exaggerated performance style of actor Vivien Leigh during the encounter with the Mexican Woman in Scene Ten of *Streetcar*—occurs in Act III when George “[a]ppear[s] in the doorway, the snapdragons covering his face” (New American 206). The stage directions note he speaks in a “hideously cracked falsetto,” stating to Nick and Martha “Flores; flores para los muertos. Flores” (New American 206). The allusion to *Streetcar* camps Leigh’s portrayal of Blanche and satirizes her acting as antiquated: it’s a coded moment of gay humour, to be sure.

Nonetheless, here Albee’s conscious and intentional citation of Leigh’s exaggerated performance as Blanche also operates on a different level: the dialogue is already haunted by the destabilizing theatricality of the queer alcoholic figure via its reference to Blanche’s breakdown. I contend that it is not that coded references to gay subcultural practices such as diva worship and camp reperformance do not exist in *Virginia Woolf*; undeniably, they do.⁶⁴ But nestled below the rich and detailed intertextual allusions Albee makes in his play—some of which *are* coded as

⁶⁴ On the question of gay subtext, Bottoms makes a rare slip, claiming that “[t]here is almost nothing in the play itself which could support this ‘four homosexuals’ interpretation of *Virginia Woolf*,” and, following Albee’s claim, attributes the popularity of the interpretation to reviewers’ “general unwillingness” to accept George and Martha’s relationship as a “real, heterosexual marriage” (101-102). I contend that this isn’t accurate: while the signifiers in the play are predominantly queer, the use of the Davis allusion is too closely associated with the gay subculture of diva worship and the aesthetics of camp to be insignificant. Five full pages of opening dialogue and stage action devoted to an obscure Bette Davis reference cannot qualify as almost nothing.

“gay”—is a queer structuring of gendered and sexualized relations. Albee’s play presents a challenge to the spectator in terms of rethinking the consuming, performing bodies that appear onstage. In accepting this challenge, critics (and, no doubt, many audience members) laboured to make sense of these queer relations using the only interpretive framework that seemed applicable: they distilled the dynamics depicted in *Virginia Woolf* down to a “gay” spirit or essence. Albee himself scornfully makes reference to this framework in his interview with William Flanagan: he claims that the film critic for *Newsweek* told him a gay subtextual analysis of the two couples in *Virginia Woolf* was “the only way he could live with the play [...] as a valid examination of heterosexual life” (53).⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the playwright’s combination of gay allusions and queer power structuration invite the very interpretive confusion he derides. Albee may very well be concerned with representations of individuals “get[ting] at” the “marrow,” to use George’s well-known phrase, of human existence (New American 225). And yet paradoxically, relations between individuals in *Virginia Woolf* show just how “sloshable” (New American 225) things can actually get.

While Albee has vehemently denounced what Halperin has described as the crypto-gay reading of his play, he certainly cannot be taken to task for a lack of gay representation on the American stage in the days before gay liberation (e.g. the Stonewall riots of 1969). Because of *Virginia Woolf*’s meteoric rise in popularity after its premiere, as well as the enormous influence the play now holds as a cultural touchstone, it is tempting to overlook the fact that Albee had already openly portrayed a gay male character onstage before the 1960s had even begun. Widely considered his first major success, *The Zoo Story* originally played in translation in Berlin’s Schiller Theater Werkstatt during 1959; it was then presented in New York City at the

⁶⁵ In this section of the interview with Flanagan, Albee caustically notes that he had a letter sent to the unnamed *Newsweek* critic “suggesting he check his information before printing such speculations” (53).

Provincetown Playhouse the following year. The play is a type of artistic study for the larger and more layered *Virginia Woolf*, but with two crucial differences: firstly, the former lacks the latter's booze-fueled theatrical "game" antics, and secondly, the shorter work contains both a dynamic of queer eroticism *and* a character explicitly categorized as homosexual. A dark one-act featuring a deadly encounter between two men in Central Park, *The Zoo Story* unspools its thriller-like plot with terrifying speed. The text's focus is a random meeting on a Sunday afternoon between Peter, a business executive in a small publishing house (19) and Jerry, an enigmatic—and, as we witness throughout the play, increasingly disturbed—man in his late thirties (14). Albee has called *The Zoo Story* his "first play" and dismissed his previous work as "junk, all of it" ("How *The Zoo Story* Became a Two-Act Play" n.p.). It is a sophisticated piece, especially for a young playwright, and it asks complicated questions about sexuality and gender in America at the dawn of the 60s' sexual revolution.⁶⁶ Jerry's dialogue, however, makes his dominant sexual orientation (or sexual identity) readily apparent. The character himself describes his erotic life thusly:

I wonder if it's sad that I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put?...make love to anybody more than once. Once; that's it....Oh, wait; for a week and a half, when I was fifteen and I hang my head in shame that puberty was late...I was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer... (*Very fast*)...queer, queer, queer...with bells ringing, banners snapping in the wind. And for those eleven days, I met at least twice a day with the park superintendent's son...a Greek boy, whose birthday was the same as mine, except he was a year older. I think I was very much in

⁶⁶ Albee himself proudly notes in his foreword to the revised *Edward Albee's At Home at the Zoo* that the play has enjoyed "49 years of frequent performance and general acceptance" ("How *The Zoo Story* Became a Two-Act Play" n.p.).

love...maybe just with sex. But that was the jazz of a very special hotel, wasn't it? (*Collected* 24; ellipses in the original)

Albee's use of the word "queer" here is quite specific: it is clearly intended not in any of its current, multiple definitions within queer studies, but rather in the strictly perjorative sense of a gay man—in other words, as the term was actually used in common American parlance at the time of the play's premiere.

In fact, Jerry's sexual history uses so many "recognizable" signifiers of gayness that, from a current perspective in history, it borders on laughable stereotype: the character's dissatisfying and bizarre sexual relationships with the "little ladies" (presumably female prostitutes); Jerry's infatuation with the Greek boy, whose very ethnicity hints at sodomitical behaviour between men during antiquity; and his inflated, borderline compulsive, sexual appetite. Despite Jerry's obvious gayness, however, Peter himself is at pains to explain away this speech, and allow his new acquaintance the socially sanctioned cover of heterosexuality. "Well, it seems perfectly simple to me..." he begins; but, as always, Jerry interrupts him, snarling, "Look! Are you going to tell me to get married and have parakeets?" (*Collected* 24) This exchange is symptomatic of their dynamic with one another during the course of the play: Jerry, despite his instability and volatile nature, remains one step ahead of Peter at all times. He also crucially comments on coded gay signifiers—just in case certain audience members might have missed them. For example, towards the end of the piece Jerry comments on how gay men, conceivably both closeted *and* those with "banners snapping," use sections of the park as cruising locations:

JERRY. Peter, do I annoy you, or confuse you?

PETER. (*Lightly*) Well, I must confess that this wasn't the kind of afternoon I'd

anticipated.

JERRY. *You mean, I'm not the gentleman you were expecting.*

PETER. I wasn't expecting anybody.

JERRY. No, I don't imagine you were. (*Collected* 24; emphasis added)

Despite Jerry's assertion that he has dalliances with women (though never with the same one twice), his entire encounter with Peter is threaded through with a homoeroticism that knits together the text as a whole. Moreover, the homoerotic charge between Peter and Jerry was so semiotically legible, and has historically read so easily and cleanly to directors, actors, and audiences alike, that Albee took the unprecedented step of rewriting the play a full fifty years after it opened in Berlin. *The Zoo Story* is now preceded by a second one-act, titled *Homelife*, creating the omnibus *Edward Albee's At Home at the Zoo*.⁶⁷ The ever-micromanaging Albee has since refused to license professional productions of the original play on its own (Chessen). Importantly, Albee's decision shifts the focus of the piece away from the gay Jerry and onto the ostensibly straight characters. Though, as I shall briefly explain now, the marriage relationship at the heart of *Edward Albee's At Home* is far from normative, a depiction which retrospectively mirrors Martha and George's perverse role-play and queer phantasies.

In *Homelife*, we learn that Peter does indeed have a wife: her name is Ann, and the entirety of the act involves the two characters having a labyrinthine discussion. Given Albee's longstanding preoccupation with eroticized bodies, it isn't long before the characters are symbolically reduced to dissected, gendered, and sexualized parts. Ann reveals her fears that she will contract breast cancer and considers a double mastectomy ("I was thinking about thinking about it—about what it would be like to think about it" [20]), while Peter bizarrely and comically confesses that he "think[s his] circumcision is going away" (26). Nonetheless, this dialogue is all

⁶⁷ Hereafter shortened to *Edward Albee's At Home*, with all subsequent citations taken from the 2008 edition.

so much louche buildup to the ultimate revelation of this first section—the disclosure that leads Peter to take his fateful walk into Central park—that Ann feels that a certain unrestrained, bestial desire is lacking from their marriage:

All the things that fucking entails, or *can* entail—aggressive, brutal maybe, two people who’ve known each other for years—slept together for years—suddenly behaving like strangers, like people who’ve just met in a bar and gone to the motel next door to hammer it all out, to fuck for the sake of fucking. [...]

The moment! Two strangers! The moment! There are people rise to that—sink to it, if you like—*rise* to that, become animals, *strangers*, with nothing less than impure simple lust for one another. (47; emphasis in the original)

Ann’s voiced feelings foment in Peter a memory in which he remembers being “very bad,” which he then relates to his wife, who listens with “[e]ars sharp” (48), as if “[e]ntranced” (51). In this tale from his college days, Peter explains how he was a pledge for a fraternity, and attended what he describes as “the sex party” (49). Crucially, this sexual encounter occurs under the influence of “*a lot of liquor, grass, other stuff*” (49; emphasis added). A girl from one of the sororities expressed sexual interest in him, and Peter is shockingly candid about what occurred between them next:

PETER. Well, I thought she *would* [enjoy oral sex], and I was spreading her a little, and she said, “No. Don’t do that. Go *in* me.” And so I spread her further, and, well, my...penis was very hard, and I was going to enter her and she said, “No; not there. The *other*.”

ANN. (*Enlightened*.) Ohhhhhh.

PETER. “You want me to...,” “Yes! Yes! There!” Well, I’d never done that,

and... [...]

But it was what she wanted she said, and it was real exciting, and so I did.

And it *was*; it was real exciting, and disgusting, and it turned me on in an awful way, and I wanted to hurt her. (51; emphasis in the original)

The milquetoast Peter, in other words, bursts forth with excessive, dangerous sexual desire while under the influence of alcohol, paralleling Blanche's carnal transgressions from the later scenes of *Streetcar*. And consider the symbolic implications of the sexual act Peter performs while in his trance-like state: though his arousal is distinctly heterosexual, and he first focused upon the woman's vagina during the encounter, the character easily slides into the "*other*" pleasure of anal intercourse, which he finds "real exciting, and disgusting, and [...] awful." Peter's heterosexuality is stained by his "bad" (or queer) sodomitical act with the woman, and alcoholic intoxication (along with a dose of marijuana) serves as the gateway to this disgusting, exciting state. In truth, Peter finds this othered sex with his partner so enthralling that he experiences a type of disembodied, violent automatism: "PETER. And I kept on jamming and jamming into her until she screamed, and it wasn't a right scream [...]; my...penis was bloody" (52). The othering, disgusting pleasure is indeed "awful" in the definition of inspiring awe, a feeling of "[d]read mingled with veneration, reverential or respectful fear [...] mysterious sacredness" in Peter (def. n.1, 2). His subjectivity is temporarily liquefied through enacting the brutal anal eroticism. And, Peter explains, he was so thrilled and disturbed by the experience, he has never been "bad" again.

Nonetheless, Ann is far from repulsed by Peter's narrating of his bad doings. Rather, she informs Peter, she herself has been craving something different. "I *am* happy with you—with us," she somewhat dubiously reassures her husband, "[i]t's me I sense I'm not happy with—not

entirely. And I never know exactly what it is; something...*other*” (54; emphasis in the original). Two pages later, Ann is better able to articulate the intended effects of the awful pleasure she so desires: “Then that must be what I wanted—a little...*disorder* around here, a little... *chaos*. [...] A little *madness*. Wouldn’t that be good? (55; emphasis added) The pairing of Ann and Peter therefore serves as a sort of flashback-in-miniature of Martha and George from *Virginia Woolf*: as I shall elucidate shortly, this latter couple’s shared perverse, excessive desires are amplified by their enticement and deployment of a second straight couple.

As with Williams’s *Cat*, a queer alcoholic body spills onto the stage in *Virginia Woolf* before a single one of the main four characters has set foot there. When the curtain is raised, the set is “*in darkness*” before audience members are quickly given two important sound cues: “*Crash against front door. MARTHA’s laughter heard*” (New American 3). The crash is presumably one of the couple, most likely Martha, drunkenly stumbling into the front door of the house in an attempt to unlock it, and those audience members who are unfamiliar with the play—today this is likely a small percentage of people, given the play’s canonical status in American and world drama—may well find this cue strange in conjunction with Martha’s laughter. Nevertheless, both effects function as sonic linking devices throughout the play: we will watch the characters stumble about the stage and smash into pieces of furniture, as well as one another, with increasing frequency (as George says at the opening of Act II, their domestic life “gets pretty bouncy [...] sometimes” [New American 100]); and, Martha’s “*braying*” laughter will echo about the stage multiple times. The two sound effects coalesce in the play’s penultimate curtain-dropper at the conclusion of “Walpurgisnacht.” George, ravaged by his continuous sparring with Martha and haunted by her bitterly superb exit line (i.e. “I’ll make you sorry you ever let yourself down” [New American 191]), reads a short paragraph from one of the books

which litter his study, and then experiences an emotional eruption:

(From offstage comes the sound of MARTHA's laughter and the crashing of dishes)

(He stands still...then, quickly, he gathers all the fury he has been containing within himself...he shakes...he looks at the book in his hand and, with a cry that is part growl, part howl, he hurls it at the chimes. They crash against one another, ringing wildly[.]) (New American 192)

George's hurling of the book at the door chimes is a representation of a release of the repressed desire and rage he has towards his wife; it is a physical demonstration of a loss of control, and it works contrapuntally with Martha's laughter to remind us that, offstage, the character is also physicalizing her desire for, and disgust with, her husband, by attempting to have sexual relations with their guest, Nick. A type of queer sexual perversity, in the form of George's knowledge that Martha will make him a cuckold while he is present in the next room, is highlighted. And as with all climactic moments of emotional tension and release that take place throughout *Virginia Woolf*, alcohol is both symptom and cause: it is both driving force behind, and materialization of, the queer behaviour on display.

Like Williams's boozy depictions in *Streetcar* and *Cat*, Albee's dialogue and stage directions in *Virginia Woolf* continually knit together the themes of excessive desire through alcohol and queer sexualities. For instance, after the lengthy discussion of *Beyond the Forest*, the second major topic discussed onstage, much to George's chagrin, is the imminent arrival of "What's-their-name": their guests, Nick and Honey (New American 9). But the audience members receive this expository information through an exchange between the couple about consuming alcohol:

MARTHA. (*Pouting* [after George's "*braying*" barb]) Make me a drink.

GEORGE. What?

MARTHA. (*Still softly*) I said, make me a drink.

GEORGE. (*Moving to the portable bar*) Well, I don't suppose a
nightcap'd kill either one of us....

MARTHA. A nightcap? Are you kidding? We've got guests. (New American 9)

During the next two pages of dialogue, Martha will repeat her request twice before her speech marks her receiving it (e.g. "May I have my drink, please? [...] Thank you") (New American 10). The repetition of her demand for a drink is treated very casually; we are given a clear sense that this action is business as usual for the characters, considering George's uncharacteristically warm response and acquiescence to Martha's badgering (i.e. "Well, I don't suppose" etc.).

Martha's requests are interspersed between her descriptions of the as-yet-unseen Nick and Honey. At her father's Saturday night faculty mixer that night (New American 7), Martha has easily sized up the younger couple. She nastily reduces each character to a stereotypically gendered attribute (Nick has a job "in the math department"; Honey is a "mousey little type" and presumably a homemaker [New American 10]) and, more importantly, a cutting physical description (Nick is "about thirty, blond"; Honey is "without any hips, or anything" [New American 10]). George's interjection that Nick is "good-looking" in addition to being thirty and blond is then followed by the short line "It figures" (New American 10). His smug remark sets up Martha's third-act revelation that she "pass[es her] life in crummy, totally pointless infidelities [...] *would-be* infidelities (emphasis in the original)" (New American 199); it is revealed that the couple have entered an addictive psychodynamic pattern which is directly expressed via alcoholic behaviour.

Nevertheless, Albee's text reveals its true fascination with queer excess through George and Martha's bodily enactments of these desires, as well as their self-reflexive, coded comments about those enactments. Less than three pages after receiving her first drink, Martha berates George about his bartending skills: "You never put any ice in my drink. Why is that, hunh?" (New American 15). This is our first clue about the structuring of the fluid power relations between George and Martha. *Virginia Woolf* is, after all, a narrative about the struggle for the dominant role in one's most intimate relational identity: that of spouse. Albee's characters famously rely on both alcohol and sex as symbols in order to constantly turn the tables on one another.

The ice (or lack thereof) in Martha's drink is telling for two reasons. Firstly, the imagery reappears in the monologue that opens the third act, in which Martha imagines speaking with her father:

I cry all the time too, Daddy. I cry alllll the time; but deep inside, so no one can see me. I cry all the time. And Georgie cries all the time, too. We both cry all the time, and then, what do we do, we cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the icebox, in the goddamn ice trays (*Begins to laugh*) until they're frozen (*Laughs even more*) and then...we put them...in our...drinks. (*More laughter, which is something else, too. After sobering silence*) [...] (*Jiggles the ice in her glass*) CLINK! (New American 196)

In this speech we recognize Albee's intertextual reference to O'Neill's *Iceman*, where alcoholic illusions brings a chilly peace: the iced spirits allow the characters to continue living.

Contrastingly, in *Virginia Woolf* life-lies cannot help but corrode, as I observed in Chapter I with reference to the work of Matthew Roudané. Martha symbolizes the ice in her glass of booze as

merely frozen tears, a bodily signifier of their self-deception and unhappiness which has cooled and hardened.

Secondly, it can be surmised that audience members, having just endured the repressive gender and sexual mores of the Cold War decade, would likely view a confident wife ordering an emasculated husband to serve her drinks as a social rarity at best, and a deranged perversion at worst. Indeed, one is reminded of the character of Ruth in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*, which premiered two years after *Virginia Woolf*. Like Albee, Pinter places great emphasis upon the act of the male characters serving female characters alcohol: to be served alcohol in one's own home is to be placed in the masculine subject position. In *The Homecoming*, Ruth puts it quite bluntly in response to a question from Lenny about how she will take her drink; staring at the men she quips "Rocks? What do you know about rocks?" (99) As Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English explain in their study *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women*, the twentieth century had ushered in new rigid codes of behaviour for married women:

The new ideal [for women] carved out in the first decade or so of the century would not be the political activist or social reformer but the housewife. She would be bound to the home just as securely as the invalid had been—not because she was too weak to do anything else, but because she had so much to do there. Bustling, efficient—intellectually as well as emotionally engaged in her tasks—the housewife could stand as a model for all women, not just the wealthier ones. Men could be bank presidents or hod-carriers, professors or coal-miners; women, henceforth, would be housewives. (156)

Social gender roles were to become even more intense as America reached the mid-century: accordingly, media representations of this rebooted Platonic ideal of the housewife were

omnipresent. Nancy A. Walker's examination of women's issue magazine, *Shaping Our Mother's World: American Women's Magazines*, explores how publications of the period almost unanimously disseminated image after image of the domestic goddess. Even magazines with much wider foci than homemaking were pitched through the lens of the domestic:

Vogue primarily addressed fashion and upper-class social interaction, whereas *Good Housekeeping* focused on the practicalities of middle-class homemaking; *Mademoiselle*, with its audience of college-age young women, was concerned with education, appearance and social life; and *Ladies' Home Newspaper* presented perhaps the most various and understanding [*sic*] of domestic life. (8)

This emphasis upon all things chatelaine in women's magazines was omnipresent in late 1950s and early 60s media: the housewife was expected to live for her family, and to defer, if not remain downright subservient, to her husband.

The presence of Jacqueline Kennedy in the White House at the time of Albee's play is far from inconsequential: *Virginia Woolf* premiered on Broadway in the midst of the Camelot era. Kennedy is perhaps the *ne plus ultra* example of the gracious hostess, wife, and mother of the period, and she quickly became a complex icon.⁶⁸ The depictions in the media of her glamour were paradoxically founded in her domesticity, and served to further restrictive gender roles. Numerous images of the First Lady entertaining spread all over the globe during the Kennedy administration, both in print and via her famous televised tour of the White House on CBS, which was broadcast on Valentine's Day, 1962 in the United States and subsequently syndicated in over fifty countries ("Timeless Elegance"). The image of the First Lady standing proudly in

⁶⁸ Consider, for example, the different signifying ways in which artist Andy Warhol used four images of Kennedy for his famous piece *16 Jackies* a mere two years later in 1964.

front of the portrait of George Washington during the CBS interview performed important ideological work: viewers were meant to grasp that heterosexual couplings with firmly delineated gender roles produced stable family units, which in turn produced a stable nation. The image of Kennedy standing in front of the Washington portrait knit together traditional gender roles and patriotism in an iconic way; Albee's play was to capitalize upon this connection. By naming his main characters after the Washingtons, Albee made them symbolize Americana. This clear citation meant that George and Martha were used to interrogate American social values, especially those connected with behaviour viewed as deviant. Perfectly coiffed in a demure red Chanel dress with her signature pearls about her neck (see Fig. 22), Kennedy served as a kind of anti-Martha. Ironically, since her death rumours have swirled that Kennedy attended orgiastic parties with her close friend Gore Vidal—parties at which male prostitutes were prominently featured. (See, for example, Scotty Bowers's controversial memoir *Full Service*.)



Fig. 22: Jacqueline Kennedy During the CBS White House Tour, 14 Feb. 1962.

With her ferocious power and decidedly unladylike actions, Albee's Martha might as well be a queer adaptation of Hedda Gabler. But unlike Hedda's absurdly ineffectual Tesman, George is much more evenly matched with his own wife, and herein lies a crucial aspect of the play. After this representation of George serving Martha her drink, and the latter character critiquing the former's skills, the text then shifts into a discussion of the libidinal power of desire and bodies. George ironically claims that he does put ice in Martha's drinks, and warns "[i]t's that habit you have...chewing your ice cubes...like a cocker spaniel. You'll crack your big teeth" (New American 15). George's spiteful ribbing leads into a somewhat more lighthearted discussion regarding which of the two characters appears younger and more sexually attractive (e.g. who has more teeth, who is going bald, etc. [New American 15-6]), and George's eventual rebuffing of Martha's advance for a "BIG SLOPPY KISS" (New American 16). Both of these moments are threaded through with a libidinal thematic: the characters compete with one another in terms of general erotic allure, which in turn stimulates Martha into attempting a seduction of her husband. The fact that the kiss Martha demands is "big" and "sloppy" is highly significant; her queered, sensual, and sensuous body is one that is excessive, spilling over with fluids. Finally, Martha requests another drink—her second, in just under ten minutes or so of stage time—which leads to this crucial exchange:

MARTHA. Ha, ha, ha, HA! Make me another drink...lover.

GEORGE. (*Taking her glass*) My God, you can swill it down, can't you?

MARTHA. (*Imitating a tiny child*) I'm firsty.

GEORGE. Jesus!

MARTHA. (*Swinging around*) Look, sweetheart, I can drink you under
any goddamn table you want...so don't worry about me! [...]

GEORGE. Well, just stay on your feet, that's all....These people are your guests, you know, and...

MARTHA. I can't even see you...I haven't been able to see you for years...

GEORGE. ...if you pass out, or throw up, or something... [...] and try to keep your clothes on, too. There aren't many more sickening sights than you with a couple of drinks in you and your skirt up over your head, you know....

(New American 18)

In this heated exchange, which I have abbreviated for the sake of brevity, the subject positions, and their accompanying levels of relational force, are startlingly complex.

When Martha and George initially begin this argument, traditional heteronormative gender positions have been inverted: Martha is signified as the dominant and domineering aggressor, while George is the emasculated and passive-aggressive submissive. Their relational positions have direct relevance to terminology used in both gay and lesbian subcultures. In common gay parlance, Martha is here the "top" and George is the "bottom." And given the overdetermined status of gender performance in *Virginia Woolf*, an even more fitting set of binary descriptors may be adapted from the lesbian subculture of the 1940s; as theorist Sue- Ellen Case writes in "The Butch/Femme Aesthetic," couples who identify as queer have a longstanding tradition of referring to one another in a binary model which segregates the participants into positions of hypermasculinity (i.e. "butch") and hyperfemininity (i.e.

"femme"). Case's article is fascinating, and the author provides a firm basis for the specificity of the terms "butch" and "femme" in the history of lesbian culture in America. I am well aware that Case's use of the terms connects them with an aesthetics of camp and campness, as opposed

to queerness, and that the author would likely fervently oppose transplanting these particular terms into a different context. However, queer culture has historically involved exaggerating and signifying through hypergendered performance, and the terms are now in common usage by those who identify as queer—not to mention those who identify as gay men, and bisexual and transgender men and women.⁶⁹ Butch and femme, in other words, are queer because as a system of signification they emphasize gender roles *as* performative.

Martha's boisterous, attention-getting, and demanding tone positions her as the butch to George's femme...at least for the first two lines of the excerpt I have quoted above. Here we begin to see how traditional heterosexual and gendered subject positionality flows back and forth between the married couple. After George's remark about "swill[ing] it down," Martha then changes tactics by her use of feminized baby talk (i.e. "firsty"), and when this doesn't produce results, the character returns to flat-out aggression. Martha claims a more powerful subject position through the masculine act of drinking a man under the table: to "out-drink" someone in the play's (and, I would argue, in the offstage world's) libidinal economy is to overpower them in a type of digestive battle of the bodies. George's rebuttal places him back in the position of femme or bottom: he passive-aggressively harps about Martha's unruly, drunken, and lascivious behaviour. In Freudian terms, as the castrated Man he attempts to gain the phallic power position in the argument by claiming normative status and shaming the other character for her identity as a drunk and queer individual. His language explicitly evokes abjection for the spectator/reader: no other sight is "more sickening," he claims, than the spectacle of his skirtless, inebriated wife. As with Williams's Blanche and Brick, Albee's text symbolizes queer alcoholism as a monstrous

⁶⁹ As Case admits, the culture of the gay bar relies upon these "symbolic systems" (187). Discussions amongst patrons in both gay and lesbian bars frequently focus upon analyzing the roles of butch/femme or top/bottom. What is mulled over by those involved in these cruising conversations—especially in spaces influenced by the sale of alcohol—is the commitment to these roles: e.g. who is performing them? how well are these roles being performed? and perhaps most importantly, could these roles be reversed? And if so, how?

pulling inwards. The over-consuming queer body is one of horror, pleasure, and ultimately social and dramatic chaos.

Many critics have noted that the impassioned arguments and “games” (a term first used by Nick on page 35 of the 2005 edition, but repeated throughout the entire piece) that take place between Martha and George in *Virginia Woolf* form the play’s core agon. But what has been repeatedly overlooked in the voluminous criticism on the text is the extent to which these games are reliant upon the couple’s performing, consuming bodies and their juxtaposition against those of Nick and Honey. For while the textual emphasis upon Martha and George’s bodies relies upon signifiers of addiction and queerness, Nick and Honey’s forms serve a much different purpose. Before he begins his play proper, Albee provides the reader with clipped, dense descriptors of his players.⁷⁰ I will return to his comments regarding George and Martha later in the chapter, and instead note the archetypal significance with which the author imbues his physical descriptors of the secondary characters Nick and Honey. Like her namesake,⁷¹ Honey is blond, a bit drippy, and saccharine: she is described as “a petite blond girl, rather plain.” She is portrayed throughout the play in such a way that the reader and spectator is invited to view her as stereotypically feminine and crucially delicate: Honey is “frail”; she “gets sick quite easily” and “throw[s] up a lot”; and, in George and Martha’s memorably disturbing phrase, she is “slim-hipped” (New American 99, 99, 100, 41). As Stephen J. Bottoms notes in his history of the play’s performance and reception, while it is certainly possible to cast the actress playing Honey against type when mounting a production of the play, the role is the most strictly defined, both physically and creatively, of the four parts:

On the surface, this role [of Honey] appears even more thankless than that of Nick

⁷⁰ The 2005 Broadway revised text does not provide pagination for the cast and set descriptions.

⁷¹ Indeed, much has been made by critics of the fact that it is possible audience members do not even learn the character’s name: “Honey” might merely be a diminutive or pet name which conceals her actual first name.

—not least because Honey is given still less to work with in the text itself. She has far fewer lines than the others in the play, and spends large parts of her onstage time *simply sitting around drinking*, reacting to the others with varying degrees of coherence. (172; emphasis added)

Certainly Honey's sparse line count and eventful journey into the bottle, in conjunction with a characterization which seems distinctly flatter, to use Forsterian terminology, than that of the other three characters, ensure that the actress playing her faces unique challenges when approaching the text; these issues have been further compounded by Albee's paring down of the part during his revisions for the 2005 Broadway revival.

In fact, the role is so sharply defined that many critics have argued it either borders on, or tips into, misogynist parody. Bottoms, for example, references critic John Clum's assertion in his study *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama* that "Honey is a hateful caricature, a horrid case of arrested development" (172). However, both Honey *and* Nick are infantilized by the play's dialogue and action; this theme is then threaded into the text's obsession with sexual and symbolic procreation. As a result of this paired infantilization—or what one might call "equal opportunity hatefulness"—and for the perhaps even simpler reason that it is difficult to imagine a piece written in the early 1960s about two straight couples which included four complex, inoffensive, perfectly rounded roles, I cannot subscribe to this line of thinking. I do, however, certainly understand the temptation to enter into it, and I do not dispute that aspects of both Martha and Honey's characterizations can appear misogynistic at times—and this misogyny is sometimes even heightened via production.

Nonetheless, as Albee's play is a direct examination of the anxieties, pain, and suffering inflicted upon two straight married couples by the rigid and determinative heterosexual matrix

and its accompanying ideology of what queer theorist and critic Lee Edelman has described as “the absolute value of reproductive futurism” (*No Future* 3), it seems understandable that critics would be frustrated by the representations of gender roles, particularly after the 1970s’ second wave of feminism and gay liberation. But more often than not, these arguments are tinted by ugly homophobic assertions and twisted pseudo-psychoanalytic diagnoses of gay male misogyny: Albee is a gay man, these writers fervently assert, and therefore he is distinctly and pathologically unable to represent female characters in accurate, empathetic, and plausible ways. There are numerous instances of such criticism: see, for example, Philip Roth’s “The Play That Dare Not Speak Its Name” for the *New York Review of Books*, in which the novelist acidly claimed that Albee’s *Tiny Alice* was a “homosexual day-dream in which the celibate male is tempted and seduced by the overpowering female” (108; emphasis added). Further examples include “Who’s Afraid of Edward Albee?” for the *Tulane Drama Review* by Richard Schechner, who claimed he was “tired of morbidity and sexual perversity which are there only to titillate an impotent and homosexual theatre and audience,” and then went on to note he was “tired of Albee” in general (64); W.J. Weatherby’s “Albee on Broadway” for the *Guardian*; and, most notoriously, Stanley Kauffmann’s dreaded “Homosexual Drama and Its Disguises” for the *New York Times* in 1966, with its shockingly candid charge of gay male misogyny. Kauffmann’s piece surely serves as the apotheosis of the homophobic critique of so-called crypto-gay works.⁷²

Rather, the more incisive explanation for the lack of nuance with which Albee presents Honey as a gendered and sexualized character (and, as we shall see, this affects the corresponding representation of Nick as well) is that the couple is a dramaturgical necessity. *Virginia Woolf*, as I have argued, is a play about straight couples: Honey and Nick are merely the

⁷² Kauffmann’s infamous article for the *Times* contains the now unintentionally hilarious lines “Homosexuals with writing ability are likely to go on being drawn to the theatre [...] here is every reason to expect more plays by talented homosexuals” (2.1).

theatrical “straight men” to Martha and George’s disturbingly satisfying stand-up comedians. Because Albee is so invested in the fluid subject positions that the main characters inhabit, the playwright must provide readers and spectators with characters that have a greater degree of gendered and sexualized relational fixity. Nick and Honey, in other words, must remain in a butch/femme dyad in which phallic power does *not* flow back and forth between the two subjectivities.

It is a critical commonplace to note how crucial the presence of an onstage audience is to *Virginia Woolf*,⁷³ and, indeed, this aspect of the play enhances the sense of drunken intensity it works to sustain. But what has rarely been remarked upon is that the most convincing interpreters of the piece have understood that Nick and Honey are a very specific type of onstage audience. While interesting and challenging roles for actors and actresses in their own right, they are foiled against the juicier, scene-stealing parts of George and Martha in order to reinforce traditional gender roles and “straight” or normative sexual desires. Nick is the masculine dominant, and Honey is the feminine submissive. Historically, directors have followed Albee’s wishes in casting actors of suitable bodily appearance for the two roles: one need only return to the casting used in the Warner Brothers film adaptation, in which director Ernest Lehman cast George Segal and Sandy Dennis specifically for their respective macho and mousey qualities. And, even when the actors selected for the younger couple do not perfectly align with Albee’s physical descriptors, directors have typically found alternative methods of achieving this butch/femme aesthetic. Alan Schneider’s directorial choice of George Grizzard as Nick and Melinda Dillon as Honey in the Broadway premiere demonstrates this. Even though Grizzard

⁷³ A notion Bottoms brings to light in Chapter II of his *Plays in Production* study: “[Audience members] necessarily become more aware of their own positions as viewers, or even voyeurs. [...It is] clear that the *performative effects* of George and Martha’s word games are felt not only by Nick and Honey but by those witnesses sitting beyond the proscenium” (79-80; emphasis in the original).

was noticeably shorter than his costar, and thus not as “physically imposing as the ‘quarter-back’ [Albee] had envisaged in the role” (qtd. in Bottoms, *Virginia Woolf* 27-8), Schneider and Albee still ensured through costuming and performance technique that Nick’s and Honey’s initial rigid manly /demure feminine appearances were semiotically legible. (See, for example, Fig. 23, in which Grizzard is in a fairly macho pose, spread-kneed on the ottoman, while Dillon has daintily crossed her ankles in her chair.) For *Virginia Woolf* to have the greatest artistic impact, Nick and Honey must retain a greater amount of relational fixity—they must represent a certain amount of “straightness” which can be categorized by audience members— in terms of their gender and sexuality. They are tops and bottoms, in other words, who must remain tops and bottoms.

At least, that is, for a while. For though it is central to the play’s structure that the core queer George-and-Martha pairing is contrasted with one that is connected with (more) normative social practices, Albee’s reliance upon the metaphorical power of the queer alcoholic insists that Nick and Honey are symbolically polluted or befouled through their interaction with the older couple. There is indeed an initiation taking place during *Virginia Woolf*, but it goes much further than Martha’s attempted instruction of George on the fabulousness of Bette Davis. Acting as audience surrogates, Nick and Honey are brought into contact with behavioural cycles of alcohol addiction and queer sex—cycles that they cannot help themselves but partake in, enjoy, persevere over, and embody. There are several foreboding clues that Nick and Honey are being, in a sense, taught by George and Martha, and that they will very likely mimic the brutal and flaying addictive patterns in which they witness the older couple engaging later in their own lives. For example, George sarcastically infantilizes Nick and Honey as children after the evening’s pantomimed or demonstrated educational games: “Home to bed, children; it’s way past your bedtime” (New American 252). The couple’s shocked reaction to the revelation that



Fig. 23: Uta Hagen, Melinda Dillon, and George Grizzard in the 1962 Broadway Premiere.

George and Martha cannot bear children as they exit in Act III is ambiguous to the point that it borders on the indecipherable. Their statements are so vague after the revelation that the child is imaginary that audience members are not given a clear sense of if or how they will proceed with their own lives:

GEORGE. You two go now.

NICK. Yes.

HONEY. Yes.

NICK. I'd like to...

GEORGE. Good night.

NICK. Good night. (New American 253)

Albee himself has commented to *Playbill* on the ill-omened status of Nick and Honey's marriage: "As you begin the play, you have Nick and Honey, this very sweet, young married couple coming into a den of wolves. But by the end, you realize it's George and Martha's marriage that really means something and that it's very likely that Nick and Honey are finished as a relationship" (Wallenberg 10). And most tellingly of all, in Act I when Nick asks, "May I use the...uh...bar?" George ominously predicts "Hm? Oh, yes...yes...by all means. Drink away...you'll need it as the years go on" (New American 49).

Nick, and, to a much greater extent, Honey, do indeed proceed to drink away, with George and Martha functioning as representations of classic enablers through the remaining two and a half acts. George even manipulatively and viciously insists on serving Honey more brandy in Act II against Nick's protestations, after she has already gotten sick from overconsumption:

HONEY. Could I have a little brandy? I think I'd like a little brandy. [...]

GEORGE. (*Moving to the bar again*) Sure! *Fill 'er up!* [emphasis added]

NICK. Honey, I don't think you...

HONEY. (*Petulance creeping in*) It will steady me, *dear*. I feel a little unsteady.

GEORGE. Hell, you can't walk steady on half a bottle...got to do it right.

HONEY. Yes. (*To MARTHA*) I love brandy...I really do. [...]

(*GEORGE hands her a brandy*) Oh, goodie!⁷⁴ Thank you.

⁷⁴ Honey's childlike exclamation upon accepting the snifter from George is yet another of the play's allusions to the infantilized representation of the younger couple. This leitmotif reaches its frankest expression in Act II, in which George narrates witnessing Honey sucking her thumb while asleep:

GEORGE. I passed your wife in the hall. I mean, I passed the john and I looked in on her.

Peaceful...so peaceful. Sound asleep...and she's actually...sucking her thumb.

MARTHA. Awwwwwww!

GEORGE. Rolled up like *a fetus, sucking away*. (New American 184; emphasis added)

(New American 136-37)

Closely paralleling the neurotic psychological fumbblings of Blanche, Honey requests her “little” serving of brandy by claiming that the spirit will “steady” her; it is clear that it will do precisely the opposite by exciting and amplifying her emotions and further disturbing her subjective state. “Fill[ing] ’er up,” however, is George and Martha’s forte, and before long Honey will exhibit for the audience the most explicit and physicalized symptoms of extreme inebriation seen in the text up until this point: overconfidence and boasting (“I dance like the wind” [New American 141]), euphoric sensations and feverish dancing (New American 142), “wil[d]” moments of aggression and bloodlust (New American 152); mental fogginess (New American 160), and her ultimate “*outlandish*” emotional outburst (New American 164). Honey’s antics are a paradigmatic of how the transformative power of theatre is essential for examining the way the performative nature of consuming alcohol reworks normative gender behaviour. As the evening grinds on, Honey just doesn’t seem to be herself while at George and Martha’s, or at least the self that the rigid social mores of the period dictate that she *should* be.

In short, attempted physicalization of any form of sexual desire is perhaps the only enactment of drunkenness audience members do *not* witness Honey exhibiting during the piece. While Nick appears to consume just as much alcohol as his wife, he initially displays fewer bodily symptoms of intoxication; this creative choice for the work is unsurprising, given that Nick and Honey are used to represent the (hetero)norm. The hard-bodied, powerful Man can “hold” his liquor, while the Woman is overtaken, besotted, spills over.⁷⁵ But the character does display the effects of the alcohol by attempting to perform his desire for Martha: tellingly, as

Here the infantilization motif and the queer alcoholic merge in one image: Honey’s developing oral fixation, her “sucking” down of Brandy, is transferred to her thumb as she drunkenly snuggles in the tub.

⁷⁵ The origins of this cultural belief that women are more susceptible to alcohol and forbidden bodily desire(s) dates back millennia; many representations are found in ancient Greek drama. The paradigmatic example is the representations of the possessed women of Thebes in Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, as explored in my epilogue.

Honey crests the wave of her drunk and decidedly unladylike actions, Nick experiences impotency in his sexual encounter with Martha and is declared a “houseboy” (New American 208). Honey exhibits behaviour that is often connected with masculinity, while Nick is feminized by the older couple: parodying her emasculation of George, Martha even demands that he “Make [her] hubby a drink” (New American 207). In this way Albee explores sexual perversion and excess via the actions of (and statements by and about) the characters of Nick and Honey, who unwittingly become the mice to George and Martha’s cats.

As I have already suggested, the cuckold fantasy, along with its close queer bedfellows, that of wife-swapping and orgiastic/group sex, seeps into Albee’s play like a circular red-wine stain on a white tablecloth. George has already ironically described Martha’s father’s faculty mixers as “Saturday night orgies” on page seven of the text, which gives her comment about “Daddy sa[ying they] should be nice” to George and Honey (New American 11) a murky, bawdy tone. A mere six pages of dialogue later, George dryly rebuffs Martha’s request for a kiss through hypothesizing a lewd scenario involving Honey and Nick as unwitting voyeurs: “Well, dear, if I kissed you I’d get all excited...I’d get beside myself, and I’d take you, by force, right here on the living room rug, and then our little guests would walk in, and...well, just think what your father would say about *that*” (New American 17). George’s way of detailing this scene of primal sexual intercourse is, we are told, “[t]oo *matter-of-fact*”; the text suggests that the likelihood of the scenario being played out as he describes it is minimal at best (New American 17).

Nevertheless, George’s brief narrative brims with notions of uncontrollable drives, of queer urges that would put him figuratively “beside” himself (New American 17). Not only would this imagined licentious ravaging of Martha establish his wife as the bottom (at least, as

long as the fantasy was being enacted), it also puts her on *her* bottom, so to speak. The actual arrangement of the phantasmatic bodies is inconsequential: George would be “taking” his wife by force, implying penile penetration of her vagina and/or anus. The imagined performance of this perverse (or anti-normative) sexuality between him and his wife means George’s words become subtextually marked for spectators: it fetishizes and foreshadows a phantasmatic breaching of Martha’s orifices. But here we see Albee embedding another instance of one of his gay-associative winks to the viewers: Martha delightedly retorts to George’s scenario “You pig!” (New American 17). While this insult can be easily read as the character admonishing her husband (either jokingly or not) for a type of laddish male chauvinism and bravado, gay ears might hear its connections with historical, and subcultural, gay male sexual practices: a “pig” or “pig bottom” is a slang term for a receptive gay sexual partner who takes what is considered to be excessive and repeated pleasure in being penetrated and dominated⁷⁶; the phrase plays on the simile “greedy as a pig.” Martha’s comment impugns George’s masculinity, and queerly reframes him from top to bottom.

Nonetheless, George’s imagined penetration must loop us back to a focus on symbolic figures and performers like Taylor, quite simply because it invites us to read the body of the actress playing Martha. The role of Martha is typically considered to be an exercise in scene-stealing: the tendency for her lines to be loud exclamations (occasionally ones which do not even contain actual words, e.g. “NYYYAAAHAAAAHHHHH!” [New American 30]) combined with the character’s provocative theatrical baiting of George means that ever since *Virginia Woolf*’s appearance in American theatre, the play has tended to become a star vehicle for actresses of a

⁷⁶ While this term has associations which extend beyond specific gay-identified subcultures and may be used in other erotic contexts (e.g. within heterosexual, lesbian, or even transgender subcultural communities based around Bondage Domination Sadomasochism [BDSM] and/or leather fetishes), the term appears to have been popularized by underground gay male scenes in the early part of the twentieth century.

certain age. (As Albee's early comment in this chapter attests, the youthful Taylor is decidedly the exception that proves the rule regarding traditional casting of the part.) Martha's character description in the text, which is carefully and crucially much longer than that given to George, Nick, and Honey, states "*A large, boisterous woman, 52, looking somewhat younger. Ample, but not fleshy*" (New American n.p.). In response to Albee's note, directors have typically sought out famous performers who are able to appear as if they are very clearly past the age of portraying ingénues, but are still able to viably play up the character's erotic allure: actresses, for example, such as Kathleen Turner, Colleen Dewhurst, Diana Rigg, and, most recently on Broadway, Amy Morton. (See Fig. 24 for Amy Morton's provocative costuming in director Pam MacKinnon's recent revival for the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, which subsequently transferred to Broadway.) In this way, the role of Martha in *Virginia Woolf* is perfectly analogous to that of Blanche in *Streetcar*: both parts tend to "showcase" the established female stars who play them, and audience members tend to best remember sequences involving these two characters.⁷⁷

This is precisely why the casting of Taylor in the Warner Bros. adaptation of *Virginia Woolf* by Nichols and the film's producers was such an inspired decision. Obviously any individual stage or screen performer's sexual appeal is highly subjective; there will never be unanimous agreement about one person's level of physical attractiveness. The fact remains, however, that in the decade before March 1964—the date at which point Albee signed the contract for the film rights to *Virginia Woolf* (Bottoms 46)—Elizabeth Taylor was widely regarded as one of the most sexually attractive women in the world. While she did perform in a variety of different film roles in an attempt to show artistic range, casting directors and her studio team ensured that she was given scripts that would allow her to accentuate and display her body

⁷⁷ I am grateful to Prof. Alan Ackerman for this particular insight into drama of the period. He made this observation with regard to popular female roles in both drama (i.e. *Streetcar*) and popular musicals (i.e. *Annie Get Your Gun*) during a seminar on American Modern Theatre at the University of Toronto in 2006.



Fig. 24: Amy Morton as Martha in Director Pam MacKinnon's *Staging*.

in eroticized, titillating ways. As Paglia remarks in an article credited to the staff of the website *Salon*, there was a “robustness to Elizabeth Taylor” (“Paglia on Taylor”); directors essentially made her busty, curvaceous figure a plot point in well-received films such as *Giant* (1956); the Williams adaptations *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959); *Cleopatra* (1963); and especially 1960’s *Butterfield 8*, for which she received her first Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role.

Taylor’s bodily image, her so-called robustness, was in perfect alignment with Albee’s descriptor of “ample” in the word’s context of both “excellently wide” and “[...o]f large superficial dimensions [, o]f persons: of large proportions; esp. in euphemistic use, of stout or well-covered women” (*OED* Def. 1, 1a). In the same way, Taylor’s exciting public persona relied upon bawdy details from her personal life and the false promise of bodily intimacy with

spectators. George Stevens, who directed her in *A Place in the Sun*, claimed he cast her because the actress was able to register with viewers as the “beautiful girl [...] that every American boy, some time or other, thinks he can marry” (Gussow, “Lustrous Pinnacle”). Witness, for example, Mel Gussow’s statements in the actress’s 2011 obituary for the *New York Times*: “In all her incarnations she had a vibrant sensuality. But beneath it was more than a tinge of vulgarity, as in her love of showy jewelry. ‘I know I’m vulgar,’ she said, addressing her fans with typical candor, ‘but would you have me any other way?’”

As image onscreen, therefore, her body functions to signify both a desirable feminine girth, a type of powerful erotic expansiveness, as well as the coarse availability of the slattern or slut—or to adapt George’s phrase, the state of being an “original game girl” (New American 220): game for anything, in other words.⁷⁸ The textual significations of the actress’s body in the film *Virginia Woolf* invite the spectator to interpret via Taylor’s form; despite Albee’s instruction that Martha is ample but not “fleshy” (or to read between the lines, fat), the representation of the character becomes utter fleshiness. Her well-established status as screen siren meant for audiences at the time of the film’s release that the visual representation of Taylor’s body in Nichols’s adaptation was already charged with an underlying current of desire. The performance of Taylor is by definition “ghosted” by Taylor’s history of previous screen and stage roles, as well as by the history of her media persona. Carlson eloquently writes that

[t]he recycled body of an actor, already a complex bearer of semiotic messages, will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghost of previous roles if they have made any impression whatever on the audience, a phenomenon that often colours and indeed may dominate the

⁷⁸ See Figure 25 for a promotional poster advertising both *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *BUTterfield 8*. Note the come-hither configuration of Taylor’s stance, and the tagline “These roles that gave LIZ her reputation!” emphasizing Taylor’s connotations with sexual promiscuity and erotic allure.

reception process. [...E]ven when an actor strives to vary his roles, he is, especially as his reputation grows, entrapped by the memories of the public, so that each new appearance requires a renegotiation with those memories. (8-9)

The depiction of Taylor onscreen in Nichols's *Virginia Woolf* is an archetypal example of the phenomenon of ghosting; quite frankly, it would have been impossible for the film's original audience members to view her body *without* the associations it had acquired from previous roles,



Fig. 25: Elizabeth Taylor's Ghosted Body

as well as from her public persona. Indeed, much of the delight audiences likely experience during a screening of the film results from media stories and rumours about real-life couple Taylor and Burton's legendary episodes of binge drinking. Recently, the publication of *The Richard Burton Diaries* in 2012 has shed even more light on their booze-fueled antics during the 1960s, with Burton composing entries containing events and musings such as

Friday 10th [...] E [i.e. Elizabeth Taylor] was astonishingly drunk even as I got to lunch. I don't recollect her before ever being incoherent from drink. I expect it from the drugs she's forced to take, but not from the booze. Christ I hope she's alright. It would be frightful to live the rest of our lives in *an alcoholic haze*, seeing the world through fumes of spirits and cigarette smoke. Never quite sure what you did or said the day before, or what you read, whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon. Good I'm going to have a whisky and soda right now. There are *few pleasures to match tipsiness* in this murderous world[.] (252; emphasis added)

Furthermore, as D.A. Miller has cleverly pointed out, one such association with Taylor's body is that of queer sexuality, which it had acquired in the film adaptation of Williams's *Suddenly, Last Summer* ("Visual Pleasure"). This ghosted desire embedded in Taylor's performance works in conjunction with the qualities Albee has written into the part of Martha that might typically be thought of as masculine: loud and abrasive comments, aggressive behaviour, commanding vocal tones (e.g. "Where do you think *you're* going? [New American 83]), heavy steps, fake-spitting (New American 175), pacing and resembling "a fighter" (New American 222), etc. The production team artificially aged the actress, and Taylor worked to gain weight for the role and donned padding and a grey wig.⁷⁹ Nichols therefore delicately balances—to pun on another of

⁷⁹ See Rebecca Onion's *The Vault* blog posting from *Slate.com* regarding the extensive demands Taylor and Burton made to the production team regarding hair and make-up tests for the film.

Albee's major works— Taylor's image onscreen: elements of her appearance mimic that of a female grotesque and are used to incite disgust, revulsion, and prejudice; but Taylor's emphasized curvaceous appearance carries the ghosted code of her bombshell sex-symbol status. And the semiotic layering of representations of Martha is in no way restricted to Nichols's film adaptation of the play. Stage legend Uta Hagen, of course, who originated the role on Broadway, also gave a well-publicized performance⁸⁰ that emphasized the character's intricate, intertwined, and queerly blended qualities (see Fig. 26). Taylor's performance in the film, which is ghosted by her past as a sex symbol, may be read as being ghosted by Hagen's famous portrayal of Martha as Castrating Woman or ballbreaker.

My point is that directors and actors involved in mounting professional theatrical productions of *Virginia Woolf* have been able to capitalize upon the character's queerly fleshy allure due to the fact that theatre, by its traditional definition a live art, requires live performers moving about the stage in front of audience members. The immediacy and required bodily presence of the medium ensures that the queer alcoholic's body is experienced right in front of us. Albee's careful crafting of the text highlights this performative aspect in many ways: one need only look at the libidinally charged entrance of Martha in "Fun and Games" (which the audience is carefully prepped for via George and Honey's dialogue):

*(MARTHA has changed her clothes, and she looks, now, more comfortable
and...and this is most important...most voluptuous)*

⁸⁰ Bottoms notes that for many critics, Hagen's Martha was the definitive version of the character, "thanks primarily to the tour de force virtuosity of her performance" (148). It is generally agreed amongst critics that Hagen's performance emphasized the character's "bitchy" and emasculating qualities, and that her Martha was much more memorable than Arthur Hill's George. The playwright Doric Wilson has said of her performance that she "entered the stage like a runaway locomotive" (qtd. in Bottoms 138). Taylor's film performance, in contrast, is softer.



Fig. 26: Uta Hagen as Martha in the Broadway Premiere.

This still, titled “No More, George,” is taken from the Uta Hagen/Herbert Berghof Papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Here Hagen shows a rare moment of the character’s fragility at the start of the Act-III climax.

GEORGE. There you are, my pet.

NICK. (*Impressed; rising*) Well, now...

GEORGE. Why, Martha...your Sunday chapel dress!

HONEY. (*Slightly disapproving*) Oh, that’s most attractive.

MARTHA. (*Showing off*) You like it? Good! (New American 50-1)

Along with the three characters for whom she is showing off, the audience member, regardless of his or her gender, sexual orientation, or age, is invited to read Martha’s “most voluptuous” body, her excessive sensuality and incitement to desire as she stalks down the stairs. In this moment,

Martha becomes the ultra-femme: her voluptuousness is a conscious, exaggerated performance of femininity.

However, Martha's action of slipping into something a bit more comfortable does not appear to make things clearer but rather more confusing for everyone involved: George, Nick, and Honey each have very different reactions to her transformed appearance. In both symbolic and pragmatic stage-picture terms, she has placed herself atop the group once again: consider that at this moment, the actress playing Martha is very likely descending to the stage floor. Reclaiming the position of top from her husband, she then instructs George to "trot over to the barie poo" for her, thereby forming a link between her newly eroticized appearance and the consumption of drink. After this moment, the four characters attempt to re-establish heteronormative social niceties, with Martha jokingly inquiring whether the male characters have "solve[d] the problems of the world" (New American 51) and Nick, with "*false heartiness*," joking about a "conspiracy" amongst the women (New American 52). Nevertheless, the physicality and strange eroticism of Martha's changed and changeable body forces the viewer to reassess his or her conception of any sort of "natural" power dynamic between heterosexual couples. And the characters' half-hearted jokes are unable to shore up the heteronorm for long: Martha's simultaneously disturbing and seductive form figuratively consumes stabilized power positions and power divisions.

The interpretive difficulty generated by Martha's queer alcoholic body onstage functions as a synecdoche for the problem of the characters' subjectivities, which in turn forces audiences and readers to examine their own relations to themselves: in short, to dis/identify. Queer sex and alcohol are two powerful methods for altering relations between individuals: in a sense, they can change how you identify, where you belong in power hierarchies, and, *Virginia Woolf* suggests,

perhaps even who you are.

Contemporaneous criticism of the play proves that audiences were both fascinated and disturbed by the queer relations at work in Albee's play. As Bottoms notes, *Village Voice* reviewer Michael Smith astutely deemed *Virginia Woolf* to be a new kind of play: one that relies upon "an apparently naturalistic scenario while deviating significantly from naturalistic convention" (79). Smith's comments in his review mark the distinctly uncomfortable level of intimacy pressed upon audience members⁸¹ during a performance of the play: "We are not moved or entertained by the play, we are transfixed [...] We are drawn smoothly into a world that we manage only to skirt in our ordinary lives, and then the gates are locked behind us" (17). With the benefit of a decade with which to reflect upon the text—not to mention the advantage of witnessing new directions in his work with later plays such as *Tiny Alice*, *A Delicate Balance*, and *All Over*—playwright and scholar Anne Paolucci was able to succinctly describe the eerily intimate spell *Virginia Woolf* tends to cast over its audience members in her 1972 book *From Tension to Tonic: The Plays of Edward Albee*:

It is a peculiarity of Albee's and a trademark of his that the protagonists of his plays are at one and the same time distinctly themselves and just as distinctly Everybody Else. In *Martha and George*, *Nick and Honey*, this identity is perfected dramatically, so that the play appears—from one point of view—a psychoanalytic "happening" in which the audience is intimately involved. The strength of such a play lies in this immediate and *growing identification* of the audience with the protagonists on stage; the difficulties of the characters, though rooted in mystery, are simple enough to grasp in their social implications.

⁸¹ See Zinman's comment regarding Albee's transposition and adaptation of Woolf's intimacy between reader and character in her stream-of-consciousness novels (e.g. *To the Lighthouse*) to the staged intimacy developed between character and audience (45).

As in the earlier plays, Sex is the dynamo behind the action.⁸²

(46; emphasis added)

Despite the bizarre and poorly supported claim that the social implications of the characters' difficulties in *Virginia Woolf* are easily parsed, Paolucci's description of the play as a psychoanalytic happening fueled by dynamic sexual forces is to my mind correct. Albee's queer relationality produces an intoxicating effect upon the audience through the play's intensely intimate and metatheatrical performance: the sense of disorientation and interpretive confusion experienced by audience members is a replication of that which takes place onstage. Smith's insistence that members of the play's initial Broadway audience exited feeling "as if [...] we were drugged or drunk" testifies to this process (qtd. in Bottoms 88).

The majority of reviewers were quick to denounce the piece because of this much-feared, and, of course, much-desired experience of dis/identification that it inflicted upon its audience members. Albee was pilloried by the press for his representations of queer and alcoholic figures; *Virginia Woolf*, the critics argued, was a symptom of a depraved, decadent culture, and was complicit in inspiring individuals to perform their own perverse acts. In many reviews, age-old antitheatrical bias looms so large that sections feel as if they could have appeared in tracts centuries earlier; conservative publication the *New York Mirror*, for example, decried the play as a "sordid and cynical dip into depravity" that could only be enjoyed by one who "enjoy[s] watching the wings being torn from human flies" (Coleman 20). Nonetheless, many reviewers were not above declaring precisely what type of depravity would proliferate if *Virginia Woolf's*

⁸² Paolucci's chapter on *Virginia Woolf* ("Exorcisms: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*") as a whole to my mind advances a rather forced, conservative argument on the sexual politics at work in the play: much of her analysis appears to press an Augustinian philosophic/mythic mold over top of Albee's text.

producers insisted on staging the play: effeminacy, homosexuality, and/or gender perversion.⁸³ In an editorial for New York's *Sunday News*, titled "For Dirty-Minded Females Only," which ran exactly one week after his review of Albee's play (Bottoms 100), critic John Chapman launched a misogynistic and homophobic attack against what he saw as the play's desired audience of wicked, dirty women and disturbed, degenerate gay men:

While I cringed and shuddered at the most soiled and *fruitiest language* I have yet heard on a stage, the house was echoing with *the shrieks and guffaws of the 'ladies.'* They made such a racket I never did hear any men; perhaps the other men, like myself, were more embarrassed than amused and therefore kept quiet. [...]
Who's Afraid is merely sensational. Ladies, you may have it. Whoop, holler, squeal, yip, shriek and gasp deliciously to the content of your dear little hearts.
 (2.1; emphasis added)

Consider how Chapman focuses here upon the bodily reactions of the audience members who are seen as being under Albee's destructive, hypnotic spell: "ladies" are individuals who must be categorized apart from the patriarchal ideal, and who are categorically unable of controlling their physiological reactions to the performance. (The critic's conflation of women and gay men is made even clearer elsewhere in the review when he criticizes Albee's "Fire Island dressing"⁸⁴ [2.1]) Chapman's use of scare quotation marks draws the reader's eye to his main point: the decadence and excess of *Virginia Woolf's* characters infects audience members and feminizes

⁸³ Shockingly, critic John Simon, renown for his homophobic remarks about "faggot nonsense" in the theatre, has grudgingly praised *Virginia Woolf*. He did, however, return to his long-standing anti-Albee stance during a debate with Ben Brantley on a 2001 episode of *Charlie Rose* (Gobert "Metaphysical" 194). For his part, Albee wrote in the *New York Times*, with his characteristic caustic wit, "Mr. Simon's disapproval of my plays has been a source of comfort to me over the years, and his dislike of *A Delicate Balance* gives me courage to go on" (Simonson "John Simon to Leave Long-held Post").

⁸⁴ Fire Island is a stretch of land that lies approximately 5.5 miles (8.9 km) off the southern shore of Long Island, New York. It has long been a mecca for gay men and lesbians, and since the early 1950s has been a popular euphemism for unrestrained gay sexuality in American media and popular culture.

them. His critique is tied to a longstanding antitheatrical worry about the audience's participation in "metaphysical passive sodomy" (51), as R. Darren Gobert has described it in a different context. Audience members who audibly reacted to Albee's play are disgustingly open—that is, permeable—to a theatre of "sensation," to performance that will cripple and pervert their minds via their very bodies. The six verbs in his final imperative only serve to emphasize this notion of excessive desire; each word presents the imagined audience member as in the thrall of a type of perverse and dangerous trance or hypnosis.

I contend that the historical mainstream audience's awed disorientation and interpretive confusion when faced with Albee's text is responsible for the deeply entrenched canonical status of *Virginia Woolf* in American and world theatre. It is precisely because heterosexual audience members were forced to question bodily and psychical limits that the play became such a cultural touchstone. In contrast to the reception of Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*⁸⁵, which I analyze in the next section of the chapter, this has everything to do with the failure of audience members, readers, and critics to recognize and identify with queer relationality.

⁸⁵ This title is hereafter shortened to *Boys*.

II. Icks! Icks! Terrible Icks!: Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*

Few intertextual allusions are as strong as the one that exists between Albee's *Virginia Woolf* and Crowley's *Boys*. The latter playwright is careful to acknowledge his borrowings from the former in a rather clumsy section of dialogue in which the characters discuss the lasagna Emory has prepared for them. Crowley first references the unseen pederastic villain of Williams's *Suddenly, Last Summer*; the spectre of Sebastian prompts the conversation to shift to the allusion to Albee's famous work:

MICHAEL. Ladies and ladies, I would like to announce that you have just eaten Sebastian Venable. [...] A character in a play. A fairy who was eaten alive. [...]

HANK. Did Edward Albee write that play?

MICHAEL. No. Tennessee Williams.

HANK. Oh, yeah.

MICHAEL. Albee wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

LARRY. Dummy.

HANK. I know that. I just thought maybe he wrote that other one too.

LARRY. Well, you made a mistake. [...]

COWBOY. Edward who? (68-9)

The three gay male writers (Williams, Albee, and Crowley himself) and their works are here woven together for the characters as well as for the audience. And, as with the Bette Davis reference in *Virginia Woolf*, a gay cultural initiation occurs, though this time amongst characters who are explicitly named as gay men: Hank and Cowboy are instructed about just who Sebastian

Venable, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee are. Not knowing about Albee's *Virginia Woolf*, the play suggests, is a sign of startling unrefinement. It places one in the category of Cowboy, who, while beautiful, remains unable, as Michael scathingly remarks, to "follow from one sentence to the next" (62).

In his introduction to the fortieth anniversary edition of the text, playwright Tony Kushner, himself no stranger to both queer and gay male representation onstage, comments upon the connection between the two works while staunchly defending what some have seen as Crowley's novice, imitative style:

This was Mart Crowley's first play [...t]he playwright is learning, but he's learning fast. Yes, he borrowed heavily from the most famous American play of the decade, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* But in the process of borrowing, Crowley in a sense *outed* Albee's masterpiece, long before outing was a verb [emphasis in the original]. (*Boys* xii)

Hence the playwright's defense brings us back to the initial interpretation of *Virginia Woolf* with which I began the first part of this chapter. Crowley's play, Kushner argues, removed what Halperin and many other critics have seen as *Virginia Woolf's* "crypto-" suffix, outing its supposed gay subtext.

Nevertheless, in actuality Crowley's *Boys* translated the fluid queer relationality on display in Albee's text into something much more fixed and, for lack of a better term, conservative. Through explicitly labeling its nine characters as gay, with the exception of the enigmatic Alan, whose sexuality is ultimately kept hidden from the audience, Crowley's play glosses over the interpretive difficulty that is so central to *Virginia Woolf*. The gay men who inhabit *Boys* are shown frantically struggling with sexual desires deemed abnormal by society,

and the playwright's empathy towards the men does nothing to diminish the work's pathologizing discourse. Addictive behaviour, primarily abuse of alcohol—though marijuana (11, 53), amyl nitrite or poppers (11), Valium or diazepam (110), and presumably, cocaine or “the hard stuff” (11) are also mentioned—is depicted as symptomatic of the men's various neurotic and obsessive pathologies. Via the characters' cutting dialogue and actions, which are by turns combative, self-pitying, and just plain mean, the text forms a causal link between gay male desire and addiction. Thus those that form the majority of the mainstream media, heterosexual male critics, were able to contain and defuse any connection which could be made between the character's lives and their own.

In fact, *Boys* became a comforting representation of the inherent perversity assumed to be found in gay male desire: the text provides, in a sense, a diagnostic and fatalistic answer for it, and as a result reviewers warmed to the piece and labeled it a groundbreaking and uncompromising work of art. To apply D.A. Miller's eloquent comments on the gay-themed major motion picture *Brokeback Mountain* in a different, but nonetheless fitting, context “[w]hat we are asked to ‘accept’ about the Homosexual is not his sexuality, but his agonized attempts to fight it—touching proof of a certain devotion to normality after all” (“Universality” 50). Like Ang Lee's film, *Boys* works to confirm straight society's worst fears about gay men, fears which are often entirely contradictory: gay desire is inherent, but can also infect; gay men are “born that way” (as Lady Gaga would have it) but can also convert unsuspecting heterosexuals; gay men hate women, but are also too close to being women themselves. However, above all *Boys* essentializes the gayness of its characters: while the text does give one the impression that the quality is informed by being part of a culture, it predominantly represents gayness as the state of having a specific abnormal or perverse desire, which is then placed in stark opposition to the

normal state of desiring, heterosexuality. The queerness of the queer addict is merged into, and transformed and subsumed by, gayness. And Crowley's representation of the gay addict is one that is decidedly conservative, pathological, and anti-liberational. Were we to think in figurative terms, we might imagine this process as quite similar to contemporary bartending or "mixology": gayness is that overpowering, distinctive liqueur which alchemizes one's vodka soda into something very different.

As with each text this dissertation analyzes, alcohol is shown everywhere in Crowley's play. A piece of naturalism that strictly adheres to the neoclassical unities, *Boys* takes place in Michael's "*smartly appointed duplex apartment in the East Fifties, New York, consisting of a living room and, on a higher level, a bedroom*" (3). The third sentence of Act One's stage directions inform the reader that "*Michael, wearing a robe, enters from the kitchen, carrying some liquor bottles*" (3). Similarly, the seventh sentence spoken onstage is Michael's offer of alcohol to Donald: "You wanna drink?" (3). There is, of course, a perfectly valid narrative justification for these first references to alcohol: Michael is hosting Harold's birthday party, and is therefore entertaining guests. Nevertheless acts such as carrying liquor bottles or offering one another a drink will become freighted with meaning once we learn that Michael cannot stop himself from repeated instances of binge drinking. As a matter of fact, four of the nine characters in the play appear to struggle with alcohol abuse and/or clinical AUD. Of the remaining characters, all are depicted drinking in the text, with the exception of Cowboy. The characters drink alcohol, talk about alcohol, think about alcohol, formulate theories about drinking alcohol, and even, in one memorable sequence which again cites *Virginia Woolf*, vomit offstage from overconsumption (58).

Perhaps with Crowley's *Boys* more than any of the other works discussed in this

dissertation does one get a sense that the author was creating a type of dramatized autobiography; the mens' actions in *Boys* have a distinct feeling of being directly lifted from the author's own life. Crowley, born in 1935 in Vicksburg, Mississippi, is the son of parents who both suffered from addictions: his father was an alcoholic, and his mother was dependent on drugs (Crowley, "'Boys' to 'Men'"). In an interview given immediately before the sequel to *Boys*, *The Men from the Boys*, opened in San Francisco in 2002, the playwright commented with dark humour on the creative lineage of male playwrights presenting works with themes of addiction. He noted slyly, "I always resented that Eugene O'Neill already had my best plots" (Crowley, "'Boys' to 'Men'"). It has been well documented that Crowley was a very close friend of the late film star Natalie Wood (Crowley, "Mart Crowley on Natalie Wood"). In fact, it is doubtful that *Boys* would have even reached an audience without Wood's assistance: the actress hired her gay pal as her assistant, which also provided Crowley with time to write the initial script. The gestation period for the first draft, however, was a bumpy one, and some of Crowley's comments imply that he and Wood were more than just confidants—they were drinking buddies. Furthermore, Crowley's own behaviour during the play's composition sounds remarkably like that of his protagonist, Michael:

A wealthy friend, Diana Lynn, called him up with an offer to house-sit while she and her husband sailed across the Panama Canal to Nassau. He sublet his own apartment for income to a visiting European actor, took up residence in "this fabulous Georgian -- well, Hollywood Georgian mansion" *and had nothing to do* but "*throw dinner parties and drink myself into oblivion.*" He did throw the parties, "for Natalie," but he stopped drinking and wrote instead.

(Crowley, "'Boys' to 'Men'"; emphasis added)

Here Crowley's comments regarding Wood and their shared binge-drinking compulsion shift uncomfortably close to assigning blame. In fact, as I shall explain shortly, the playwright's account of his relationship with Wood subtly mimics his character Michael's description of his relationship with his mother, in which he serves as her "girlfriend dash lover" (13).

As with the fixation upon drinking shown in *Boys*, gay male sexuality is never far from the stage in Crowley's play. To begin with, there is the extreme camp register of the characters' dialogue. Fascinatingly, the characters in *Boys* will make the same reference to diva worship as Albee's characters—including the identical diva—within the first several pages of the playtext. Like Martha's reference to Bette Davis in the opening sequence of *Virginia Woolf*, Michael and the other men's camp citations connect to gay male subcultural practices, but unlike Albee's text these citations are explicitly marked as homosexual:

MICHAEL. You're fun-starved, baby, and I'm eating for two! (*Sings*)

"Forget your troubles, c'mon, get happy! You better chase all
your blues away. Shout Hallelujah! C'mon get happy..."

(*Sees Donald isn't buying it*)

—what's more boring than a queen doing a Judy Garland imitation?

DONALD. A queen doing a Bette Davis imitation. (8-9)

The above instance is hardly a rarity in *Boys*: the script is peppered through with derogatory slang terms for male homosexuals such as "queen," "fag," "faggot," "Mary" "pansy" (8, 10, 17, 20, 43), "fairy," "queer," "cocksucker," "mincing swish" (49), "flaming little sissy" (97), and a personal favourite of mine, "butterfly in heat" (43). These words are often used in self-deprecating (or even self-loathing) ways, which ensures that "the Homosexual" is both directly declared as an identity and subtextually branded as pathological.

Moreover, gay male sexuality isn't merely present onstage via camp witticisms and slang terms: Crowley actually includes a sequence in which two of the characters, Hank and Larry, make love in Michael's darkened bedroom. Given that the play was written before the eruption of gay liberation in the decade to come, Crowley must ensure the sex act occurs just out of sight of the audience members. However, in what initially seems like an extraordinarily progressive and almost heroic move from a gay rights standpoint, the playwright uses dialogue to make clear that a gay male sex act is taking place: "MICHAEL. (*Into Alan's ear*) What do you suppose is going on up there? Hmmm, Alan? What do you imagine Larry and Hank are doing? Hmmmmmm? Shooting marbles?" (102). I am not in any way attempting to denigrate the large contributions Crowley has made towards the creation of a canon of gay male literature. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this explicitness, which Crowley no doubt rightly understood would repulse and disgust many of his heterosexual audience members, is quickly tempered by pleas for tolerance provided by two of the most memorable supporting characters: "EMORY. Whatever they're doing, they're not hurting anyone. / HAROLD. And they're minding their own business" (102). Despite the admittedly new, explicit nature of the depiction of gay male sexuality, Crowley's text contains and controls the representation by placing it in opposition to acknowledged sexual norms, and implicitly requesting liberal heterosexual society's tolerance.

The play therefore connects the discourses of alcoholism and homosexuality with a shared language of pathology. Crowley sets up this shared language through his use of the plot device of Donald appearing at the apartment, in Michael's gently mocking tones, "about a day and half early": Donald's psychoanalyst had cancelled his Saturday evening appointment (3). Besides providing an excuse for many more moments of general silliness and camp hilarity (e.g. "MICHAEL. Works late on Saturday and takes Monday off—what is he, a psychiatrist or a

hairdresser?” [5]), Donald’s therapist is unsubtle dramaturgical justification for providing Donald and Michael with lengthy expository monologues, or, more accurately, origin narratives. The therapist allows for signifiers of illness to appear onstage; even Donald and Michael’s seemingly frivolous banter is tainted by pathologizing wordplay:

DONALD. Well, tonight I was beside myself to get to the doctor—and
just as I finally make it, rush in, throw myself on the couch, and vomit
out how depressed I am, he says, “Donald, I have to cancel tonight—
I’m just too sick.”

MICHAEL. What didn’t you tell him you’re sicker than he is.

DONALD. He already knows *that*. (5; emphasis in the original)

For roughly nine pages of dialogue, Donald and Michael discuss their sources of unhappiness and malaise, which significantly dovetail with both homosexuality and alcohol abuse. Even Kushner is at pains to explain away what he deems as one of the play’s minor faults: “And yes,” he concedes, “the play begins a little clumsily, with those looooong monologues of Michael’s and Donald’s about their parents!” (xiii). His reasoning that through Crowley’s use of the figure of the analyst “an important change is being signaled” rings false; Kushner claims that Donald is not “in analysis to be cured, to become heterosexual” because he “is finally beginning to see beyond” (xiv). But just how we are to interpret Donald’s vague epiphany about his anxious childhood interactions with his parents, Evelyn and Walt, is never made clear. Furthermore, in the play’s final tableau, Donald has isolated himself from the other characters with a book, after telling Michael he’ll be gone from the apartment “just as soon as [he] knock[s] off that bottle of brandy” (114). Certainly one would be hard-pressed to read positive actualization and self-acceptance into these actions.

The origin narratives of Michael and Donald coincide perfectly with the rise of American Neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories on, and approaches to, the development of homosexuality. Despite Michael's caustic interjection "Christ, how sick analysts must get of hearing how mommy and daddy made their darlin' into a fairy" (9), the two characters reveal anecdotes which fit neatly into Neo-Freudian models (and to some degree, original Freudian models) of male homosexuality. As psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jack Drescher notes in his essay "Homosexuality and Its Vicissitudes," during the mid-twentieth century Neo-Freudian psychoanalysts in the United States stressed homosexuality as an undesirable, pathological, psychic malformation:

[Psychoanalyst S.] Rado considered [...] homosexual acts a misguided, maladaptive attempt to mimic heterosexuality.

Rado's (1940, 1969) pathologizing theory was central to the work of Bieber et al. (1962), who conducted a study of 106 homosexual men in psychoanalysis and compared them with 100 heterosexual analysands. Their study's starting hypothesis was "that heterosexuality is the biologic norm and that unless interfered with all individuals are heterosexual" (p. 319) and they labeled homosexuality "...a pathologic biosocial, psychosexual adaptation [...] Bieber et al. claimed that *a mother's undermining of a father's authority is a contributory factor in male homosexuality*. (89-90; emphasis added)

This influential discourse undergirds the stories the characters narrate. Both Donald and Michael tell versions of acquiring "the Evelyn and Walt Syndrome" (9). Donald insists he has "a neurotic compulsion to not succeed" because he "began to identify failing with winning [his] mother's love" (9). This neurosis has apparently shaped all aspects of his life. Michael also labels his own

current behaviour neurotic and describes his upbringing as the “[s]ame song, second verse” (9). Following amplified and damaging models of infantile regression and/or maternal identification as the root cause of homosexual object-choice, as Freud tentatively described in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and “Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of his Childhood,”

As Freud explains in the case of da Vinci:

From this [da Vinci’s childhood dream of a vulture] it would appear that Leonardo’s erotic life did really belong to the type of homosexuality whose psychical development we have succeeded in disclosing, and the emergence of the homosexual situation in his phantasy of the vulture would become intelligible to us: for its meaning was exactly what we have already asserted of that type. We should have to translate it thus: “It was through this erotic relation with my mother that I became a homosexual.” (“Leonardo” 466)

Michael explains that his mother “refused to let [him] grow up,” and that she “was determined to keep [him] a child forever” (11-12). He elaborates in a monologue that consumes over two full pages of stage time:

MICHAEL. What you see before you is a thirty-year-old infant. [...]

She [his mother] made me into a girlfriend dash lover. [...]

(*Beat. With increasing speed*)

And she nursed me and put Vicks salve on my chest and cold cream on my face and told me what beautiful eyes I had and what pretty lips I had. She bathed me in the same tub with her until I grew too big for the two of us to fit. She made me sleep in the same bed with her until I was fourteen years old—until I flatly refused to spend one more night there. She didn’t want to prepare

me for life or how to be out in the world on my own[...A]nd here I am—
unequipped, undisciplined, untrained, unprepared, and unable to live! (13)

In other words, both Donald's and Michael's back-stories cue the reader or spectator to interpret the characters' sexual orientations via prejudicial Neo-Freudian, as well as Ego Psychological, lenses. Their homosexuality is a result of twisted and obsessive relations with their mothers: quite simply, the play posits that they are gay because, in Drescher's phrasing, "they were once mamas' boys" (90). The very use of the word "boys" in the play's title in order to describe characters who are, for the most part, in their late 20s and early 30s connotes a lack of maturation, a sense of arrested development.

The addictive cycles the characters struggle with are presented as further evidence of this failed maturation. It is, of course, highly significant that immediately after Donald's confession about his misery and confusion, Michael heads to the living room "[t]o make drinks," claiming, "I think we need about thirty-seven!" (9). Additionally, the train of thought which begins Michael's melodramatic, self-pitying monologue about his personalized Evelyn and Walt syndrome is carefully couched in terms of unmistakable addictive excess:

MICHAEL. Fed up with dark *meat*, try light. [...] Hate *tequila*, what about *Slivovitz*? [...] And if you're sick of people, what about poppers? Or pot or pills or the hard stuff. And can you think of anything else *the bad baby* would like to indulge his spoiled-rotten, stupid, empty, boring, *selfish*, *self-centred* self in? [...] Is that what you think you've missed out on—my *hysterical* escapes from country to country, *party to party*, *bar to bar*, *bed to bed*, *hangover to hangover*, and all of it, *hand to mouth*. (11; emphasis added)

Michael's frenzied search for a life of (hetero)normalcy and meaning has put him into a state of

excess. Neo-Freudian terms abound in his self-meditation: he alternately pejoratively describes himself as regressive (“the bad baby”), narcissistic (“selfish, self-centred”), and even hysterical. His explication of his past actions is basically a laundry list of obsessions, neuroses, and perversions, and importantly those terrors begin with alcohol (tequila, the plum brandy) and Scandinavian and Greek male flesh (dark and light “meat”). (Note, too, how the section ends with a stress on “mouth” which the actor playing Michael cannot avoid. Like the queer addicts presented by Williams and Albee, Crowley’s gay alcoholic is a monster of orality and orifices.) While the addictive behaviour spreads to other substances and manifestations (purchasing expensive cashmere sweaters on credit, for example [9]), alcohol and gay sex form a type of two-towered gateway drug to psychosis and destruction.

Michael’s final accelerated exclamation at the end of this sequence is of great significance, as it stresses crucial subtext at work in Crowley’s *Boys*. Describing his frenzied travels and the resultant misery, Michael shouts “Run, charge, run, buy, borrow, make, spend, run, squander, beg, run, run, run, waste, waste, *waste!*” (11). On the surface, this string of manic verbs is about the financial debts Michael has accrued while jet-setting around the world. However, at a more metaphoric level, it stresses the abject fear that heteronormative subjects have of the homosexual and alcoholic Other: the figure presents a symbolic “wasting” of the self, a breaking down, a decayed loss of procreative ability that a culture of strict reproductive futurism makes its most prized possession.

This quality of waste connects Martha and George with Michael and the boys, but with different significances. Martha and George are symbolically linked with waste, or continuance and growth, through their struggles with alcoholism and biological fertility issues. After the climactic revelation that their son is not real, Nick quietly asks George, “You couldn’t

have...any?" to which both characters respond with "*a hint of communion*" "*We couldn't*" (252). By society's cruel procreative logic, they are wasted genetic material: lamentable, pitiable biological deformities prevent them from continuing their line via procreative sex. Michael and the boys, however, represent a whole different—and more culturally terrifying—form of aberration: they are genetic material that should *not* be continued, as the chance of reproduction as a result of sex acts between two men is non-existent. In both instances, the characters turn to alcohol in order to cope, which destroys their bodies and psyches. The confused and absurd "two gay couples" reading of *Virginia Woolf* here becomes slightly more intelligible:

- a) Martha and George and Honey and Nick do not (or physically cannot) bear children.
- b) Homosexual men cannot bear children.
- c) Martha and George and Honey and Nick are subtextually homosexual: no children are born because there are no women to bear them.

Nonetheless, though it is undeniable that Crowley's text borrows heavily from the themes and structural devices present in *Virginia Woolf* (e.g. spousal tension, a social gathering which descends into drunken ramblings, revelations which come about as a result of a sadistic "truth" game), there is one aspect in which Crowley's work presents a genuinely fresh perspective. *Boys* directly addresses the cyclical nature of excess and addiction, in a way that Albee's text does not, via two repeated pieces of dialogue which serve to coalesce gayness and alcoholism: states described as the "Icks" (18) and the "'Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night-syndrome'" (23). In their private moment before the party has started, Donald notes that Michael is only drinking club soda, and Michael shyly reveals that he has abstained from drinking and smoking for five weeks (17). Donald states that Michael "seem[s] happier or something" now that he is sober, to which

his friend “[q]uietly” responds “Thanks” (18). When Donald asks what has prompted this newfound restraint, Michael admits that his psychoanalyst “certainly had a lot to do with it” (18), but also claims he could not fathom surviving another “morning-after ick attack” (18). The Icks, Michael explains, is the cycle of anxiety, guilt, and depression which accompanies alcohol dependence and unrestricted social (and presumably sexual) behaviour:

MICHAEL. Unfathomable guilt—either real or imagined—from that split second your eyes pop open and you say, “Oh, my God, what did I do last night!” and ZAP, total recall! [...]

And from then on, that struggle to live till lunch, when you have a double Bloody Mary—that is, if you’ve *waited* until lunch—and then you’re half pissed again and useless for the rest of the afternoon.

[...Y]ou hang on till cocktail time, and by then you’re ready for what the night holds—which is hopefully another party, where the whole goddamn cycle starts over! (18)

Donald’s enthusiastic agreement with the process Michael describes demonstrates that he, as yet another of the play’s tortured gay alcoholics, is very well acquainted with the Icks. Crowley’s placement of this dialogue sequence so close to the characters’ Neo-Freudian origin narratives that appear at the play’s beginning invites audience members to make correlations between the twin cycles of behaviour. The Icks, it is implied, is a vicious “merry-go-round” of promiscuous gay sex and booze; Michael claims he had to “get off or die of centrifugal force” (19).

Nonetheless, his tragic undoing by the play’s finale is foreshadowed in the final line spoken before the first guest arrives: “The only thing is...” he tells Donald in an ominous tone, “I’d *kill*

for a drink” (19; emphasis in the original).⁸⁶

The ““Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night-syndrome””⁸⁷ is a related, but distinct, concept in the play, one that Michael claims “has to do with immaturity” (24). Here again we see pathologizing discourse pouring into the play by the pint-full: the jokingly named “syndrome” is of great semiotic significance. It describes when young men, of any declared sexual orientation, experiment sexually with one another during college, and then dismiss the experience the next day with “a lot of shit-kicking crap about, ‘Man, was I drunk last night! Christ, I don’t remember a thing!’” (24). The focus on this “syndrome” in the play serves to reinforce fears surrounding homosexuality and contamination. Doubtlessly, instances such as what Michael and his friends describe occurred fairly frequently on American campuses during the 1960s, and continue to do so today. The “Christ-was-I-drunk-syndrome” creates gay panic for audience members with varying degrees of homophobia or unease with male homosexuality by suggesting that alcohol can be used in order to blur the lines between gay and straight sexuality—and furthermore, that the substance will also be relatively ineffective at assisting in the repression of the terrifying memories of gay sex. As Michael notes, “You see, in the Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night syndrome, you really *are* drunk. That part of it is true. It’s just that you also *do remember everything*” (24).⁸⁸ Alcohol can therefore function as a cover: it can conceal aberrant desires and allow them to be inflicted upon normal, young male subjects.

⁸⁶ Crowley was to revisit Michael’s struggle with alcoholism in the sequel to *Boys*, *The Men from the Boys*, which had its premiere at the New Conservatory Theatre Centre, San Francisco, on 26 Oct. 2002. The final tableau of *The Men from the Boys* centres upon whether Michael will relapse into his addiction and resume his self-destructive behaviour:

After a moment, Michael turns, slowly goes to open the bar. He stands, looking at all the colored bottles and sparkling glasses. As Michael stands staring at the tempting display... [will he or won’t he?] ...slowly, all lights fade to black. (Collected 458)

⁸⁷ The term appears once in the text in scare quotation marks, and then merely as a hyphenated term.

⁸⁸ The fact that the men respond to Michael’s explanation with “[g]eneral laughter” (24), and that later Larry will assert about straight men that “[w]ith the right wine and the right music there’re damn few that aren’t curious” (82) only serve to heighten notions of a gay “agenda” or “conspiracy,” focused upon deviant homosexuals attempting to pervert normal straight men.

In a strange paradox, however, the gay panic created by the “Christ-was-I-drunk-syndrome” conflicts with the central theory of excess and gay perversion put forward by Crowley’s play, what Timothy Scheie has deemed in his well-crafted and thoughtful article, “Acting Gay in the Age of Queer: Pondering the Revival of *The Boys in the Band*,” its “unsavoury minoritizing tendencies”: that homosexuality is an innate, immutable identity characteristic. The text presents a similar perspective on alcoholism; the Icks will be eternally looping around in homosexual men’s psyches, it implies, in order to both facilitate, and escape from, gay desire. In what is arguably the best remembered passage from the text (as Kushner notes, in a play of many famous lines it is likely “the play’s most deservedly ‘most famous’ line” [xiv]), and in what is probably the only true reversal of Michael’s tyrannical power over the other “boys,” Harold, the “thirty-two-year-old, ugly, pockmarked Jew fairy” (53) asserts that Michael, and presumably all others “boys” like him, will be forever abnormal:

You are a sad and pathetic man. You’re a homosexual and you don’t want to be. But there is nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God, not all the analysis you can buy in all the years you’ve got left to live. You may very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life if you want it desperately enough—if you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate—but you will always be homosexual as well. Always, Michael. Until the day you die. (108)

Harold’s speech, powerful and moving though it is as a work of dramatic writing, seals the fate of *Boys* as a retrograde and conservative work, and one distinctly lacking in queer politics or representation. However satisfying it is to see Michael reduced to a nervous breakdown after

witnessing his campaign of torments and lacerating remarks against the other characters⁸⁹—many of whom he ostensibly calls his friends—what was accomplished by the play’s denouement was that mainstream, heterosexual critics were able to compartmentalize aberrant behaviours, and declare that *Boys*, though an interesting curio of sorts, held little to no meaning for them.

This is easily verified in the reviews of the period. For example, though Peter Lewis’s *Daily Mail* review, with the no doubt unintentionally comic title “When a Normal Man is the Odd Man Out,” called Crowley’s piece “[c]lever” and contained a vaguely empathetic tone, he stated that the play’s only real strength was “to turn the lone heterosexual into the odd man out and to make the spectator realize what that feels like...to be marooned at a party where all the merriment, the relationships, the behaviour (the dancing together) rest on an assumption he cannot share.” Lewis hastened to add, however, that the play’s altogether foreign subject matter ensured that it “would have been unbearable had it not been so funny.” Though he was to drastically revise his opinion in the wake of gay liberation, as Scheie has astutely noted, then *New York Times* critic Clive Barnes hinted that the self-loathing inherent to homosexuals is responsible for the play’s tragedy. In his second review of the original production, in a move equal parts progressive and patronizing, Barnes stated that he hopes “Mart Crowley is wrong and that all homosexuals are not as wretchedly miserable as he paints them,” while also claiming that the play “is set at a homosexual birthday party” but “is actually about *self-loathing and the malignant destructiveness* that develops from it” (36; emphasis added). Despite his claim that he hoped Crowley had not presented essentialized portraits of gay men, Barnes obviously entered into the pathologizing discourse surrounding homosexuality, which was quick to separate

⁸⁹ Kenneth Nelson’s performance of this breakdown sequence in William Friedkin’s film adaptation of the play is particularly moving and memorable.

subjects into “Us” and “Them.”⁹⁰ Gay spectators themselves were also heavily affected by the play’s pathologizing and anti-liberatory perspective. One original audience member Scheie quotes tells of feeling a risk of exposure, of interpreting how vastly different he was from the heteronorm: “I felt like I had been discovered...I wanted to fall into the earth” (1).

Thus mainstream heterosexual audiences warmed to the play with such intense affect because *Boys* re-affirmed already rampant homophobic and prejudicial attitudes through the figure of the explicitly gay (rather than queer) alcoholic. The gay alcoholic was represented as sick, diseased, in need of medical and psychological treatment, abject—and as a result, in a pre-Stonewall environment, box-office sales went through the roof. Not only did Crowley’s depiction of the gay alcoholic solidify and reify binary oppositions of homosexual/heterosexual, drunk/sober, and perverse/norm, but it also implied that the interpretive ruptures caused by queerness and alcoholism could be properly labeled, represented, explained—and most importantly—explained away. Heterosexual audience members were spared identifying with Michael and his friends; “normal” spectators could easily distance themselves through dis-identifying with the freakish characters on display. Crowley’s *Boys* intertwined homosexual desire and alcoholism in a very direct way, and as such the complexity of the queer alcoholic was transfigured into the relative simplicity of the gay drunk. The fluid characteristics of the queer alcoholic first presented by O’Neill, and then expanded upon by Williams and Albee, were disregarded. All that was mercurial and implicit became unambiguous and explicit.

Conversely, Albee’s richer text was far more difficult for mainstream critics and audiences to swallow. Martha and George were mesmerizing and terrifying characters because

⁹⁰ Critic Walter Kerr, who also reviewed the play for the *Times*, provided an exceptionally empathetic and insightful critique of Crowley’s work in a piece titled “To Laugh at Oneself—Or Cry.” But even Kerr’s review marveled at the play’s artistry in transporting audience members into a different or othered “environment” inhabited by “eight homosexuals” (1).

they were frankly much closer to home for heterosexual men and women. Anyone could become a George or a Martha; anyone could become, in a queer fashion, a wasted waste. The play succeeded in pulling audience members ever closer, forcing them to both define themselves against, and recognize themselves in, the characters at the same time. The intimate displays of the destabilizing pleasures of queerness and alcoholism found in *Virginia Woolf* are therefore performative. The tragedy places spectators in jeopardy of having their own subjectivities melt away, their own limits liquidated. *Virginia Woolf*, as in all queer art, reveals that limits are seldom, if ever, easy to locate: Albee himself has argued that the best and most dangerous works of art are those with “illimits” (qtd. in Zinman 9).⁹¹

⁹¹ The quotation “illimits of art” is taken from the essay “Some Thoughts on Sculpture” and is mentioned by Zinman in her book titled simply *Edward Albee*.

Epilogue: The Hangover

On 12 June 2014, Texas Gov. Rick Perry was participating in a Q&A session after a speech he had given to the Commonwealth Club of California in San Francisco. Despite the fact that the event was focused upon economic policy, the topic under discussion soon shifted to one of the largest wedge issues in contemporary American politics: gay rights. The week of Perry's appearance in San Francisco, the Texas Republican Party had just adopted a platform supporting access to "reparative therapy" for gays and lesbians (Baker, "Rick Perry"). Reparative therapy, now widely discredited by medical and therapeutic communities, attempts to alter an individual's sexual orientation so that he or she may live a heterosexual life. Documented treatments in centres that advocate reparative therapy have included aversion therapy (e.g. the application of electric shock to hands and/or the genitals; nausea-inducing drugs), mandatory prayer sessions, and talk therapy focused on reclaiming one's "natural" gender identity and sexual desires. After an audience question regarding the Texas Republican Party's new platform and its support of reparative therapy, interviewer Greg Dalton then asked Perry if he believed homosexuality was a disorder. "Whether or not you feel compelled to follow a particular lifestyle or not," Perry began, "you have the ability to decide not to do that. I may have the genetic coding that I'm inclined to be an alcoholic, but I have the desire not to do that, and I look at the homosexual issue the same way" (Baker, "Rick Perry"). An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that though the crowd at the InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel included many of the Governor's supporters, an audible gasp of disbelief escaped many in the crowd after Perry's comment (Baker, "Rick Perry").

Nevertheless, from another perspective, the Governor's bizarre claim was completely

understandable. As I have argued through the chapters of this dissertation, the discourses surrounding both alcoholism and queer sexual practices in the United States (particularly their interlaced histories of treatment) have been tightly woven together throughout the twentieth century. The bond forged between them is very strong; and, in our current cultural climate, which is increasingly concerned with the model of absolutes Sedgwick identified as volunarity/compulsion, it speaks to us in an even stronger way. While American culture and literature is a particularly rich and relevant field of study for this topic, it is of course impossible to escape aspects of the figure's imagery, and they stretch back to the very beginnings of the genre itself. Consider that one of the foundational texts of drama, Euripides's play *The Bacchae*, not only contains a version of a queer alcoholic figure, but makes the connection between alcoholism and maniacal sex perversion into the play's guiding conceit.

Produced posthumously at the City Dionysia in 405 BCE, *The Bacchae* at first appears to stress the binary of perversion/norm through the bodies of its respective protagonists, the god Dionysus and Pentheus, ruler of Thebes. Pentheus is described as a "*young man of athletic build, dressed in traditional Greek dress*" (214 s.d.), while Dionysus is "*of soft, even effeminate, appearance*" with a "*beardless*" face and "*long blond curls*" (1 s.d.). A recent adaptation by David Grieg for the National Theatre of Scotland, for example, starred Alan Cumming in the role of Dionysus—a decidedly queer actor whose body is haunted by androgynous, eroticized roles such as the Emcee in the Broadway production of *Cabaret* (see Fig. 27⁹²). However, before long this rigid binary between the two characters begins to dissolve, which is subtly hinted at in the homoerotic undertones in Pentheus's dialogue when he first comes face to face with his adversary, disguised as a follower of Dionysus rather than the god himself:

So,

⁹² Many thanks to photographer Richard Campbell for permission to use this image.



Fig. 27: Alan Cumming as Dionysus in the National Theatre of Scotland's *The Bacchae*.

you *are* attractive, stranger, at least to women—

which explains, I think, your presence here in Thebes.

Your curls are long. You do not wrestle, I take it.

And what fair skin you have—you must take care of it—

no daylight complexion; no, it comes from the night

when you hunt Aphrodite with your beauty. (453-58; emphasis in the original)

His remarks about Dionysus's gender non-conforming appearance (i.e. his long hair; his fair, sheltered skin, his girlish beauty) importantly both register the character's queerness and foreshadow Pentheus's own descent into the god's thrall of excess.

Initially, though, Pentheus becomes obsessed with the activities of the all-female Maenads, a group of women in the throes of Dionysian madness:

[R]eports reached me of some *strange* mischief here,

stories of our women leaving home to frisk

in mock *ecstasies* among the thickets on the mountain [...]

[i]n their midst stand *bowls brimming with wine*.

And then, one by one, the women wander off to hidden nooks where they *serve the lusts* of men. (216-18, 220-22; emphasis added)

Pentheus's voyeuristic desire to see these bizarre Dionysian revels is matched only by his revulsion, terror, and hatred: he is "sorry to see [the women] drunk," yet he craves witnessing their "obscene disorder" (815, 232).

And this voyeuristic desire, of course, forms part of a larger need: Pentheus's anxieties about the women's activities are a result of his fear and jealousy that they have located a pathway to self-knowledge or an essential truth. These anxieties are mirrored by those present in the audience: in many ways we all yearn for some form of transcendental self-knowledge, and this is stressed through the play's Chorus asking the question "[w]hat is wisdom?" (877). It is important to note, however, that historically the genre of theatre has placed a great deal of emphasis upon these particular methods—alcohol-induced havoc and queer sexual practices—for obtaining or accessing such wisdom or knowledge.

As *The Bacchae* demonstrates, however, this knowledge has a cost. The Maenads of the Theban hillsides are clearly juxtaposed with Pentheus, a symbol of sober, structured, heteronormativity: queerness is hence figured as a dismantling, transgressive, and insatiable thirst for something *more*, something *other*. The disorder that Dionysus foment—though,

crucially, does not partake in himself, a characteristic which O'Neill will capitalize on with his own Dionysian figure, Hickey—is precisely what Ann will later crave in *Edward Albee's At Home*: an othering pleasure that liquidates subjectivity. Halfway through the play, a herdsman from Mount Cithaeron arrives with a shocking message. The Messenger's description of the Maenads' actions in the mountains blends gushing fluid imagery with collective frenzied bloodlust:

One woman

struck her thyrsus against a rock and a fountain
of cool water came bubbling up. Another drove
her fennel in the ground, and where it struck the earth,
at the touch of god, a spring of wine poured out.

[...] With one voice they cried aloud:

“*O Iacchus! Son of Zeus!*” “*O Bromius!*” they cried
until the beasts and all the mountain seemed
wild with divinity. [...]

And at this we fled

and barely missed being torn to pieces by the women.
Unarmed, they swooped down upon the herd of cattle
grazing there on the green of the meadow. And then
you could have seen a single woman with bare hands
tear a fat calf, still bellowing with fright,
in two, while others clawed the heifers to pieces.
(703-707, 724-27, 733-39; emphasis in the original)

The wild women cease to have any sense of themselves and their individual subjectivities: drunk with both wine and the god's power, they cry with one voice and converge as a cohesive force in order to destroy "[e]verything in sight" (753).

The Messenger's narration of their collective delirium sets the scene for Dionysus's onstage possession of Pentheus. Euripides ensures that the audience is able to drink in the sight of the entranced Pentheus, cross-dressed as a Maenad. Pentheus's gender non-conforming costume signifies his newfound queerness, while his dazed state and peculiar dialogue with Dionysus about his transvestite appearance makes clear that he has lost his sense of self:

(Enter Pentheus from the palace. He wears a long linen dress which partially conceals his fawn-skin. He carries a thyrsus in his hand; on his head he wears a wig with long blond curls bound by a snood. He is dazed and completely in the power of the god who has now possessed him.)

DIONYSUS.

Why,

you look exactly like one of the daughters of Cadmus. [...]

PENTHUS. *(coyly primping)* Do I look like anyone?

Like Ino or my mother Agave?

DIONYSUS.

So much alike

I almost might be seeing one of them. (915 s.d., 925-27)

Dionysus's power has the ability to dissolve boundaries that initially seemed rigid, and Pentheus's transformation provides the spectator with the opportunity to see this dissolution in the flesh.

The effect is profound. The viewer must scopically take in (is, in a sense, unconsciously seeded with) the sight of Pentheus's queer, drunken body—a body which until this point in the

play was used to represent traditional gender and (hetero)sexual expression—and he or she is then forced to both identify and disidentify *at the same time*. As I have argued in *Parched*, spectators simultaneously experience a type of “diagnostic” disgust or modified pity, through witnessing a character who is unlike them via his or her addiction/compulsion/perversion, as well as fear, by identifying a “man [character] like ourselves” (Aristotle 76). This dis/identification destabilizes the audience member’s own sense of him or herself, and in ways that are not unlike those of alcohol or queer sex. Pentheus’s downfall in Euripides’s *The Bacchae* demonstrates that the malleable component topoi of the queer alcoholic have existed since the start of drama. Thousands of years later, it took a specific set of culturally contingent factors—those of America during the mid-twentieth century, namely the social construction of “alcoholic” and “queer” as identities, alongside the nation’s troubled histories of treatment for those pathological, addicted conditions—for aspects of the code to coalesce into a recognizable figure.

Governor Perry’s equation of alcoholism and homosexuality as addictive conditions, with which I began this epilogue, demonstrate how deeply this figure has penetrated into Western society and culture. The governor made the comments less than a year from the time of my writing, and clearly expected the audience to quickly and easily form the mental connection: it was as if through his ideological lens one so-called destructive lifestyle could easily stand for another. To a certain degree, this is to be expected: there are still citations of the figure that resurface in different works, though curiously theatrical representations appear to have taken a backseat to those from television as of late. Popular prime-time series such as *Nashville* feature closeted alcoholics, while the figure seeped into the hit Netflix series *House of Cards* during a jaw-dropping scene in the second season featuring a bisexual threesome. The *House of Cards* sequence was particularly fascinating, as it involved none other than Kevin Spacey: the actor’s

character, politician Frank Underwood, had a *ménage-a-trois* with his wife Claire (Robin Wright) and bodyguard Meechum (Nathan Darrow) in which the intoxicating effects of alcohol featured prominently. (All three characters were drunk, or had been drinking heavily, at the time.) To the present day, Spacey's body is still being used as a vehicle for conjoining alcoholism and queerness on television and laptop screens across America.

Nonetheless, as I have argued, the figure is best represented through the mechanics of the theatre, and though culture continues to pour out different reconfigurations of the queer alcoholic, it appears likely that its stage presence has already started to shift and change. This is evident from a recent production I attended which featured an iteration of the queer alcoholic. Since 2013, the Canadian pop/rock star Hawksley Workman has been touring his latest piece called *The God That Comes* to different theatres and arts festivals in the United States, Canada, Scotland, Denmark, and the Netherlands (Workman). *The God That Comes* is a one-man cabaret show that adapts *The Bacchae* in startling, performative ways. The performer even encourages audience members themselves to drink profusely throughout the performance. Workman slides effortlessly through the play's roles with simple prop changes to delineate the different characters (e.g. a pink boa and lipstick for Dionysus, a black military cap for Pentheus, etc.) in his deconstruction of the myth. The gender-bending, queer Dionysus, who appears in human form "strum[ming] a ukelele and rid[ing] a tiger in skinny jeans" (Nestruck, "*The God That Comes*"), is introduced in the lyrics to the comic song "Ukelady Boy," available on the video-sharing website *Youtube*:

Uke-uke-lady Boy, Uke-uke-lady Boy

You bat your eyes, so shy and coyish

Kinda girlish, kinda boyish

Uke-uke-lady Boy [...]

Tell me have you seen my Lord?

His fellowship of lust and joy

The very sight of him intoxicates you

And makes you want to

Walk-a talk-a look-a like-a smoke-a hookah little lick-a maybe suck-a maybe you

Could use a

Uke-uke-lady Boy [...]

The God of Wine and Song!

The song's lengthy line about the effects of the god's power, both humourous and disturbing, is packed with barely intelligible nonsense terms (e.g. "Walk-a talk-a look-a" etc.) and sonically recreates the psychic dissolution those in his thrall experience; the intoxicated hordes are unable to even form words.

Workman's production is a postmodern adaptation of Euripides's work. Like Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster's Group's adaptation of Williams's *Vieux Carré*, it mixes together recycled, recognizable signifiers in order to emphasize and comment upon the connection between repeated inebriation and queerness. Nevertheless, as we progress into the twenty-first century, it seems inevitable that theatrical representations of this relation will change alongside shifting models of alcohol addiction and sexuality. The reconfigurations of the queer alcoholic figure from the work of O'Neill in the 1940s through to that of Albee and Crowley in the 1960s prove this point: with the eruption of both the medicalization of alcoholism and gay liberation by 1970, the imagery of queer alcoholism mostly gave way to that of gay alcoholism with the opening of *Boys*. One can only speculate as to how these depictions will morph even further over

the years. American neuroscientist John David Sinclair has reported that opioid antagonists, such as naltrexone and nalmeferene, can be prescribed to alcoholics with the result of 75 per cent of them experiencing a reduction of drinking to “a safe level” (Glaser); non-normative sexual behaviours have continued to become increasingly visible and accepted in mainstream culture; the media has frequently declared new substances (e.g. pornography, internet shopping, etc.) as “addictions”: in a world in which all of these things are taking place, the very concepts of alcoholism and queerness are being revised at an accelerating rate, to say nothing of their depictions in American theatre. Audiences did indeed become addicted to consuming depictions of the queer alcoholic figure during the mid-twentieth century, but the hangover appears to be setting in. The question remains: what types of representations of excess, compulsion, and destabilizing pleasures will the tragic form move towards? What will our new models of addiction and queerness look like—and how will we stage them?

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