Stressed Sexuality: How Props, Stage Directions and Setting Convey Tormented Male Protagonists in Selected Plays of Tennessee Williams

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Stressed Sexuality: How Props, Stage Directions and Setting Convey Tormented Male Protagonists in Selected Plays of Tennessee Williams

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

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Table of Contents

Introduction.............................................1

Chapter One: Stage Directions...............5

Chapter Two: Props.................................29

Chapter Three: Setting.........................48

Conclusion...........................................63

Bibliography..........................................65
This thesis examines how the stage directions, props, and setting are patterned to create themes in character development in selected Tennessee Williams plays. This analysis focuses on four plays from a successful period in Williams’ life from 1955-1961 in which the playwright had established a pattern in developing sexually desirable male characters using symbolism and space: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). All four illustrate how Williams shapes the structure of the scenes by directing the space the characters reside in. Characters are conveyed most intensely through very specific staging notes, which give insight into what troubles the plays tormented protagonists. Although the symbolism behind each prop is richly varied, there is a specific pattern in Williams’ use of props, which enhance the protagonist’s major flaws, and add to the revelation of character slowly throughout the course of the play. There is a recurring structural theme of the space where the play takes place affecting the outcome and unifying mode of the play. This is seen most intensely when the setting of the play is varied versus a stationary setting. For example, Brick and Shannon have a much more positive ending versus Chance and Sebastian who are either killed or castrated at the end of the play. This thesis contends that the understanding of Williams’ main male protagonists is enriched through analyzing the stage directions, props, and setting in selected plays.
Tennessee Williams wrote memorable characters. The protagonists he created were a series of vivid pictures of the human condition. His plays are preoccupied with extremes of violence and sexual behavior: madness, and rape as well as brutal and fantastic deaths. Williams presents a dark world that shows exploitation, violation of moral codes, corruption and dehumanized passions of power and intimate relationships. *Suddenly Last Summer* is an ideal example of this corruption. Williams creates a vision of a deceased character, Sebastian, who exploits others for his own passion and in this midst of exploiting others, becomes the one who is violated as his body is devoured by the children he took advantage of. Williams makes his audience realize that beautiful worlds and tropical paradises can be tainted by the people that inhabit them. Characters such as Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana* and Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are proof that it does not matter where you are; tropical jungle or southern plantation, the world drives the misfits and the rebels into the same kind of unhappy self contained isolation. His pervasive theme is inevitable loneliness. Williams' protagonists are faded men, consumed by time and decay; Brick, Shannon and Chance exemplify this faded loneliness. The disheartened renegade characters of Chance and Shannon lead their lives of alienation; due to their failure to adjust with the worldly norms, they construct fabricated illusions to feel a sense of freedom. Protagonists such as Brick, Chance, and Shannon are anguished souls trapped in their own predicament until they manage to free themselves.

Part of the reason for Williams' success was that he created characters that were
attractive and empathetic to the audience and himself. Williams once said, “I cannot write any sort of story unless there is at least one character in it for whom I have physical desire.” (Hayman 58). Williams’ desire is openly expressed by the creation of homosexual characters such as Sebastian. The use of homosexual male protagonists shows a shift that Williams made from focusing on female protagonists to tormented men. Prior to 1950 the playwright had focused on victimized women such as Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). The shift from concentrating on women to men shows that Williams was starting to probe male characters more deeply. What first draws a reader or audience to a Tennessee Williams play is that the characters have very real qualities. For example, take Shannon in *Night of the Iguana*. Shannon feels the pain of losing his title of reverend and as the play progresses it also becomes apparent that Shannon is delusional. He is afraid of a ‘spook’ that hides in the jungle. That Shannon is handsome and is emotionally vulnerable makes him an appealing character. Shannon is a hero for Hannah when he saves the iguana, yet he is also villainous in his bizarre violence toward young Charlotte after he has sex with her. Characters like Shannon are not easily defined either as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The behavior of the characters varies and resides in the space somewhere in between villain and hero. The main male characters have their own demons and weakness that they battle throughout the course of each play. For example, Chance in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is plagued by memories of his childhood sweetheart. Chance’s weakness is greed; he wants nice clothes and cars so he gives up Heavenly to be paid for sex. Chance learns he desires Heavenly more than material wealth and his misfortunate ending lies in his decision to return to St. Cloud and her.
Williams succeeds in creating a whole different and fantastic world within his plays. This dream-like world is enforced by the setting and props and helps to define character. For instance, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* the feelings of isolation for the Pollitt family are intensified because the setting never leaves the plantation. The isolation that Brick experiences is written in the stage directions; he stays in his bedroom or even his bathroom whenever possible in order to distance himself from his wife and family. This isolation, along with his drinking, allows Brick to remove himself from the pain and guilt that plague him due to Skipper’s death. Part of the reason Brick wishes not to think about Skipper is because he is conflicted over Skipper’s confession of homosexual love for Brick. Although Brick denies that he had a homosexual relationship with Skipper, the possibility is brought up repeatedly in *Cat*. The 1955 *Cat* represents that Williams’ plays were straying towards openly homosexual characters. Examining the use of stage directions, props, and setting demonstrates authorial interventions into otherwise dialogue-based texts.
Chapter One: Stage Directions

The stage directions call for young and attractive men. Williams creates characters that are sexually attractive to both himself and the audience. His use of youth in describing how character should be cast is not straightforward, since many times characters are described as young, but ravaged. Take Chance, in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The stage directions call for a young man: “He is in his late twenties and his face looks slightly older than that; you might describe it as ‘a ravaged young face’ and yet it is still exceptionally good-looking” (158). Though Chance is still young, he is aged in appearance beyond his years. So while Williams wants youth on the stage, for the appeal that youth typically has for the audience, he also wants the actors playing his characters to offer more than freshness. Williams is looking for a face to show the audience that the character has lived life; perhaps they have lived even a little too roughly. It is clear that the slightly ravaged look that Williams typecasts does not decrease the appeal that the author wishes the characters to have. If anything, the roughened look gives characters, such as Chance and Brick, even more sexual appeal by adding a brooding and dangerous air to their characters.

Desire is a strong motivator and Williams shows desire in all forms: from the estranged relationship between a distant husband who may have had a homosexual relationship with his best friend and his sexualized wife in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, to a defrocked reverend who has violent tendencies toward women in his sexual encounters in *The Night of the Iguana*, to a socialite who enjoys sex with younger exotic boys in *Suddenly Last Summer*. These vastly different relationships show how sexual desire propels drama within the plays. In the stage
directions Williams describes characters who are not just sexually attractive, they are idyllic:

“His body shows no decline, yet it’s the kind of a body that white silk pajamas are, or ought to
be, made for” (157). This description of Chance exemplifies the sensual masculinity that inspires
intense desires. His attractiveness is representative of the main male characters in the plays
discussed, such as Brick or Shannon. Though their faces may be starting to show the signs of the
wear and tear of age, amazingly their bodies are hard, firm, and of course sexually appealing.
Yet these protagonists are conflicted or tormented in some way by their sexuality. They have
either exploited themselves for money like Chance has or they have deviant desires or attitudes
towards sex like Sebastian and Shannon. The stage directions help address what is truthful in the
portrayal of character.

The initial introduction of the leading characters in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* sets the tone
for how Brick and Maggie will act and speak toward each other throughout the play. The
description of Brick shows someone who is brooding and dark. Brick is a man more capable
than his current state reflects:

He stands there in the bathroom doorway drying his hair with a
towel...He is still slim and firm as a boy. His liquor hasn’t started
tearing him down outside. 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, which shows that at some deeper level
his is far from peaceful (885).
Brick exemplifies the masculinity that Williams wishes to create on stage. He is youthful, yet his character also reflects someone who has had terrible experiences that have made him ‘detached’ from life. Brick’s sexual appeal is important because it makes his disinterest in life even more intriguing; Williams keeps the audience wondering why such a handsome, rich man is drinking his life away. It is important that *Cat* maintains a sense of mystery leading up to the ultimate truth of why Maggie and Brick do not get along. Maggie tells the audience just how desirable Brick is: “You were a wonderful lover... Such a wonderful person to go to bed with... You know if I thought you would never, never, never make love to me again—I would go downstairs to the kitchen and pick out the longest and sharpest knife I could find and stick it straight into my heart, I swear that I would!” (892). Maggie’s statement proves that Brick doesn’t care about the desire that he arouses. Maggie tells Brick: “you were really indifferent to it ... Your indifference made you wonderful at lovemaking” (892). Brick’s indifference is part of what makes him alluring to both his wife and the audience. By using this apathetic character Williams creates his own interpretation of what is sexually appealing. Part of the representation of sexuality in *Cat* is to show how Brick’s indifference to his own sex appeal makes him become the representation of a certain ideal man.

On the first page of Act One Williams gives stage directions regarding how Brick should first appear to the audience: “Brick calls out to (Maggie), but is still unseen. A tone of politely feigned interest, masking indifference, or worse, is characteristic of his speech”. Brick’s deeply ingrained southern manners and his indifference prevents him from being reactive. Instead, his character internalizes any feelings he may experience and chooses to be pleasantly bland with his
wife and family. Williams leaves the door open for interpretation of what the “or worse” may be when describing Brick’s indifference. What could be worse than indifference? Anger, or even hatred? What the audience soon knows is that his indifference is a response to his wife. Although he is written to try to ignore her intrusions, Brick is repeatedly placed in the position of responding to Maggie. When Brick speaks to Maggie the stage directions note that it should be “without interest” (884). Though Brick is not responsive in her attempts at conversation or physical contact, Maggie does not give up. She is a strong character, constantly trying to draw Brick to her in an attempt to gain back his affection and attention. But Brick has learned that he can tune out Maggie along with the rest of his family.

It is difficult for Brick to ignore Maggie completely when they share a bedroom together. Maggie and Brick’s bedroom is not accidentally the place where the former owners of the house, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, slept together. In, “Notes for the Designer”, Williams states: “The place has not changed much since it was occupied by the original owners of the place, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship” (15). By including a description of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, Williams creates a connection between the two relationships of Brick and Maggie and the homosexual couple through his use of the bedroom. That a homosexual couple poetically “haunts” the bedroom of Brick and Maggie helps to pose strain when the sexual relationships of the couples are compared; Brick does not show interest in Maggie, while Jack and Peter lived there happily together for their whole lives. As Robert Emmet Jones notes, Williams expresses the homoerotic
longing that the men might harbor homosexual or bisexual tendencies in Cat (550). In addition to Brick’s relationship with Skipper, which both Maggie and Big Daddy already allude to as homosexual, the association of sharing a bed with Jack Straw and Peter Ochello implicates Brick’s sexuality. As Jones surmises, Williams was not necessarily creating a homosexual when he wrote Brick’s character, but he certainly does create a character that has feelings which may be homoerotic or bisexual. The thought of the bed being shared by Brick, Jack, and Peter keeps coming into play as the acts progress and the deceased Skipper is introduced. Brick accuses Big Daddy of putting him and Maggie in their room on purpose: “Maybe that’s why you put Maggie and me in this room that was Jack Straw’s and Peter Ochello’s, in which that pair of old sisters slept in a double bed where both of them died” (945-946). The implication of Peter and Jack’s relationship follows Brick and Maggie; their childless marriage and Brick’s lack of desire for Maggie introduce questions regarding Brick’s relationship with Skipper. Peter and Jack shared a strong bond, as Big Daddy tells Brick: “When Jack Straw died—why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin like a dog does when its master’s dead, and died too!” (946). While Brick and Maggie lack the intimacy that the former owners of the house shared, Brick and Skipper shared a strong bond. Peter and Jack’s legacy was a strong loving relationship and by comparison the stage directions show only harshness in Brick and Maggie’s relationship; the lines on Maggie’s face and Brick’s drinking show the ghostly shadows of love that was lost and tenderness that has been misplaced.

By comparing the relationships, one sees there is a lack of intimacy that is missing in Maggie and Brick’s marriage but was present in Brick’s relationship with Skipper.

Brick’s lack of interest in Maggie brings his sexuality under scrutiny. Maggie often tries
to gain the attention of her husband so Brick’s lack of interest is not attributable to Maggie’s lack of trying. Maggie is often put in a position to show off her sex appeal to Brick: “She (Maggie) steps out of her dress, stands in a slip of ivory satin and lace” (883). Brick’s disinterest seems only to make Maggie work harder to regain his interest, although Brick denies Maggie even the briefest of sexual encounters with him. Ruby Cohn points out that “Williams reverses Brick’s passion for his wife to hers for him” (67). Towards the end of Act One the stage directions have Maggie stand in front of a mirror and touch her breast and her hips with both hands while telling Brick about another man who wished to have sex with her (50). When she names the man Brick only remembers him as a football player who had to quit because of an injury. Though Maggie tries to entice Brick, the lack of a sexual relationship between them helps to raise doubts about Brick’s sexuality, and continual references to Skipper add to the questions.

Brick’s character is fragmented from guilt over a tragedy he cannot let go of; Maggie and Big Daddy both saw Brick break down after Skipper’s death. His extreme grief over the death of Skipper, combined with his lack of desire for Maggie, calls his sexuality into question by both his family and the audience. It is ironic that on Big Daddy’s birthday he and Brick finally discuss the relationship between Brick and Skipper, especially since Brick has just learned Big Daddy is dying from cancer. What brings Brick to discuss Skipper with his father is in part that Brick owns the secret that Big Daddy is dying. By Brick’s own admission he hates lying, and Big Daddy is being lied to about his cancer. Brick’s disgust for the secrets he sees in his family brings him to finally open up about Skipper’s death and how Brick rejected his friend. In Act Two Williams describes Big Daddy’s prodding about Skippers’ death and how Brick’s
detachment seems to finally be broken through:

His heart is accelerated; his forehead sweat-beaded; his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse. The thing they are discussing painfully on the side of Big Daddy, fiercely on Brick’s side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them. The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to ‘keep face’ in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the ‘mendacity’ that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with. It may be the root of his collapse (116).

Williams is ambiguous about their relationship even in the stage directions. Brick’s sweat, rapid breathing and change in voice all signal that Brick is highly stressed as he discusses his relationship with Skipper. That Brick is speaking “fiercely” during this discussion enhances how differently he is acting during this discussion of Skipper. The “inadmissible thing” that Skipper died to disavow was a sexual relationship between the two men. Brick and Skipper being active sexually with each other is something that they would have shied away from because of social taboo; however, this does not mean that a sexual relationship did not exist.

When Maggie tries to discuss Skipper with Brick, she suggests that Skipper was in love with him and Brick has a violent reaction to this suggestion: “Brick strikes at her with the crutch, a blow that shatters the gem-like lamp on the table” (911). The strong emotional and physical reactions Brick has, both during the conversation with Big Daddy and in his confrontation with Maggie, reflects a true crisis for Brick and the audience since the relationship between Brick and
Skipper is so up in the air. Though in the play it is left for the audience to decide what happened between the two characters, Williams does offer an opinion:

Brick is definitely not a homosexual...Brick's self pity and recourse to the bottle are not the result of a guilty conscience in that regard...It is his bitterness at Skipper's tragedy that has caused Brick to turn against his wife and find solace in drink, rather than any personal involvement, although I do suggest that, at least at some time in his life, there may have been some unrealized abnormal tendencies (Cat 705).

Williams presents a view of Brick that contrasts the previous stage directions where Brick's heart rate accelerates and he sweats while he turns "fierce" during the discussion of Skipper. The rapid breathing and sweat-beaded response are not the reaction of a man with "unrealized tendencies," but the reaction of someone who is nervous discussing the truth. John Timpane characterizes Williams' ability to create characters that are hard to define: "individual characters may be objects of love, pity, or ambivalence—but they resist being objects of identification. And catharsis, in its senses of purgation and purification, is usually denied, in favor of a complex of competing emotions, an uncertain richness of possible responses" (7). Brick is an ideal example of the multiple responses that Timpane describes because even he seems confused about his relationship with Skipper, and Brick's unwillingness to explore the possibilities of Skipper's true feelings shows that he feared them.

Brick's noncommittal attitude toward questions and concerns by his family is
exemplified when Big Daddy prods him. Big Daddy asks him how he broke his ankle and suggests that he was “layin’ a woman on that cinder track” (920). It is ironic that Big Daddy suggests this, since he has made it clear that he already suspects Brick may be gay. This suggestion is more Big Daddy’s trying to prod a reaction from Brick than him guessing how Brick’s injury really occurred. In response, Brick is directed to “meet his father’s hard, intent, grinning stare with a slow, vague smile that he offers all situations from behind the screen of his liquor” (921). When Big Daddy talks to Brick about his own days of sleeping in hobo jungles and railroad flops, he also brings up Jack Straw and Peter Ochello; what is important is what Big Daddy leaves out (945). Big Daddy acts on the assumption that Brick and Skipper may have had a homosexual relationship. This makes for underlying tension that Brick reacts to: “Brick wheels on his crutch and hurls his glass across the room shouting, YOU THINK SO TOO?” (946). Though Brick’s reaction is violent, it is not an admission to any truth. Brick’s character denies a simple conclusion by his vagueness and his refusal to heal after tragedy.

Chance, the main male character in *Sweet Bird of Youth*, is also vague in what he is seeking in St. Cloud. Chance comes to St. Cloud on a whim; driving a borrowed car, with a woman who is paying him. Chance seeks the American dream of freedom and happiness however, his actions do not always reflect this. As described in the opening stage directions there is a contrast between Williams’ description of the free birds outside of the old, elegant hotel window to when the scene moves inside the hotel and Chance is shown in bed. It is notable that Williams includes the birds to symbolize freedom: “Outside the window there is heard the soft, urgent cries of birds, the sound of their wings” (157). The freedom of the birds emphasizes the
difference from the opening glance of two sleeping figures lying in a bed facing towards the audience. These directions are revealing of how Williams wished Chance to be viewed; the birds are free to fly away at any time they wish, compared to Chance, who is really a caged bird. His relationship with a woman who is paying him for his time keeps him from flying away. As Rita Colanzi notes of Williams’ dramas, “references to captive birds often accentuate a character’s denial of his or her transcendence and responsibility to create a self”(452). Though Colanzi is referring to Camino Real, the analogy to birds is also relevant to Sweet Bird of Youth. Another critic, Mary F. Lux, notes that birds are “perhaps Williams’s most sacred totem animal of freedom and escape” (117). The birds in the stage directions are a way for Williams to connect Chance with a symbol of freedom. Chance’s captivity is self imposed; he believes he needs a woman with money to ‘keep’ him. In Act One there is a note about Chance’s need for Princess’s money: “He crosses to the bed, takes a traveler’s checkbook out of her purse, and extends it to her” (178). Though he does succeed in freeing himself at the end of the play, Chance has lived most of his life in a cage of his own creation. At the climactic ending of the play Chance breaks free and flies from his cage when he refuses to go with Princess. Princess tells him: “I’ll send a boy up for my luggage. You’d better come down with my luggage” Chance replies, “I am not part of your luggage” (234). Chance’s stepping up and taking charge of his own fate is arguably an act of transcendence for his character.

Chance believes Heavenly has the key to his freedom, but in reality only he can free himself. When Chance and Heavenly see each other again for the first time it is not the happy reunion imagined by Chance. “For a long instant, Chance and Heavenly stand there: he on the
steps leading to the Palm Garden and gallery; she in the cocktail lounge. They simply look at
each other... the Heckler between them. Then the Boss comes in and seizes her by the arm”
(218). In the brief moment where Chance and Heavenly meet again, Chance is confronted by his
past. His memories of the days when he and Heavenly were innocent and free are dichotomized
by the present day, where both characters are repressed and defiled. As indicated in the stage
directions, the Heckler and Heavenly’s father are positioned between them. This symbolizes the
defeat of Heavenly and Chance’s love by the forces that stand between them. As Ralph F. Voss
writes; “the reunion between the one-time young lovers, Chance Wayne and Heavenly Finley, is
so fleeting and wrapped up in a swirl of larger events that they literally do not speak to
eachother” (70). Compared to other couples like Brick and Maggie, Chance and Heavenly are
hardly ever on stage together during the course of the play, and the stage directions never place
Heavenly and Chance alone together. Later, in Act Two, Chance sees that Boss Finley is still in
control of Heavenly: “His arm is around Heavenly and he is speaking... When Chance sees the
Boss’s arm around Heavenly, he makes a noise in his throat like a hard fist hit him low” (223).
Boss’s arm around Heavenly is a symbolic gesture of the imbedded cultural and social
framework that serves to repress Chance and Heavenly, and makes thoughts of a reunion between
the old lovers too remote a possibility.

Part of this social framework is that Chance has shown up back in St. Cloud with an older
woman who is ‘keeping’ him. Chance may have been the sweetest boy in St. Cloud at one time;
however, age and loneliness turned him into someone who is pretentious and destructive.
Chance is a gigolo: “I was truly meant for love-making...slept in the social register of New
York!” (181). Williams clearly shows that Chance is Princess’ gigolo: “As the curtain rises, Princess has a fountain pen in hand and is signing checks. Chance, now wearing dark slacks, socks and shoes of the fashionable loafer type, is putting on his shirt” (179). Chance claims not to enjoy the acts that he is being paid for, stating, “I gave people more that I took. Middle-aged people I gave back the feeling of youth” (181). Chance does have moments where the audience sees that he can be giving emotionally: “He (Chance) assists her (Princess) to the bed. There is unmistakable sympathy in his manner, however shallow” (169). Though Chance claims not to enjoy his job, he does not pull away from touching Princess: “He reaches over the headboard to hand the glasses to her. She puts them on and looks him over. Then she motions him to come nearer and touches his bare chest with her finger tips” (166). Whether or not Chance enjoys his job, he is good at it: “He pulls her into his arms: She rests in them, panting a little like a trapped rabbit” (167). However callous Chance may be he is not immune to the loneliness that Princess feels; he too needs human contact. Though Chance seems indifferent, the stage directions show moments where he softens: “Chance sits down on the bed. He puts out his unfinished cigarette and immediately lights another. His voice becomes thin and strained”(160). While Chance provides pleasure, and human contact, as he ages he begins to look for more out of his life. The loneliness that Chance feels makes him idealize his youthful love with Heavenly even more, and his exile from St. Cloud causes him to have delusions about what he left behind. His progression toward St. Cloud is part of an illusional comeback, one that Chance believes will both assuage the loneliness he feels and redeem his morals.

Chance prefers to remember the good and forget the bad. It may seem that Chance is
progressing backward as he travels back through his past in St. Cloud. But he is traveling forward toward the realization of his lost youth and ultimately his castration. Chance is someone who succeeds in being mobile, yet his mobility propels him towards his own physical and psychological destruction. As can be said of most of humanity, his mobility is propelling him towards his own mortality. Chance’s decision to stay on in St. Cloud is a great change for his character. This decision is difficult for him, as the stage directions show in Act Two when he enters the bar at the hotel: “Chance draws a deep breath. Then, he stalks back into the main part of the cocktail lounge like a matador entering a bull ring” (207). Williams’s comparison to the matador entering the bull ring suggests that Chance knows that his struggle to win Heavenly and happiness will be difficult. Chance is not welcome back in St. Cloud, as evidenced by the town’s treatment of him: “They all stare at him...In a way he now has what he wants. He’s the center of attraction: everybody is looking at him, even though with hostility, suspicion and a cruel sense of sport” (213). He is quite literally taking a “chance” by staying in St. Cloud.

Even while Chance is still sitting at the bar there is a warning of what is to come: “There are a number of men, now, sitting around in the darker corners of the bar, looking at him...they are simply waiting for something...Miss Lucy stares at Chance and the men, then again at Chance, nearsighted, her head cocked like a puzzled terrier’s. Chance is discomfited” (215). Later as the violence starts to unfold Williams writes that “it is very important that Chance’s attitude should be self-recognition and not self-pity—a sort of deathbed dignity and honesty apparent in it” (234). As Chance faces the men who will castrate him he speaks to them and the audience: “I don’t ask for your pity, but just your understanding—not even that—no. Just for your
recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all” (124). Chance gathers the other characters in the play into this statement. Princess can see him in her own struggle with lost youth, Heavenly in her loss of fertility and Chance’s unborn child, Boss Finley with the loss of his wife and ultimately losing Heavenly to the shell of a person that she has become. His castration is not only dismemberment for him, it is also the desecration of hope for Chance Wayne and the other characters in the play. As Judith Thompson writes about Chance, “At the play’s end he surrenders himself to the castration which renders his dreams desecrated and dismembered” (132). His time to be with Heavenly has run out, along with his aspirations for fame and fortune. Chance’s last quote mentions time as the enemy, showing his recognition that he has been diminished by time and age and that the sweet bird of youth and hope has flown away for everyone.

*Suddenly Last Summer* also shows how easily a character can be diminished by desire for youth. This play is intensely focused on memory and deeply rooted in the reconstruction of memory. Though the play opens and concludes with the obvious authorial intention of violence, there are numerous indications that violence is not meant to be the overall theme of the play. The stage directions show this connection to memory and the violent subconscious by the use of Sebastian’s prehistoric “jungle garden” setting:

Giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers which suggest organs of a body, torn out,
still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant
hissing and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited
by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature (101)

The jungle garden focuses on recreating a lost and prehistoric world that will invoke the
subconscious and lost memories. The descriptive note to the director sets the stage to be organic,
a place where savage tastes, desires and actions come to life. As William Mark Poteet contends,
this play has “traditionally been interpreted by academic critics as a modern day morality tale,
one that examines an inescapable, cruel and naturalistic world” (64). While the play does deal
with base actions and animalistic desires, the main theme is remembering Sebastian.

The memory of Sebastian invades the first scene when Mrs. Venable brings into play his
book of poems:

She (Mrs. Venable) lifts a thin gilt-edged volume from the patio
table as if elevating the Host before the altar. Its gold leaf and
lettering catch the afternoon sun. It says ‘Poem of Summer.’ Her
face suddenly has a different look, the look of a visionary, an
exalted religieuse. At the same instant a bird sings clearly and
purely in the garden and the old lady seems to be almost young for
a moment (103-104).

Both the jungle garden and book of poems that Sebastian created produce strong memories of his
life. Mrs. Venable identifies her son with both the garden and the book, so much so that
Williams directs her appearance to change as her memories come over her. Mrs. Venable’s
memories invoke the beauty that Sebastian created: her memories help show the jungle garden not as a place of violence, but a place where beautiful poems are written and birds sing.

The way that Sebastian died raises questions of judgment. Williams shows the audience a horrifying ending to Sebastian as punishment for his desires. He is also showing the violent side of human needs. When Catharine is given the injection by the Doctor so she will tell the truth she seeks out Sebastian’s jungle garden: “Catharine has gone out into the dazzling jungle of the garden” (135). Once in the jungle garden Catharine begins her story. The stage directions show the noise level fades to a sweet bird-song as if willing Catharine to continue with the story: “The raucous sounds in the garden fade into a bird-song which is clear and sweet” (136). It is in the garden that Sebastian’s death scene is depicted by Catharine:

Nobody could believe it, nobody, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don’t blame them!—They had devoured parts of him. Torn or cut parts of him away with their hands or knives or maybe those jagged tin cans they made music with, they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little black mouths of theirs (147).

Sebastian had known some of the naked savage children he had either propositioned them or had sex with them. Writing of the reconstruction of Sebastian’s life, Poteet says, “how he (Sebastian) lived it, becomes critically less important than how and who recreates it by recall; thus cannibalism seems less a fitting punishment for his moral transgressions and more an ultimate taboo, amplified by homosexuality” (65). Poteet is giving Catharine importance, solely because
of her ability to recall and share the life and death of Sebastian. However, Catharine’s purpose in the play is to be a voice to the central character, Sebastian. And the way Sebastian died is too startling to be overlooked. The jungle garden that Sebastian created, where Catharine will ultimately recreate him for both his family and the audience, shows both the creative artistic side of Sebastian as well as the pedophile. *Suddenly Last Summer* is a play devoted to the secret life of man, and how his secret erupted and affected both the memory of him and those around him.

Sebastian’s death and his sexuality are intertwined by the way he died, and by how his homosexuality is undeniably linked to his death. Williams has stated, “homosexuality is not the theme of my plays, they are all about relationships” (2). Sebastian and the effect of his relationships are fundamental in this play. Sebastian’s sexuality becomes a significant topic because the audience must use imagination to envision Sebastian’s death since it was too radical to be shown on stage in the 1950’s. Critics have different opinions on how Williams is presenting Sebastian to the audience. John M. Clum writes: “Sebastian is another invisible homosexual, impossible to show on the stage in the 1950's, though, from the beginning of his career, Williams insistently forged a space, however tentative, for the presentation of the homosexual” (130). The fact that in *Suddenly Last Summer* Sebastian is already dead and is never shown on stage serves to back up Clum’s theory. However, Sebastian is far from invisible; the stage directions show how the people in Sebastian’s life are affected by his death and by the post-mortem revealing of his homosexuality:

“She (Mrs. Venable) strikes at him (George) with her cane. He

(George) releases the chair and Miss Foxhill pushes her off. He
trots after her a few steps, then he returns to Mrs. Holly, who is sobbing into a handkerchief. He sighs and sits down beside her, taking her hand. The scene fades as light is brought up on Catharine and the Sister in the garden. The Doctor comes up to them. Mrs. Holly stretches her arms out to George, sobbing, and he crouches before her chair and rests his head in her lap. She strokes his head. During this: the Sister has stood beside Catharine, holding onto her arm” (130).

Mrs. Venable orchestrates the entire scene, to protect Sebastian’s memory, when it is suggested that Sebastian was a homosexual. She withholds the money promised to George and Mrs. Holly until they agree to have the Doctor give Catharine a lobotomy: all to protect Sebastian from being remembered as a pedophile. The grief and chaos that surrounds the people closest to Sebastian is evidence that he was not just an invisible homosexual, as Clum surmises. The space that Clum insists Williams forges is far from tentative. In Suddenly Last Summer the space that Sebastian assumes is all encompassing. Though he is never seen on stage, Sebastian assumes the role of protagonist.

Sebastian’s family wishes that Catharine would tell another story, as none of them have anything to gain by Catharine telling the truth. One critic sees the re-enactment of Sebastian’s life and death by Catharine to be a method of seeking to cure Sebastian of his homosexuality. Kevin Ohi writes of Sebastian’s death in his essay Devouring Creation: Cannibalism, Sodomy, and the Scene of Analysis in Suddenly Last Summer: “such a tendency toward re-enactment also
implicates the heterosexualizing cure in the very desire it would cure" (27). It is hard to picture a cure for his sexuality, and it is doubtful that the play is seeking one. *Suddenly Last Summer* so blatantly flaunts the homosexuality of Sebastian that it is would be difficult to be persuaded that Williams was attempting to be apologetic for Sebastian’s behavior. Catharine had the opportunity to offer a lie: if she had lied then this curing that Ohi speaks to would have succeeded, at least for Sebastian’s family and the audience. The stage directions show the family waiting for the truth to be told. Their discomfort is visible: “There is a long pause. The raucous sounds in the garden fade into a bird-song which is clear and sweet. Mrs. Holly coughs and Mrs. Venable stirs impatiently. George crosses downstage to catch Catharine’s eye as he lights a cigarette” (136). Mrs. Venable does not want to hear the truth uttered, and George and Mrs. Holly have money to gain by Catharine lying about what she witnessed. But the truth that Catharine speaks is actually an anti-cure. Her retelling instead of sugar-coating Sebastian’s life brings his sexuality out of the dark more so perhaps than when he was alive.

Catharine is a leading antagonist, and the only one who knows the truth about Sebastian’s death. The stage directions show that Sebastian’s story causes Catharine pain: “Catharine turns away and breaks into quiet sobbing” (123). Catharine incorporated herself in a lie to give Sebastian social substance. D. A. Miller deems Catharine to be Sebastian’s “appointed censor” (12). But she does not truly censor his actions; she is a co-conspirator for a well-loved friend. It is undoubtable that there were constraints on sexuality in society during the time that the play was written and this fact is favorable for Miller’s argument. Williams could not have written *Suddenly Last Summer* as anything but a recollection; to act out Sebastian Venable’s demise
would have been difficult to stage. A pedophile, cannibalized by the young boys he enticed to
have sex with him, is not acceptable to the conventional American morality. Instead of seeing
these acts onstage the audience hears the retelling of his death and sexual trysts through others.
The act of retelling opens new opportunities for stage direction as the audience hears about the
past and sees the current reactions to it. When Catharine tells what happened to Sebastian she
receives a violent reaction: “Mrs. Venable springs with amazing power from her wheel-chair,
stumbles erratically but swiftly toward the girl and tries to strike her with her cane. The Doctor
snatches it from her and catches her as she is about to fall. She gasps hoarsely several times as
he leads her toward the exit Mrs Holly sobs and crosses to George, who turns away from her”
(147). Sebastian’s tragic death and the sorrowful truth are revealed for his family and the
audience through Catharine’s narration.

In The Night of the Iguana the stage directions show the protagonist, Shannon, to also be
facing his own tragedy and truths. Shannon is not capable of remaining separate or isolated from
the other characters. The struggles Shannon experiences show that he needs to be around other
people. He has a nervous condition and he literally comes to Maxine’s to crack up and the
description of Shannon shows his need for care to be provided for him: “Shannon appears, in a
crumpled white linen suit. He is panting, sweating and wild-eyed. About thirty-five, Shannon is
“black Irish”. His nervous state is terribly apparent; he is a young man who has cracked up
before and is going to crack up again–perhaps repeatedly” (330). Shannon’s description is
extremely dramatic. This wild-eyed man is unstable and at the end of his rope, just like the
iguana he saves. As Shannon’s character tries to hold his life together, he is instinctively drawn
to Maxine's with the hope of taking time to catch his breath. The audience sees Shannon trying to fight his obsessions, and his issues with religion and sexuality are referenced repeatedly. He refers to himself as “An ordained minister of the Church” (346). Though Shannon has been ‘defrocked’, he still thinks of himself as a priest:

Shannon is working feverishly on the letter to the bishop, now and then slapping at a mosquito on his bare torso. He is shiny with perspiration, muttering to himself as he writes and sometimes suddenly drawing a loud deep breath and simultaneously throwing his head back to stare up wildly at the night sky. Hannah is seated.... looking steadily at Shannon, like a guardian angel’ (388).

It is obvious from these stage directions that Shannon's character is searching for something out in the jungle at Costa Verde. As Rod Phillips theorizes, Shannon is actually making a religious pilgrimage to Costa Verde, in the hopes of restoring himself from his "spook" (61). Shannon is certainly on a journey, and it is possible he is searching for God, but on this journey he needs to be around others to heal. His search leads him to Maxine's, where he seeks cleansing and renewal in the natural jungle setting.

It is clear that Shannon seeks company; he does not want to be alone during his soul-searching journey, and he makes this obvious by having an audience every time he is acting irrationally. He makes himself the center of attention to ensure he will have constant company. He has Hannah trying to save his lost soul, Maxine trying to sleep with him, the women from the
tour trying to have him arrested, and curious German tourists wondering if he will actually take
the long swim to China. His most complex relationship is with Hannah, the saintly guardian, but
also a symbolic representation of the forbidden desire that Shannon fights. Hannah watches over
Shannon when he does ‘crack’: “She (Hannah) goes into her cubicle directly behind his
hammock. The cubicle is lighted and we see her removing a small teapot and a tin of tea from
her suitcase on the cot, then a little alcohol burner” (401-402). When Shannon first sees Hannah,
Williams describes her as unearthly: “Shannon looks down at her, dazed. Hannah is remarkable
looking—ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but
animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine and yet androgynous
looking—almost timeless” (338). The ghostly pale image that Williams conjures is supernatural.
With Hannah as his ‘guardian angel’ Shannon succeeds in facing his demons: “He grips the
section of railing by the verandah steps and stares with wide, lost eyes. His chest heaves like a
spent runner’s and he is bathed in sweat” (347). The “spook” that Shannon is running from is
symbolic for his desires: the underage Charlotte on the tour bus, for the woman in his parish, and
now for Hannah. So it is ironically fitting that this saintly guardian who is watching over
Shannon while his “spooks” catch up with him is helping him deal with his demons.

Shannon’s character has issues with his sexuality, which stem from his mother punishing
him for masturbating as a child. His reaction towards sex is unhealthy; he seems to regret the act
immediately after it is completed. Shannon tries to explain his actions with the young school
teacher in Texas: “we knelt down together [to pray], but all of a sudden the kneeling position
turned into a reclining position on the rug of my study and... When we got up I struck her. Yes, I
did, I struck her in the face and called her a damned little tramp” (368). Later he tells Nonno: “No sane civilized woman would have me,” alluding to his abusive nature. Shannon punishes himself for any sexual pleasure that he experiences. Williams’ stage directions sexualize his relationship with both Hannah and Maxine. The directions indicate an interest should be felt between Hannah and Shannon: “Shannon, standing behind Hannah, places his hand on her throat” (418). As James Fisher explains, “Williams believed that romanticism is absolutely essential and felt that the ability to feel tenderness toward another human being, the ability to love was paramount” (2). Fisher goes on to explain that romanticism must co-exist with self awareness and a clear sense of the difference between illusion and reality. Fisher contends that “characters who suffer most in Williams’ plays do so less because of any deviance from the social norms than because they, somehow, are self deluded” (2). This theory can easily be applied to The Night of the Iguana. Shannon has deluded himself into thinking that Maxine’s is the only place he is safe enough to ‘crack up’. Maxine also plays her part: “They are now on the path, Maxine half leading half supporting him (Shannon)” (426). The stage directions show that Shannon does feel tenderness towards Hannah. However, Maxine wins Shannon in the end because she has a greater influence on him. The Night of the Iguana brings together anguished souls who try to work through their turmoil in the Mexican jungle.

Stage directions that Williams provides play a large role in helping to interpret the text and the tormented main male characters. All the respective plays reference main male characters that self-dramatize to achieve their own means; Shannon and Chance are shown by the stage directions to create drama to attract attention to themselves. Shannon is created to be overly
dramatic from the start of the play when Williams describes him to be “wild-eyed”. Shannon cannot help but attract negative attention; he even urinates on the women’s bags when they finally do leave him in Costa Verde and go with Hank on the bus. Chance is written to come back to his old hometown as a gigolo with a movie star; ironically he does this to win back Heavenly. Sebastian also attracts too much attention with his licentious behavior in Cabeza de Loba. And even though Brick tries to hide in his room, his broken leg and spiteful relationship with his wife attract the attention of his family. What Shannon, Chance, Brick and Sebastian have in common is that they are desirable characters. Yet, they are on the run and their lives are in jeopardy because of their sexually deviant behavior. Shannon leaves his parish in Texas when the parish finds out about his sexual liaison with a parishioner, and he ends up tied in a hammock so he does not kill himself. Chance becomes a gigolo after an unsuccessful attempt at acting and leaves Hollywood, only to be castrated when he returns to his hometown. Sebastian leaves New Orleans to unleash his sexual desires someplace where no one knows him, but ends up cannibalized. And Brick may lose his family fortune because he will not produce an heir with his wife and is suspected of having a homosexual relationship with his best friend. As the world within each play comes to life, the stage directions convey how the characters should act and reveal each of the character’s motivations through the usage of devices other than dialogue and action.
Chapter Two: Props

Examining the effect that props have is an important part of understanding the thematic concepts of the plays because they help to give meaning to the text, setting, and characters. For example, Brick states that he drinks to feel numb: "liquor is the only thing that’ll kill this disgust" (943). Chance drinks and takes pills because he is nervous. The props that are liquor and drugs help to reinforce that many of the main characters in Williams’ plays are searching for meaning in any way possible. Props such as the flesh-eating Venus flytrap in Suddenly Last Summer help the characters invent their own illusionary world. Props also help the audience to better understand the emotional state that the characters are in. For example, in Night of the Iguana Shannon can relate to the tied up iguana and he admits that he is “a man at the end of his rope who still has to try to go on” (343). The image of the rope as a metaphor for Shannon’s sanity is interesting, particularly since he is tied up with rope in the final scene of the play to prevent him from taking his own life. Williams created props in his plays that, though they were everyday objects, seen repeatedly and in the right contexts, become imbued with symbolic meaning.

Williams makes it clear that the liquor helps Brick deflect the feelings of crisis that surround the Pollitt Family. Every time Brick picks up a drink in Cat a statement is made, displaying his dissatisfaction with his wife, family, and himself. Liquor, as a prop, is a constant throughout the play. The liquor allows Brick to live with the mendacity he claims is rampant in his life. Williams describes the liquor in Act Two as Brick’s barrier for keeping himself
disconnected from the rest of his family: “Only Brick remains unengaged, leaning upon the liquor cabinet with his faraway smile, an ice cube in a paper napkin with which he now and then rubs on his forehead” (67). Maggie aptly describes her husband: “devoting yourself to the occupation of drinking” (886). The liquor is a barrier for Brick, a buffer between the inhabitants of the house and his feelings toward them. George W. Crandell notes, “For Brick, drinking is one kind of social activity that allows him to remain in close physical proximity with others while keeping himself emotionally distant” (433). The liquor softens his feelings of guilt and despair over Skipper’s death. It does not, though, soften his anger towards Maggie and his disgust with the rest of the family as they vie for Big Daddy’s fortune. Big Momma continues to prod Brick to stop drinking: “You put down that liquor, son, your hand was made fo’ holdin’ somethin’ better than that!” (915). However, she never retrieves the liquor from his hand or from the shelf. In fact, there is liquor in every room so that Brick can continue drinking as he moves slowly through the rooms of the plantation. Brick often refers to the level of alcohol in his blood: “I have to hear the little click in my head that makes me peaceful” (935). The ice in the glass of liquor is heard clinking in most every scene. The liquor is an armor for Brick, though it is not the kind of armor that will stand up to the conniving of Mae and Gooper. In fact, Maggie’s choice of armor, though different from Brick’s, is far more appropriate. Maggie’s hard won Diana Trophy Archery set that Mae finds in Act One is more efficient than alcohol. The family that surrounds Brick and Maggie at the Pollitt plantation are devious in their planning for cutting Brick and Maggie out of the fortune, and Brick’s drinking only gives them more ammunition to present to Big Daddy. The violence that Maggie’s archery set implies is for protection from the war that
rages over the Pollitt Estate.

Though Maggie is adept at protecting herself and Brick from Mae and Gooper’s spying, she has difficulty protecting the secret that their love life is in trouble. While the relationship of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello flourished, in bed Maggie and Brick do not seem to have that luck, though they sleep in the same bed that Peter and Jack shared. When Big Momma asks Maggie why her and Brick’s relationship has not resulted in children or made Brick happy she points to the bed and tells Maggie; “When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!” (903). The bed is a symbol of failure and powerlessness, especially with so many “no neck monsters” bred by Big Momma’s other son as a reminder. Their relationship in bed is lifeless by this time, and just to remind them both of that Dixie rushes into their room “firing a cap pistol at Margaret and shouting: Bang, bang, bang!” (912). The blanks being shot out of Dixie’s fake gun have obvious implications. Brick is no longer interested in drawing his gun. He cannot seem to impregnate his wife; the blanks in the gun are symbolic for the “blanks” Brick “shoots” in bed. The little girl and her gun also fittingly bridge the problems that Brick has between the sheets, and the guilt that Brick is plagued by over Skipper’s death. Brick blames himself for the death of his friend Skipper, as sure as if Brick had fired a gun and killed Skipper. He cannot stop thinking about his part in Skipper’s death: “he (Skipper) made a drunken confession to me and on which I hung up!” (951). The replication of powerlessness shows the reasons behind Brick’s drinking. The liquor is a symbolic crutch that Brick is using to hold himself together and keep the facade of being unemotional and unattached to anyone in or out of bed.

The fractured leg, which Brick broke while jumping hurdles drunk, causes Brick to have
to use a crutch which also symbolizes what is broken in him. From the start of the play the crutch is noted as something necessary for Brick to be able to move around; without it he needs someone to help him. The crutch is both a physical prop and a metaphorical allusion to the needy person Brick has become since Skipper’s death. The crutch allows Brick to balance on his good leg while he pours himself a drink, or while he expresses his attitude about mendacity. Big Daddy and Maggie use the crutch to their own advantage when they take it from Brick in an attempt to get him to stop drinking and talk to them. Maggie tells Brick, “Lean on me,” to which Brick replies, “No, just give me my crutch” (893). Later in the play Big Daddy throws the crutch from Brick’s reach. Brick says, “Will you please give me my crutch so I can get up off this floor?” Big Daddy takes advantage of the situation and responds, “First you answer my question. Why do you drink?” (939). In the same way that Brick is obsessed with drinking, Big Daddy fears death: “I put up with a whole lot of crap around here because I thought I was dying. And you thought I was dying and you started taking over, well, you can stop taking over now” (922). The birthday candles on Big Daddy’s 65th birthday cake that Big Momma tells him to blow out are a symbol of triumph over his defeat of death: “Big Daddy, blow out the candles on your birthday cake” (921). The candles on the cake represent birthdays that have passed, and as such, one more reminder to Big Daddy of mortality. The clock that is part of the setting is also a reminder to him: “the clock chimes softly, sweetly. Big Daddy gives a short, outraged glance” (939). Big Daddy knows that time is passing and that he cannot stop it, nor can he turn back the clock. The clock and the birthday candles are conflicting symbols of the lies and the false hope that pervade the relationships in the Pollitt house. While the clock reminds Big Daddy that time
is running out, the candles on his cake tell him to celebrate his health. Finally it is Brick who is able to open up and talk with Big Daddy and tell him the truth about the cancer: “How about these birthday congratulations, these many, many happy returns of the day, when ev’rybody but you knows there won’t be any!” (951). Brick breaks the cycle of mendacity by providing his father with the truth that no one else would.

The firecrackers that go off during Brick and Big Daddy’s talk symbolize the eruption of emotions that is being hashed out between them: “A puff and crackle and the night sky blooms with an eerie greenish glow. Children shriek on the gallery” (929). Brick and Big Daddy are at a standstill in the conversation when Big Daddy asks Brick, “Why is it so damn hard for people to talk?” (928). The fireworks contrast with the liquor cabinet, which literally helps Brick to ‘bottle up’ his emotions. When Brick gets up while Big Daddy is talking to go to the liquor cabinet he tells Big Daddy: “This talk is like all the others we’ve ever had together in our lives! Its nowhere, nowhere–its–its painful, Big Daddy” (936). As Colby Kullman writes, “He (Brick) has become so disillusioned and guilt ridden that even the well-intentioned, loving attempts of Big Daddy to understand and help him seem to fall short of his salvation” (667). Kullman establishes an important link in how the guilt of Skipper’s death causes Brick’s rupture from his family. Big Daddy’s response to Brick’s rejection of his attempt at meaningful conversation is to “Seize the crutch and toss it across the room” Big Daddy’s frustration with his favored son stems from Brick’s rejection of the life that Big Daddy wishes him to have (927). Then in the next moment the stage directions introduce another type of prop into the scene: “A little girl bursts into the room with a sparkler clutched in each fist, hops and shrieks like a monkey gone mad and rushes
back out again as Big Daddy strikes at her. . . The two men stare at each other” (937). The two sparklers are symbolic of the fight residing in both Big Daddy and Brick; both still have life left in them. That the little girl has a sparkler in each fist is important; this symbolizes a connection between the two sparklers and the fight that Brick and Big Daddy are constantly in. The sparklers, like the firecrackers bring energy into the scene.

While Brick relies on whiskey, Chance prefers vodka; only unlike Brick, Chance does not have a Big Daddy or Maggie to keep watch over him. Instead Chance has Princess, who like him, prefers to drink and take drugs. Ironically, Princess reclaims her fame on the big screen while Chance fails in his attempt to seek fame and material success. At the beginning of the play Williams quotes Hart Crane: “Relentless Caper for all those who step\The legend of their youth into the noon” (150). It is noteworthy that Williams chooses to quote the poet Hart Crane, who is known for substance abuse, especially since Williams focuses on Chance’s drug and alcohol infused behavior. Williams’ use of Crane fittingly foreshadows the lost youth and virility of Chance, who like Brick, is heading toward middle age in life. Chance’s youth has been spent using his sex appeal. As Thompson notes, “Chance laments the waning of his sexual appeal and powers, but gives little indication that he has outgrown his youthful belief in their importance” (136). The pills and vodka, as props, help to show how irresponsible Chance has been with his youth. Nor does Chance take responsibility for his drug and alcohol abuse; he tells Princess in Act One, “All my vices where caught from other people” (173). The continued usage of both alcohol and drugs in the play shows that Chance is not willing to change. In Scene Two of Act Two Williams describes Chance drinking in the cocktail lounge: “Chance removes a pint bottle
of vodka from his pocket and something else which he washes down with the vodka" (84). Though Chance claims to be successful, he has lost his confidence, along with his youth, so he carries his alcohol and pills on him to provide him reassurance.

The drugs and alcohol, along with the way he drifts through life relying on his sex appeal and conniving, help Chance’s character to be seen as corrupt. For example, Chance uses his cunning to try to gain more money from Princess as he follows her with a tape recorder, pen and Princess’s checkbook. Chance records Princess talking about her Moroccan hashish: “Princess! Do you know something? All this conversation has been recorded on tape” (176). Using the props of the taperecorder, pen, and checkbook, Chance believes that he has the best of Princess. Chance tries to control the situation by blackmailing her. He hands her the checkbook and tells her, “Here! Here! Start signing” (43). Princess’s money would mean freedom for Chance. As Thompson writes, Chance has relinquished his dreams of fame and fortune and is now in favor of the alternative—“to go on” (132). Chance’s desire for material wealth shows a fault in his character’s ability to make ethical or rational decisions, and instead, his plan backfires and Princess regains control of the situation rather quickly. She tells Chance, “I want you...I say now and I mean now, then and not until then will I call downstairs to tell the hotel cashier that I’m sending a young man down with some travelers checks to cash for me” (44). That Chance tries to blackmail Princess shows how far his morals have deteriorated, and his inability to successfully blackmail her symbolizes another failure for him. Only a few minutes later Chance repeats his pill and vodka gesture: ”he has removed a pink capsule from his pocket, quickly and furtively, and drank it down with his vodka” (91). The props of vodka and the pill speak to his
failure, and that he has accepted his fate as an aging gigolo.

That Chance is being paid for his time in bed with Princess is dissimilar to his relationship with Heavenly, where he is the buyer. Chance describes how dearly he paid for his time with Heavenly on a train: “I bribed the Pullman conductor to let us use for an hour a vacant compartment on that sad, home-going train” (205). Chance states: “(I) gave him five dollars, but that wasn’t enough, and so I gave him my wristwatch, and my collar pin and tie clip and my signet ring and my suit, that I’d bought on credit” (205). Chance bought his time with Heavenly. He did not pay Heavenly, but only for the space that they used on the train. He saw less value in the objects, jewelry and suits, than in the time he could share with her. But that boy is gone and in his place is a man whose youth is lost along with his self-respect. Chance now cares about nice clothes and driving Princess’s Cadillac. Chance tells Princess he wants to “Toot those silver horns and drive slowly around in the Cadillac convertible so everybody that thought I was washed up will see me” (186). The change in his evaluation of these materialistic goods signals that Chance has changed what he values. He states, “I cried in her arms that night, and didn’t know that what I was crying for was—youth” (206). Chance’s focus on ‘things’ and his subsequent moral decline is his way of retaining youth.

Chance is characterized by his virility, and the subsequent use of his sex appeal to make a living for himself shows how important youthful vitality is for him. To show the importance of sex Williams makes use of the bed, a major prop that Princess pays Chance to be in. Williams notes in Act One that “the principal set-piece is a great double bed” (157). This bed becomes a central prop, like the bed in Cat. The size of the bed takes up the space of the room, and is also
the place where transactions take place between Chance and Princess. The bed demands
attention for the sheer factor of its size and for the action it implies. The bed is where Chance
earns his keep with Princess, and also where Chance claims to be first castrated by Princess. The
equity of Chance’s body is what gives him value, so it is surprising when Chance claims to feel
castrated by accepting Princess’s offer: “get a little sweet music on the radio and come here to me
and make me almost believe that we are a pair of young lovers without any shame” (179). She
commands Chance, “close the shutters and draw the curtains across them” (179). The pen and
checkbook are traded for closed blinds and drawn shades, and Chance’s drawing the blinds and
shades over the windows signifies he is accepting Princess’s proposition. Chance accepts the
sexual trade of his body for cash; by doing so he makes himself a commodity. So it is not
surprising when Chance appears submissive in his castration, since he admits to have already
been castrated by the position his lost youth and virility have placed him in.

Mortality is another theme addressed through props. Princess’s life has been taken over
by her own fears: “Oh God, I remember the thing I wanted not to. The goddamn end of my life!
[she draws a deep shuddering breath]” (31). Princess’s fear of mortality is echoed by Chance’s
fear of his meaningless existence, and by Heavenly’s hysterectomy and subsequent inability to
have children. When Princess cannot breathe, Chance is there to get her oxygen: “He has
extracted from the case a small oxygen cylinder and mask. He fits the inhalator over her nose
and mouth. She falls back on the pillow. He places the other pillow under her head” (163). The
oxygen cylinder is one of the many items that Princess needs to keep up her existence; it
demonstrates how physically panicked Princess is by thoughts of her own death. At one point
Princess tells Chance, “Chance, come back to your youth. Put off this false ugly hardness” (176). The loss of youth is synonymous with the descent towards death in *Sweet Bird of Youth*. In Act One, when Princess asks what the time is, Chance responds: “My watch is in hock somewhere. Why don’t you look at yours?” Then Chance looks at Princess’s watch and states: “It’s stopped, at five past seven.” (167). The watch signifies that time has stopped for both characters. Neither character wants to think of the time that is silently passing, and with it their lives. Chance later sums up his intentions: “I go back to Heavenly, or I don’t. I live or die. There’s nothing in between for me” (207). At the end of the play Chance hears a clock ticking. As the noise becomes louder and louder Chance states, “I didn’t know there was a clock in this room...It goes tick-tick, its quieter than your heart-beat, but it’s slow dynamite, a gradual explosion, blasting the world we lived in to burnt-out pieces...Time—who could beat it, who could ever defeat it?” (235-236). Colanzi notes that “Chance’s denial of his mortality is symbolized by his obsession with Heavenly, the love of his youth” (453). Chance has taken hold of the idea that if he reattaches himself to Heavenly his failures will be forgotten and his lost youth will return. Both Heavenly and Chance cement the loss of their youth by losing their ability to procreate. Heavenly states, “Dr. George Scudder’s knife cut the youth out of my body, made me an old childless woman” (198). Though Chance is at the heart of both their castrations, instead of taking responsibility, he blames “the enemy, time” (236).

In *Suddenly Last Summer* the main character Sebastian, like Chance, also experiences violence to his body at the hands of others. Both Chance’s castration and Sebastian’s cannibalized death are sexually driven. The children that ate Sebastian were his victims, and
Chance’s castration is driven by his career as a gigolo and that he gave venereal disease to the daughter of the most powerful man in town. While Chance has no one to protect him, the means of Sebastian’s death is protected by his mother, who tries to protect the memory of Sebastian from further desecration, by containing all the facts surrounding his death and only allowing Sebastian to be remembered as a young socialite or a poet. Certain props in *Suddenly Last Summer* allude to the closed nature of the characters; the book of Sebastian’s last summer’s poem that holds the key to his demise and the truth about other characters lies closed on the table: “(Mrs. Venable) lifts a thin gilt-edged volume from the patio table as if elevating the Host before the altar” (103). Mrs. Venable controls the access to the poems that are in this book: “There are twenty-five of them, he wrote one poem a year which, he printed himself on an eighteenth-century hand press at his-atelier in the-French-Quarter-so no one but he could see it....” (104). It is important that the book is closed instead of open, since this signifies how private Mrs. Venable is about guarding her memories of Sebastian. Her controlling nature extends to everything and everyone that had contact with her son. For example, when Mrs. Venable is telling Dr. Sugar about Sebastian and Catharine she has Catharine’s mother and brother removed from the room: “Wait upstairs in my upstairs living room for me” (110). She then tells Mrs. Foxhill to “Get them upstairs. I don’t want them at that window during this talk” (110). Mrs. Venable does not wish to have George and Mrs. Holly hear what she is telling Dr. Sugar, for fear that they may try to discredit her. Then she turns to Dr. Sugar and says, “Let’s get away from the window” (110). The window represents a visual opening in the set for George and Mrs. Holly to be able to hear and see the conversation between the doctor and Mrs. Venable,
and as such the window provides an opening that Mrs. Venable wishes to avoid. A prop that helps reveal Sebastian’s mother is her reticule that holds her cigarettes, which is also closed. Mrs. Venable asks the Doctor to open it for her: “This is a reticule, Doctor. (She raises a cloth bag) A catch-all, carry-all bag for an elderly lady which I turned into last summer.... Will you open it for me, my hands are stiff” (112). Little does the Doctor know that by opening Mrs. Venable’s purse and helping her he may as well symbolically be opening “Pandora’s box” and all the trouble that went along with it. Catharine is also being used as a closed vessel, for she holds the memories of Sebastian and the information regarding his death. Catharine hides from the injection and hides from being forced into telling the truth: “You know what I think you are doing? I think you are trying to hypnotize me....Yes! I feel so peculiar” (135). Catharine’s freedom is in how she portrays Sebastian. This freedom is taken away from her when she is given the injection: “if they give me an injection—I won’t have any choice but to tell exactly what happened in Cabeza de Lobo last summer. Don’t you see I won’t have any choice but to tell the truth” (121). The secrecy is a wall that the characters in Suddenly Last Summer hide behind and the props offer a way into the secrets.

Williams also uses color, specifically white, to create meaning through visual props. The most striking instance is Catharine’s white bathing suit. Catharine states, “He bought me a swim-suit I didn’t want to wear. I laughed. I said, ‘I can’t wear that, it’s a scandal to the jay-birds!’”(140). One notable reading of the white bathing suit that Sebastian gives Catharine is offered by D. A. Miller: “Cathy’s body is implicated in male homosexuality not merely as its sign, or even its analogy, but as its very evidence” (3). To picture Catharine in the white bathing
suit as she emerges from the water with the suit clinging revealingly to her body is undoubtedly sexual: “It was a one-piece suit made of white lisle, the water made it transparent!–I didn’t want to swim in it, but he’d grab my hand and drag me into the water, all the way in, and I’d come out looking naked” (140). To connect her visible femininity to homosexuality, because Sebastian used Catharine to lure men for him, is an interesting comparison, to say the least. As Miller contends, Catharine’s image in the bathing suit becomes a spur for the homosexual fantasy. Though white symbolizes purity, the twist is that the white bathing suit is see-through and blatantly sexual. The suit proves Catharine is a highly marketable product to be sold by the unscrupulous Sebastian.

The color white can have many different meanings; white is often used as symbol for purity, white is the color of light and is blinding, white often alludes to the insanity that is implied throughout the play. In the stage directions for the asylum there is a white chair that Catharine and the nurse/nun in the white habit/costume take turns sitting on in Scene Two. “The sister in her sweeping white habit, which should be starched to make a crackling sound, pursues the girl about the white whicker patio table and among the wicker chairs: this can be accompanied by quick music” (116). The cigarette that Catharine puts to her lips is also presumably white. The cigarettes, like the white nun’s uniform and white patio set are all props in the state asylum. The white props contribute to the setting of the asylum and add a dramatic element. Without the white “nurse uniform” the nuns are just nuns, and the setting would seem more like a convent than a mental institution. The Dr. Sugar who is referred to as “doctor” throughout the play is introduced with his real name by Mrs. Venable to Catherine: “This is Dr.
Cukrowicz. He says it means “sugar’ and we can call him “sugar”- (126). Though the doctor’s name implies sweetness, the truth is that he is there for an ominous purpose- to possibly lobotomize Catharine. In the case of the Doctor his name shows the possible insincere, white, bleached sweetness of his practice and intentions toward Catharine. Thompson theorizes that “(Dr. Cukrowicz) is the potential victimizer of Catharine, whose mental and emotional life or death is dependant on whether or not he decides to ‘bore a hole in my skull and turn a knife in my brain’” (122). Another image of white is the description of Sebastian at the restaurant on the day he died: “Sebastian was white as the weather. He had on a spotless white silk Shantung suit and a white silk tie, and a white panama, and white shoes, white–white lizard skin–pumps” (142-143). On Sebastian’s last day, “he was having a bad time with his heart and was frightened about it” (142). Sebastian popped little white pills: “Cousin Sebastian wasn’t well. He was popping those little white pills in his mouth. I think he had popped in so many of them that they made him feel week....His, his!–Eyes looked–dazed” (143). Catharine describes him as being kind and affectionate, but also notes that something had changed with him. Like many of Williams’ male characters he was not mentally stable and was holding himself together using the “little white pills”. Sebastian’s unhappy mental state is fed to the audience in bits and pieces during Catharine’s story. The little white pills let the audience know that Sebastian needed help to keep his demons away. In Christianity white symbolizes sacrifice and purity, as the white Eucharist is a symbol for the body of Christ. The use of white surrounding Catharine and Sebastian is more than coincidental; both Catharine and Sebastian are sacrifices, like the Christian symbol of the Eucharist. Catharine’s body is sacrificed to the asylum to protect Sebastian, while Sebastian’s
cannibalized death shows that he became a sacrifice to the pedophilic lifestyle he chose.

The retelling of Sebastian’s life starts in his own terrifying and secretive garden, a place that Sebastian created and where monstrous creations grow. The play raises the question of whether Sebastian is a monster who deserved to be devoured. The meaning of colors is important and Williams notes in the beginning of Scene One that “the colors of this jungle-garden are violent” (101). The leafy plants give the play a cloistered “garden of Eden” feeling. This green foliage is very different than the white of the asylum. As the play opens with “violent plants” the audience also must feel the “savagery” of the garden. Though the “jungle garden is loud with the sounds of its feathered and scaled inhabitants,” the Venus flytrap, mentioned repeatedly, stands out from the other ‘inhabitants’ (129). The Venus flytrap feeds on insects. After Sebastian’s death Mrs. Venable tells the Doctor, “Sebastian had to provide it with fruit flies flown in at great expense from a Florida laboratory that used fruit flies for experiments.” She then tells the Doctor, “I cant, I just can’t do it!...So, goodbye, Venus flytrap!” (101-102). As Fisher says, “Williams’ sexually driven characters were often outlaws who could only be fulfilled through some kind of transgression. His characters were often shocking to audiences and even more so in the world they inhabited. Aggressive in their pursuit of fulfillment, they can destroy and be destroyed” (3). The kind of sexual desires that Sebastian had could only be fulfilled through what would have been seen as a social transgression. Sebastian’s death by cannibalism is also foreshadowed by the Venus fly trap devouring the flies. Williams purposefully links Sebastian to the savage flytrap to show that Sebastian is unable to resist his savage desires.

The natural tropical setting of The Night of the Iguana is comparable to the jungle setting
of *Suddenly Last* Summer. The natural props in Puerto Barrio create the mood of the play. For example, the proprietor of the hotel where the play takes place, Maxine, makes sure all her guests are offered rum-cocos because the drinks are a favorite of hers, probably because the coconuts are abundant so she has a free mixer for the rum. Being a single woman running a business makes Maxine financially conscious and what the outdoors provides for free is used repeatedly through the play. In a stage note, Williams has Maxine walking down the path when: “a coconut drops to the ground” (339). Williams shows the audience the abundant availability of resources for industrious characters who make use of their surroundings. Even the animals are used as a resource: the iguana that is caught makes for entertainment and food. Rather than creating the setting as a ritzy resort with expensive drinks and amenities, Maxine’s Costa Verde Hotel is a cheap bohemian getaway. As critic Charles Bressler writes, “human beings are simply animals who are caught in a world that operates on definable scientific principles and who respond somewhat instinctively to their environment and internal drives” (40). The use of the lush Mexican environment of the play proves that Williams has developed characters that efficiently shape and use the world that they inhabit.

The canvas hammock [strung from posts on the verandah] is a crucial prop because of how it reveals Shannon’s character (328). Shannon initially comes to Costa Verde to share the companionship of Maxine’s now deceased husband, Fred. When Shannon arrives he states, “I looked forward to lying in this hammock and talking to Fred” (331). Now, since Fred is gone, Shannon resorts to spending most of his time lounging silently in the hammock, instead of talking and fishing with Fred. Later in between Act Two and Act Three Williams notes that, “in
staging, the plastic elements should be restrained so that they don’t take precedence over the more important human values” (387). To speak to Williams directions for this play the hammock’s comfort is probably secondary to the comfort that Fred would have given Shannon. Shannon states, “Fred knew when I was spooked—wouldn’t have to tell him. He’d just look at me and say, ‘well Shannon you’re spooked’” (389). Since Fred is gone, the hammock serves its own purpose of reminding Shannon of the comfort he felt and also of the change with which he has such a hard time coping. Critic Judith Thompson also characterizes the hammock as an object of comfort: “Shannon’s attempt to regress to infantile innocence is objectified by a womb-like canvas hammock” (4). The hammock was a place of comfort until the end of the play, when it becomes his prison: “Shannon is hauled back through the bushes and onto the verandah by Maxine and the boys. They rope him into the hammock” (400). The change in the meaning of the hammock is also a turning point for Shannon’s character, signaling his confrontation with his “spook”.

In *The Night of the Iguana* the iguana is metaphorically linked to both death and freedom, and the iguana symbolizes both of these themes. Just as Shannon is tied to his hammock, the iguana is also tied up at Costa Verde, fated to be dinner for Maxine’s hired help until it is set free by Shannon and Hannah: “Shannon is going to go down there with his machete and cut the damn lizard loose so it can run back to its bushes” (424). The iguana is developed as a prop throughout the play, from the time it is caught and discussion ensues about how it tastes, to when Shannon calls it “God’s creature” (423). Shannon frees the iguana and tells Maxine, “I cut loose one of God’s creatures at the end of the rope” (426). There are multiple meanings of the iguana. Most
notably Alan Brown writes that this freeing of the iguana somehow frees Shannon from “his guilty obsession with the past” (165). Shannon’s past is haunted by negative sexual experiences and a difficult loss of his job as a reverend; it is not hard to connect that freeing the iguana is Shannon metaphorically freeing himself from his past. There is also a connection between the iguana and Hannah’s poet grandfather, Nonno. Once the iguana is freed from a sure fate of death, Nonno finishes his poem and dies. The meaning behind Nonno’s last name, Coffin, foreshadows what will ultimately happen to the aging poet. When the iguana is freed, and Nonno finishes his last poem and dies all in the same night, it marks a turning point in the play; both Nonno and the iguana are able to escape. This could even be read that Nonno’s death gives Hannah freedom from the burden she had been tied to, so Nonno’s spirit sets Hannah free. For Shannon the iguana raises questions of how the character will free himself from his own issues. For Shannon, freedom from his ‘spook’ will not come as easily as untying himself from the verandah. However, Maxine offering him companionship and a place to stay is a start.

The props play a large part of creating meaning within the play and developing plot. The props often act as symbols to create recognition within the characters of the reality they have created for themselves. In *The Night of the Iguana*, the iguana shows how Shannon is as “tied” in the hammock to face his own demons, as the iguana is tied to the verandah awaiting its fate as supper. The props help to characterize the main protagonists. Chance and Brick’s drinking and the huge beds reflect upon their alcohol problems and also their issues associated with their sexuality. For example, the whiskey Brick uses and the liquor bottles that are a constant presence in *Cat* help to demonstrate how anguished Brick is over his guilt that he played a role in Skipper’s
death and this anguish carries over to his sex life in bed with Maggie. For Chance the bed symbolizes his dependency on his sex appeal. Props are key because Williams uses very obvious symbols to create an effect within the plays. The meaning behind certain props help to illustrate what the source of anguish is for the main male characters.
Chapter Three: Setting

Setting focuses on describing the location and scenery where the plays take place. The variety of settings in one play versus a stationary setting in another is directly related to how character is built. There is a significant difference between a setting that changes and one that stays the same for the duration of the play. Part of the ritual of these plays is that character identity is associated with the variations in setting. Plays like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Night of the Iguana* are intensified by unchanging scenery as well as lighting that helps to reveal what torments Brick and Shannon. In contrast characters that are on the run because of their sexually deviant behavior are associated with erratic shifting of the setting and character, such as *Sweet Bird of Youth*. When the location is constantly shifting, the outcome for the main male character is usually negative. For example, Chance’s fate is changed because he travels home to St. Cloud, and Sebastian is killed when he travels from his home in New Orleans to Cabeza de Lobo. In comparison Brick and Shannon have more favorable outcomes by being in one location protected by family or friends who wish to help them. The difference between the play’s having a mobile or stable setting is consequential to the outcome of a character’s fate.

*Cat* reflects, by Williams own admission, a classical unity which is uncommon in his plays. This unity is directly related to the setting of the entire play being contained to only the Pollitt plantation. With all the action in one place, the scenes of *Cat* move quickly and take fast dramatic turns that are gripping. The drama is maintained and heightened by the set that encloses the characters together, where the audience watches as they struggle with each other over a
fortune—the estate, owned by the patriarch of the family, Big Daddy, who will decide which of his sons inherits the plantation. Kullman characterizes Big Daddy in relation to the world of *Cat*:

"Big Daddy Pollitt appears to have tyrannical control over his Delta plantation empire, seeming to rule without pity, Big Mama; sons, Brick and Gooper; daughters-in-law, Maggie and Mae; his grandchildren; his doctor; and his minister. His word is the law" (668). The ‘plantation empire’ may be dominated by Big Daddy; however, it is truly Brick who holds the attention and affection of his father and mother. While Big Daddy celebrates life Brick seems to be focused on drinking his away, and Big Daddy’s frustration with his favored son is palpable through most of the dialogues of *Cat*. Big Daddy’s estate is Brick’s for the taking, if he can only reach out to his father.

The opening set of *Cat* is the bedroom of Brick and Maggie, and is described by Williams as “The bed-sitting room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta... Perhaps the style of the room is not what you would expect in the home of the Delta’s biggest cotton-planter” (880). The familiarity of landscape allows the audience to be drawn to the characters, instead of focusing on changes in scenery. Lighting is also important to the set of *Cat* and in the “Notes for the Designer,” Williams writes: “Along an upstairs gallery which probably runs around the entire house; it has two pairs of very wide doors opening onto the gallery, showing white balustrades against a fair summer sky that fades into dusk and night during the course of the play” (881). The light of the sky and the white balustrades draw attention to the upstairs of the house, as well as the bed-sitting room. Williams also adds:

there was a quality of tender light on weathered wood, such as
porch furniture made of bamboo or wicker, exposed to tropical
suns and tropical rains, which came to mind when I thought about
the set for this play, bringing also into mind the grace and comfort
of light, the reassurance it gives, on a late afternoon in the summer,
the way no matter what, even dread of death, is gently touched and
soothed by it (880).

The light is meant to soften the characters and make their fears seem more human, and Williams
is very specific about the sunlight having a reassuring quality. In a play that focuses on death and
guilt the author wishes the light to reflect peace in an otherwise chaotic world.

The directions for the setting purposefully create a well-lit atmosphere where the
characters are forced into the light. Light, as a principal part of the setting, helps to reveal
whichever character the light is being focused on. When Maggie tries to talk to Brick about
having children he walks away from her and outside into the light: “He (Brick) continues to stare
at her a moment, then mutters something sharp but not audible and hobbles rather rapidly out onto
the long gallery in the fading, much faded, gold light” (906). Williams notes that there should be
fanlights above all doors on the set. He describes these to be “transoms shaped like an open glass
fan”(881). The purpose of these high-set lights is to have the designer take pains to “give the
actors room to move about freely, to show their restlessness, their passion for breaking out” (881).

The lights are meant to complement the actors and show spaciousness in the huge, plantation
style house. As Poteet observes, “Williams does not allow the characters in Cat to hide or get lost
in the dimness of the background; rather it exists to absorb some of the impact from the well-
lighted and modern foreground, where the dramatic action is played out" (43). The background is, however, where Brick’s character tries to hide himself. Brick seeks out the dimness of the bedroom or bathroom; when Big Momma knocks at the door and Maggie unlocks it, Brick “hobbles rapidly to the bathroom and kicks the door shut” (899). Brick seeks out isolation on the plantation. The brightest lighting is associated with the company of the other characters and also the mendacity that they exhibit, and that Brick despises. Though the plantation is a large house, it is still just a house and Brick cannot hide from his family or their lies.

The lack of variety in the setting of *Cat* allows the audience to feel the contempt that has bred for Maggie from Brick. The whole family knows about the lack of sexual activity in Brick and Maggie’s relationship, since Mae listens at the door and wall to their bedroom. That all of the characters are enclosed in the same setting allows for this kind of familiarity. Because of the family’s intimate knowledge of the close relationship between Brick and Skipper, coupled with Brick and Maggie’s sexual problems, insinuations surrounding Brick’s relationship with Skipper are used against him as Mae and Gooper try to emasculate Brick in the eyes of Big Daddy. Mae and Gooper’s rampant reproduction that creates their monstrous children becomes grotesque as the audience learns that, in Maggie’s opinion, their offspring are part of their greed. Mae and Gooper keep busy scheming and manipulating over Big Daddy’s fortune. Big Daddy tells Brick that Mae and Gooper: “listen at night like a couple of rutten peep-hole spies and go and give a report what they hear to Big Mama an’ she comes to me and says they say such and such and so and so about what they heard goin’ on between Brick an’ Maggie, and Jesus, it makes me sick. I’m goin’ to move you out of that room” (926). Though the plantation is large, it is easy for Mae
and Gooper to spy on Brick and Maggie because they are all in the same house together. Mae and Gooper are allowed access to Brick and Maggie’s personal lives through the keyhole of their bedroom door. No door is safe from them in the Pollitt plantation. When Big Daddy and Brick are talking in the gallery with the doors closed, Big Daddy hears someone outside and he yells, “Is someone out there by that door?...After a discreet pause, Mae appears in the gallery door” (925). Big Daddy states, “I want some privacy here, while I am having a confidential talk with my son” (925). The gallery of the Pollitt plantation is only of interest to Mae because Brick and Big Daddy are talking in private. Insulated from the outside world, the Pollitt family will not tolerate secrets for long; this is evidenced when Brick eventually tells Big Daddy he is dying. Maggie and Brick’s relationship is forced out from behind the dimness of their bedroom door and under the microscope of their watchful family.

The relationship between Chance and Heavenly is more open to interpretation than Brick and Maggie’s relationship. The setting of *Sweet Bird of Youth* includes multiple locations as the play moves through the town of St. Cloud. The varying location of the set creates distance between the characters, in comparison to the single location of the Pollitt plantation in *Cat*. *Sweet Bird of Youth* opens in an old-fashioned hotel on Easter Sunday and the setting is not just any hotel, but the Royal Palms Hotel in St. Cloud. There are church bells tolling and the Sunday morning sun is shining, “A church bell tolls, and from another church, nearer, a choir starts singing The Alleluia Chorus. It draws him to the window” (158). The setting is comfortable, with Chance by the window and Princess lying in the bed. Lighting on the set reveals Chance to the audience: “the shutters are opened, we see him clearly for the first time: he’s in his late
twenties and his face looks slightly older than that” (157). It is Easter Sunday, a day of religious celebration and redemption. The joyful choir and church bells symbolize a calling for forgiveness. Easter, the day when Christ rises after dying for the sins of the world, is also when Chance wakes up in St. Cloud. As Chance progresses through town Williams demonstrates the character’s realization that though he has lost his youth, he can still regain his dignity. Chance seeks forgiveness and salvation through his journey back to his childhood home on Easter Sunday. He also seeks the mythical Heavenly, whose name implies salvation. Chance feels that he and Heavenly belong together, but he has cost Heavenly her lost youth and they are no longer innocent young lovers. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, unlike *Cat*, there is no redemption for the main male character.

Chance is haunted by his memories of youthful happiness, but he is also faced with the same problems that he previously encountered. In Act Two the setting changes from the hotel to the terrace of Boss Finley’s house. The house is described as having Victorian and Gothic design and is set against the Gulf. The Gothic house on the Gulf implies isolation and power; this can also be an apt reflection on Heavenly’s father, Boss Finley. Thompson describes him to be “cast in the role of evil incarnate .. he makes St. Cloud infernal, a hell of heaven” (142). Using Thompson’s description, it is fitting that Boss Finley should live in a Gothic style house. Williams describes the house as having “A single white column” (195). The one bright, white column of Boss Finley’s isolated Gothic house could be interpreted as being a symbol for his one and only child Heavenly, who is often referred to as her father’s “beautiful girl” (195). Ralph Voss characterizes the relationship between Boss Finley and Heavenly to be dominating. As Voss
describes, Boss Finley is so arrogant and close to his daughter that it borders on incestuous (67-68). Chance has come back to St. Cloud to redeem Heavenly, but first he has her father to contend with.

In the next scene of Act Two the action moves back to the cocktail lounge and surrounding garden “Royal Palms are projected on the cyclorama which is deep violet and dusk. There are Moorish arches between gallery and interior; over the single table, inside is suspended the same lamp, stained glass and ornately wrought that hung in the bedroom” (200). If Boss Finley’s house implies Gothic isolation, the hotel’s violet cocktail lounge implies royalty; the color purple is the ancient color to denote royalty. The Moorish arches and stained glass show wealth. Chance is not welcome in either Boss Finley’s house or the richly decorated hotel. Boss Finley is the king of St. Cloud and Chance is his enemy. Boss Finley calls Chance a “handsome young criminal degenerate” (190). Boss Finley also promises Heavenly, “I am going to remove him (Chance), he’s going to be removed from St. Cloud. How do you want him to leave, in that white Cadillac he’s riding around in, or in the scow that toes the garbage out to the dumping place in the Gulf?” (199). The settings are very specific and are meant to inspire vivid images through their use of color. The changing scenes do inspire deep-rooted memories for Chance; they remind him of what he lost and what he left behind, places he has been exiled from, and because of the exile they seem even sweeter.

The changing scenery echoes the drifter in Chance and also keeps the play moving forward toward his castration. Chance demonstrates his capacity for sexual feeling by driving himself and Princess toward St. Cloud. His desire to once again be with Heavenly outweighs his
common sense, so much so that he takes his current lover with him to try to win Heavenly back. Chance remembers the lust he felt for Heavenly when he tells his Aunt Nonnie, “God, yes, we were in love!.. When she undressed, I saw that her body was just then, barely, beginning to be a woman’s” (205). Thompson says, “Chance laments the waning of his sexual appeal and powers, but he gives little indication that he has outgrown his youthful belief in their importance” (136). However, Thompson’s point is arguable because it can also be contended that as Chance moves through the bars and hotels of his old hometown he recognizes that his youthful fantasies are no longer important if he cannot have Heavenly’s love. His mobility toward St. Cloud is based on memories and yearning for Heavenly, and this movement will ultimately bring him to the sterile demise of his sexuality, as his character delays his departure in a place he is not welcome. He goes from the hotel, to the cocktail lounge, to the rally for Boss Finley to see Heavenly and then to a bar and finally back to the hotel. The erratic shifting of scenes develops a vision of the tormented male protagonist. The constant changes to the setting help recapture Chance’s past for the audience, while at the same time helping Chance to acknowledge who he was and who he has become. This shifting in scenes back and forth between different locations sheds light on the deluded hopes and dreams of the characters while also offering the possibility of redemption as the play progresses first away from, and then back towards Chance’s hotel room where his fate will ultimately change. The quick moving variety of settings propels the play toward the inevitable violent death of Chance’s sexuality and any hope he had to be with Heavenly.

The setting and characters of Suddenly Last Summer are meant to be exotic and rich, even more than the lush and Moorish setting of Sweet Bird of Youth. Williams states; “the set may be
as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. The initial set represents part of the Venable mansion in Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans, on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The reputation of New Orleans already creates a perception of passion and taboo desire, Thomas J. Richardson describes the Garden District of New Orleans to be a:

City defined as undercurrent of sin, release, depravity, particularly violence and sex...The city of night and release was a place where one could attempt escape from restrictions inhibitions, the burden of responsibility and time and live only for the fulfillment of the moment. However, the city of night is always followed by the city of the day” (633-635).

The lack of inhibitions was taken further by Sebastian when he created the wild interior of the New Orleans mansion. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, and this outrageous inside garden is depicted to be viewed during the late summer; which is the perfect time for the garden to be ripely in bloom (101). The fantasy-like setting is where most of the scenes are set, and the dramatic mansion houses the even more exotic jungle garden. The contrast between the old and stately mansion and the wild and terrible jungle is compounded by the sounds played within each section of setting. In the sitting room of the house there is “lyric music” playing (111). In the jungle garden the noise is “loud with the sound of feathered and scaled inhabitants” (129). The setting is specifically shocking, but not as surprisingly violent as Sebastian’s life. The setting is representative of Sebastian’s punishing
death which will be narrated in the dark chaos of the Victorian mansion/jungle garden. The theater of memory allows the play to go back in time to where Sebastian traveled, without leaving the mansion.

As Catharine retells her memories of Sebastian the light darkens: “the light gradually changes as the girl gets deeper into her story: the light concentrates on Catharine, the other figures sink into shadow” (140). Sebastian is never on stage, but with the lighting dimmed the mood is set for the memory of Sebastian to take over. The sounds on stage also change: “the sounds of the jungle garden are not loud but ominous” (131). Williams also has the lights dim onstage whenever Catharine is about to make a revealing statement about Sebastian’s sexuality: “Don’t you understand? I was PROCURING for him! (Mrs. Venables gasp is like the sound that a great hooked fish might make) She used to do it, too. (Mrs. Venable cries out.) Not consciously! She didn’t know that she was procuring for him in the smart, the fashionable places they used to go to before last summer!” (140-141). Again in Act Four the lights dim, but now Catharine is illuminated: “During the monologue the lights have changed, the surrounding area has dimmed out and a hot white spot is focused on Catharine” (142). The illumination of Catharine shows that the play has reached a crucial point in revealing the tormented Sebastian. As Poteet writes, “the theater of memory is a place defined by extremes–pitch black or blazing white–the outer boundaries” (71). The audience is completely focused on the imagery that Sebastian’s death in Cabeza de Lobo conjures, and since the audience is not actually seeing his dramatic death the lighting is a crucial device to create a theater of memory.

Though the play takes place in Sebastian’s garden, the memory of last summer is in the
faraway place of Cabeza de Lobo. Cabeza is Spanish for head and Lobo means wolf, which is reminiscent of the pack of children that run down and devour Sebastian. Lobo is also short for the lobotomy that is threatened to be given to Catherine. Cabeza de Lobo is the place where the unthinkable happens and the laws of nature and desire take over. The horrible death that Sebastian endures is described in great detail:

There were naked children along the beach, a band of frightfully thin and dark naked children that looked like a flock of plucked birds, and they would come darting up to the barbed wire fence as if blown there by the wind, the hot white wind from the sea [...] He screamed just once before this flock of black plucked little birds that pursued him and overtook him (142-7).

As Sebastian’s last day is conveyed the stage directions state that the lighting is to focus on Catharine. The change is lighting makes it clear that Williams has designated her to be the voice of the deceased Sebastian. She is someone that the audience can believe to tell an accurate account of who Sebastian was and how he lived and died such a punishing death. With this validation of Catharine in mind the audience knows that what she is asserting about Sebastian’s sexuality is the truth, and unlike Mrs. Venable they will accept it. This validation of Catherine is important too because she is the only link that the audience has to be a witness to Sebastian’s desires. The fact that Sebastian must leave home to experience his desires is critical to the study of his character. As Annette J. Saddik states “Williams illustrates the futility of trying to define and contain human desire, of trying to construct and control the human subject through sexuality,
and displays the destructive consequences of these attempts" (348). Sebastian stored up his desires and only let loose on his trips not only out of town, but out of the country, among people who could not speak English and would never have the means to reveal his sexually depraved secrets.

The setting of *The Night of the Iguana* is also exotic as well, and like Sebastian Shannon is separated from traditional society. The play takes place in Mexico in a bohemian hotel called the Costa Verde. Williams has the hotel sit on a “jungle-covered hilltop” overlooking the beach (328). The description of Puerto Barrio is that of a rain forest with “shrubs with vivid trumpet shaped flowers and a few cactus shaped plants, while at the sides we see the foliage of the encroaching jungle” (328). The landscape is reminiscent of the jungle garden in *Suddenly Last Summer*, yet this landscape is less penetrating, and less violent. The jungle in *The Night of the Iguana* is natural, not the man-made creation in *Suddenly Last Summer*. For Williams the lush plants and exotic location symbolize the absence of civilized values. It is noted that the setting of the play should be the 1940's: “the west coast of Mexico had not yet become the Las Vegas and Miami Beach of Mexico. The villages were still predominantly primitive Indian villages” (328).

The main building in the set also reflects the primitive environment to which the characters have traveled: “the setting for the play is the wide verandah of the hotel. This roofed verandah, enclosed by a railing, runs around all four sides of the somewhat dilapidated, tropical-style frame structure, but on the stage we see only the front and one side. Below the verandah, which is slightly raised above the stage level, are shrubs” (328). The bedrooms are not luxurious or inviting: “In the back of the verandah are the doors of a line of small cubicle bedrooms which are
screened with mosquito-net curtains" (328). The lack of civilized luxuries seems to be part of the experience of staying at the Costa Verde. The remoteness of the setting serves to show how removed the characters are from the idyllic American value system. The exotic location serves to initiate a type of behavior that demonstrates a struggle to maintain humanity in inhumane circumstances.

During the play, Shannon is only able to act on his desires while he is away from familiar places. Shannon is first sexualized, within the text, when the busload of American women accuses Shannon of rape. The audience later learns that the accusation is not true, that Charlotte actually came onto Shannon; however, Shannon does have violent tendencies associated with sex which Charlotte reminds Shannon of: “I remember after making love to me, you hit me, Larry, you struck me in the face, and you twisted my arm to make me kneel on the floor and pray with you for forgiveness” (364). Charlotte is the only one who calls Shannon “Larry” and the name is her way of familiarizing herself to the man everyone else calls Shannon. However, the attempt actually shows that she does not know him at all. Shannon is not Larry. To those who know him—Maxine and Hannah—he is Shannon. Larry is a man who does not exist except in Charlotte’s mind. That Charlotte calls him Larry only furthers the distance between the little fling they had in the jungle and who Shannon really is. Charlotte chases after Shannon: “Charlotte appears from the rear, coming from the hotel annex, and rushes like a teenage Medea toward the verandah. Shannon ducks into his cubicle, slamming the door so quickly that corner of the mosquito netting is caught and sticks out, flirtatiously. Charlotte rushes to the verandah” (361). The setting is small and there is really no where for Shannon to hide, other than his
cubicle/bedroom. The mosquito netting that “flirtatiously” hangs out only serves to aid in enticing Charlotte and it flags where Shannon has gone, which happens to be the bedroom. The setting continually gives away Shannon’s location within the hotel: “Shannon’s head slowly, furtively, appears through the window of his cubicle. He draws back quickly as Charlotte darts that way” (362). Since Charlotte cannot accept the futility of her attempts to have a relationship with Shannon, he is forced to express his lack of interest in her by avoiding her in the bare setting.

Hannah seems to be the only character in the play that sees Shannon stripped of all his illusions and still has hope for him. When Shannon and Hannah are alone together, the mood is set: “For the night scenes they are lighted from within, so that each cubicle appears as a little interior stage, the curtains giving a misty effect through their dim lighting” (328). The dim lighting and misty effect of the bedroom implies intimacy. The audience can see how the feelings may be growing between Hannah and Shannon, but neither of them are capable of making a reality out of the romantic feelings they share. Shannon’s way of helping Hannah is to use his influence with Maxinewhich he may mean to help Hannah, but really only hurts her delicate sensitivities regarding sex. The chances of Shannon leaving Maxine’s during his “crack up” are slim and where will he and Hannah go? Maxine tells Hannah: “I want you to lay off him honey. You’re not for Shannon and Shannon isn’t for you. I got the vibrations between you—I’m very good at catching vibrations between people” (383-384). Critc C. Allen Haake believes that Shannon and Hannah have freedom because they are never physically confined to the hotel. Haake also states that neither is “truly dominated and controlled by another” (107). However,
this is not entirely an accurate reading. While anyone may choose to leave the hotel no one leaves during the course of the play—save the troop of women that is the tour group that Shannon loses. Nonno dies at the hotel, and Shannon and Hannah remain at the end of the play. The most likely outcome is that Hannah will leave because she has no reason to stay. Haake contends that in *The Night of the Iguana* the jungle is a sanctuary for Hannah and Shannon, and that there is the possibility of their relationship continuing past the play’s time frame (108). The theory that the jungle is a haven is problematic because of the presence of Maxine and the fact that neither character has money or means to continue their journey together. According to Maxine, Shannon comes to Maxine’s “so regular that you can set a calendar by it. Every eighteen months” (386). Since Shannon keeps returning to Maxine’s for support, he needs Maxine and her help. Ultimately Shannon will stay with Maxine because of the support that she provides for him.

Exotic locations for plays such as the jungle in *Night of the Iguana* and Cabeza de Lobo in *Suddenly Last Summer* symbolize that the characters are far removed from society and its rules. Conversely, other settings symbolize a connection to the ethics and values of American society, such as the elegant mansion owned by Mrs. Venable, the Royal Palms hotel, and the Pollitt mansion. The gloomy, dark settings of Sebastian’s garden and Chance’s hotel room set the stage for the violence that will befall these troubled protagonists. In contrast, there are the brightly lit settings of plays with happier outcomes and more socially acceptable protagonists such as Brick and Shannon. Overall, there is a recurring connection that the style of the setting affects the outcome of the play for the protagonists.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the stage directions call for main male characters that are handsome, sexually appealing men who are haunted by their pasts. The props and setting help represent the inner turmoil of these characters, who experience grief as their pasts and self-destructive actions catch up with them. For example, Chance lost years chasing material wealth by selling his body to rich women and now he wants Heavenly back, but it is too late for him. Williams' characters represent how outward physical appearance does not necessarily reflect the internal emotional disparity that many of his characters experience. Some of his main male characters are evocative of overtly homosexual characters that the author wishes to explore—Sebastian and Brick—but is unable to. The ideal man in Williams' plays may know that he is desired, but lacks the understanding of what attracts others to him. This makes him even more desirable in that he is not trying to create the image, he just has it. Williams thoroughly probes these characters using props and setting along with stage directions to show how their lives have changed due to sexual or emotional needs.

These haunting characters are all searching for direction in their lives, and the stage directions point to the circumstances and the motivations behind the choices they make. The characters are written to be misfits and outcasts, sometimes even fugitives in the case of Shannon and Chance. In *Sweet Bird of Youth* Princess tells Chance that he is: "lost..in the country of flesh-hungry, blood-thirsty ogres" (217). This is true for Shannon, Brick and Sebastian as well (217). For example, when Big Daddy confronts Brick about his relationship with Skipper the
stage directions tell Brick to scream and hurl his glass across the room; this reaction thoroughly implicates Brick and Skipper's relationship. The relationship that Brick and Skipper had could never have been shown on the stage, and like Sebastian, Skipper is only on stage as a memory. The stage directions also offer insight into complicated characters such as Shannon, whose handsome carefree appearance does not alert anyone to the fact that he sees spooks in the woods, or that he will have to be tied to a hammock to prevent him from 'taking the long swim to China'. Props such as the hammock in *Night of the Iguana*, or Brick's liquor and crutch in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* show the weaknesses and decay of the characters.

Certain insinuations help to label the characters as “outsiders” or emotionally unstable in some unmistakable and tragic way. The focus on these protagonists shows that Williams made a shift in the 1950's and started to focus on his male characters as victims, versus his prior focus on his femme fatale characters. For instance, Brick's sexuality is brought into question several times in *Cat* because of homosexual comments by his family about a past relationship with a close friend. This relationship turns Brick's sexuality into the underlying focus of the play. Williams manipulates the setting to create a world within each play to show how the characters attempt to create the illusion of order in their lives to either forget the unpleasant reality of human existence or to avoid certain experiences of the past. Such illusions serve as an escape for them and also enable them to remain disguised in a make-believe world. Williams uses setting, props and stage directions to create real characters who are not necessarily good or bad people, but whose flaws and weaknesses prevent them from obtaining their desires.
Bibliography


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