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THE TRANSNATIONAL STRUCTURE OF PATRIARCHY: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS THROUGH SHAHRIAR MANDANIPOUR

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"THEY HAVE THE GUNS; WE HAVE THE POETS. THEREFORE, WE WILL WIN."

HOWARD ZINN

To My Father who lives with and within me until the day I breathe;

to my father who would have been with us and among us today, had he not been denied the proper Covid vaccination by the regime in power in Iran today.

This thesis is also dedicated to all the brave women and men in Iran who have been fighting for freedom over the past 44 years.

Woman, Life, Freedom

زن، زندگی، آزادی

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Abstract

In my thesis, I plan to analyze the major characters of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* in terms of their representation of gender roles and how the overarching system of patriarchy informs and impacts their roles within the immediate circle of social interactions and compare it against the the Iranian novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* to further elucidate the notion of the circulation of the American concepts around the world and their representations in non-canonical works of literature in other parts of the world . The aim of this thesis is to give the reader an orientation on the cross-temporal and transnational nature of the two works. The play *A Streetcar Named Desire* has long been considered as one of the most important staples for defining and analysing such areas for explorations as the construct of American gender identity including masculinity, femininity and fluidity of gender, and also the role that the hidden, often-denied structure of patriarchy plays in shaping those identities. Both works share fundamental truth and features that will make us further appreciate the cross-temporal and transnational nature of American canonical works as reflected in world literature.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades in what is termed the Digital Age, many of the concepts with which "America" has long been recognized have undergone essential changes in different parts of the world. The substantial ideologies often linked to American cultural and material products are now taking on an independent epistemology in other parts of the world and are being translated into cultural concepts which are sometimes located at the opposite end of their original format. American culture has been seen as a melting pot of various ethnic and cultural influences, and it has had a significant impact on the world culture. It has been shaped by European, African, Asian, and Native American influences, and it continues to evolve through the ongoing process of immigration and cultural exchange. One of the main ways American cultural products are disseminated is through media and entertainment. However, it is important to note that American cultural products are often adapted or modified to suit local tastes and cultural norms. This can lead to fragmentation of the original product, as it may be

changed or localized in various ways. Additionally, not all of the American cultural products are equally popular in every part of the world, and some may not be well-received or understood in certain cultures and my thesis productively discusses a case of this fragmentation and circulation of some of these ideas, hoping to add some knowledge to the existing scholarship.

It's also important to remember that culture is a two-way street, as American culture continues to be influenced by the cultures of other countries and people as well. The aim of this section is to give the reader an orientation on the cross-temporal and transnational nature of the upcoming reading of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire,* which will be discussed in connection with the Iranian novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* and to further elucidate the notion of the circulation of the American concepts around the world and their representations in non-canonical works of literature in other parts of the world. This play, an example of the dynamic of circulation and erosion of "America" traditionally understood as unitary and hegemonic, is presented here as one of the most important staples for defining and analysing the construct of gender identity in American culture, including masculinity, femininity and fluidity of gender, and the role that the hidden, often-denied structure of patriarchy plays in shaping those identities. These two attributes make the play a classic case study for observing how American notions such as gender and sexuality, and also gender-based discrimination as found in the practice of patriarchy are presented in American

canonical literature and can travel across time and space to find its parallels in a novel that has been written in another century, in another country and in a different language. Yes, despite all the striking differences, both works share a fundamental truth and features that will make us further appreciate the cross-temporal and transnational nature of American canonical works as reflected in world literature.

Major trends in 20th century drama can be traced back to the late 19th century with the rise of realistic plays of playwrights such as Anton Chekov and Henrik Ibsen in Europe. The movement was in fact a reaction to the century-long sentimental writings widely produced in the 18th and early to mid-19th century. With the rise of these publications, a radical shift took place in the course of theatre productions which aimed at a more realistic portrayal of characters and their lives. In these writings, the playwrights placed the focus on the dramatization of the moral and social challenges of contemporary life. They rejected the necessity of historical detail that had pervaded Victorian stages in favor of an interest in a simpler and more faithful representation of life in their writings. At the end of the First World War, the long-awaited and mighty waves of Modernism were on their way to subvert the traditions of fiction, poetry and drama alike. Plays such as T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party, Eugene* O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night,* and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* are among the most famous plays written in the first half of 20th century. Modern plays, in their totality, tended to approach a finite, semi-clear closure at their endings, in an

attempt to provide a settling answer to the unsettling questions put forward through the course of the actions.

The Victorian era, its aesthetics, and its literary style that had dominated for the most of the nineteenth century gave way to the modernist period in English literature. As Harmon William comments on the nature of twentieth-century or contemporary literature: "Modern refers to a group of characteristics, and not all of them appear in any one writer who merits the designation modern" (10). He continues:

> "In a broad sense, modernism is applied to writing marked by a strong and conscious break with tradition. It also implies a historical discontinuity, a sense of alienation, despair, and loss. The period employs a distinctive kind of imagination that insists on having a general frame of reference within itself to create the world in the act of perceiving it..." (11).

The early postwar times in the U.S. were socially conservative in many aspects. The roles assigned to men and women were often traditional and strictly defined. The 1950s notably lacked the spirit of feminism that was so pervasive in the 1920s all the way through the early 1940s. The second wave of feminism began to take shape in the 1960s and stretches all the way to the 1980s. Activists were adopting the main principles of feminism in both theory and practice. In reality, the second wave of feminism was a delayed and long-overdue response to the domesticized notion of 'womanhood' that emerged after World War II as America was

witnessing social developments throughout the 1950s. The baby boom years followed the natural course of the nation's economic success. At the time, the American nuclear family served as the model for the ideal family, and consumerism encouraged women to stay at home and use a variety of cutting-edge household gadgets. The second wave of feminism, which focused on sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, and de facto and explicit legal disparities, emerged as a result of these and a number of other sociopolitical events. At the time, many feminist activists opposed the nuclear family idea on the grounds that keeping women at home would restrict their opportunities and waste their potential. At the time, the ideal nuclear family that was shown and heavily promoted did not reflect happiness and was severely demeaning to women. Betty Friedan provides the following image of women from the 1950s and earlier in her best-selling book *The Problem That Has No Name*, arguing that:

> They [women] were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights_ the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for (16).

It is at such a moment in time that the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* was produced. Written by Tennessee Williams in 1947, It is a classic example of modern trends in American literature that addresses the major concerns in an

American society that was still grappling with the ongoing horrors of Second World War, the crippling aftermaths of the First World War, the impact of widespread industrialization and major shifts in schools of arts and literature. Loneliness, sterility, loss and emptiness were among the dominant themes Williams presents in his plays with which Americans immediately identified. Each of these factors contributed to the formation of a new individual identity for the people who were supposed to face the realities of this so-called '*New World*' single-handedly, those who were trying to come to terms with it in an ultimate attempt to find meaning and purpose in life. American people were now confronted with a new challenge; the question of identity crisis and its bonds with the concept of gender, with the aim of revisiting the issue of gender and its functionality in their lives.

In my thesis, I plan to analyze the major characters of the play Blanche DuBois, Stella Kowalski and Stanley Kowalski and Mitch - in terms of their representation of gender roles and how the overarching system of patriarchy informs and impacts their roles within the immediate circle of social interactions. The notion of gender roles in new waves of feminism have been deemed as subversive to patriarchy due to their newly formulated definitions of desire and identification. Patriarchy is a system of hierarchy and order in society in which men hold the power and therefore women become marginalized. However, the functions of patriarchy are not limited to this only. The confines of this system are much narrower as it defines itself with a highly specific set of attributes that must

be possessed. Famously, the apparatus of patriarchy requires more than just being a man to operate. In its very strict sense, it defines itself as precisely possessing the qualities of being a 'White, Heterosexual Male' who is more often than not able-bodied and healthy. According to this definition, whoever falls outside the narrow confines of this system will be automatically discriminated against, marginalized, labelled, disregarded and eventually dismissed. In the light of this definition, we can better understand the characters in the play and the dynamics behind their relations and interactions. Therefore, I will be talking about Blanche and her ultimate downfall in the play as a consequence of a highly complicated interplay of social, gender and power structures which includes the inevitable role of Stanley and his destructive influence not just on Blanche but similarly on the two other main characters- Stella and Mitch.

In line with the above line of discussion, and in order to establish a link with and illuminate further the contemporary reality and functionality of the system of patriarchy in the world around us today, I will briefly introduce the book *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* by the Iranian author living in exile Shahriar MandaniPour; a book which in itself is a separate and comprehensive case of the multiple workings of patriarchy within the context of Iranian society and government on the one hand, and the fields of creative arts and literature on the other.

Given the significance of gender studies in contemporary literally scholarship, along with the importance, today, of re-reading the circulation of

American cultural products from outside the United States from new perspectives, I wish to demonstrate how the construction of American gender subjectivity has been redefined through an examination of one of the most well-known American Modern plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and set it against the context of an Iranian novel published more than half a century later in an entirely middle-eastern setting. I will also strive to find the answer to the questions that revolve around the construction of identity within different cultural frameworks such as through what cultural process subjects come into existence, by what means they are constructed and how those constructions work or fail. The main focus of my thesis will contemplate the failure of a discursively-constituted, phallogocentric male identity and thus seeks to demonstrate how such failures provide opportunities for a subversive reconstruction of both male and female identity in both the play and the novel.

Thus, the significance of my argumentation lies in its attempt to prove through a cultural reading of an American canonical play that gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, to show that there is no gender identity that precedes language and culture and the ideologies that have shaped those cultural elements, namely the ideology of patriarchy. Furthermore, I will try to provide answers for the questions regarding the impact of patriarchal ideologies in circulation of cultural products through exploration of gender subjectivity which is formed by the questions about sex, gender, nationality and

the family in a highly familiar context for both American and international

readers.

CHAPTER ONE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:
Performativity, Gender and Compulsory Heterosexuality

1.1. Introduction to Feminism

Feminism has always been a growing field of study. The initial wave of feminist in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe and the U.S. marked the beginning of feminism's various voices. In its early stages, feminism was fighting for women's basic rights which grew out of an atmosphere of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. With a focus on suffrage, this movement aimed to increase possibilities for women.

The span of the second wave of feminism, however, includes three decades of 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. It slightly continued into the 1990s. Early feminist

activists believe that the structure of society is based on a patriarchal discourse which is present and embedded in all walks of life, whether in private issues such as marriage, sexual roles, definitions and orientation, childbearing, etc., or in the public domain such as work place inequalities, gender pay gap (the difference between men and women's wage for the same job), higher education, etc. Patriarchy should be eliminated, according to feminists. Feminist philosophy generally holds that women have experienced systemic oppression and marginalization because they have come to be seen as the "other" to the male norm as a result of patriarchy. Feminists contend that the patriarchal system is profiting from this marginalization by imposing its authority over non-dominant men and all women. According to Moya LIoyd "patriarchal society takes certain features of male and female biology and turns them into a set of gendered characteristics 'that serve to empower men and disempower women.' These characteristics are then presented as the natural attributes of males and females, respectively" (29). One of the key elements of patriarchy is heterosexuality which has historically and traditionally bestowed men with all sorts of social advantages to demonstrate their assumed superiority in its most basic form. In heterosexuality, as in most other binary oppositions, there are two opposing poles that are of varying types, with one pole being superior and the other pole being inferior. The idea of "compulsory heterosexuality," a phrase coined by Adrienne Rich, reveals increasing limits on both men and women since it fundamentally opposes the idea that one may choose their sexual orientation, characterizing

anyone who does so as aberrant or even excommunicated. The practice of such male-dominated social structures as politics, marriage, the media, the law, literature, and religion serve to further strengthen heterosexuality. In all of them, the requirement of heterosexuality to guarantee male rights to physical, economic, and emotional access maintains the tradition of female subordination through heterosexual partnerships and prevents the development of other forms of sexuality.

The introduction of Judith Butler's theories into the feminism debate has advanced it, nonetheless, to a new level. Butler's thoughts mostly came from the sex/gender controversy. Judith Butler's fundamental contrast from feminism and point of departure is her rejection of the biological foundation for the concept of "sex". According to LIoyd

> When feminists first began to theorize the sex/gender relation, the underlying assumption was that sex was both logically and chronologically prior to gender. Culturally determined gender norms, in other words, were conceptualized as secondary to natural sex. Gender was thus what was inscribed onto sex in some way. It is the priority of the relation between sex and gender that Butler problematizes (32).

The change she makes to the theories that were in place at the time explaining how men and women develop their distinct identities turns the predominant feminist rhetoric on its head by fundamentally elevating the sex/gender

dichotomies. After rejecting the fundamental foundations of these two, she proposes the idea of gender performativity, which, as its name suggests, posits that gendered and sex-based identities are performative in nature. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) which was later revised and rewritten in 2007, the theory of gender performativity is developed by Butler. According to the idea of gender performativity, "sex and gender are the effects rather than the causes of institutions, discourses, and practices; in other words, you as a subject do not create or cause institutions, discourses, or practices; they create or cause you by determining your sex, sexuality, and gender" (Salih 10). Butler argues that subjects do not naturally develop into men or women as a result of their sex, in the sense that de Beauvoir uses the term. This is the connection between Butler's two conceptions of performativity and subjectivity. According to Salih, being a woman is more of a "doing" than a "being" (10). Butler, in contrast to the term's apparent clarity, does not imply that gender identity is a performance. When she presents her own theory, it is one in which sex, sexuality, desire, gender, and the body are all viewed as discursively constituted; in other words, none of these characteristics is treated as a fundamental aspect of human existence (LIoyd 30).

Her main line of argument, which pertains to our reading of Williams here, is that language and discourse are used to create an individual's identity. Butler claims that the language used to describe the body actually defines it. Her theory

of gender performativity, with its emphasis on the part society and social constructs play in the formation of gender, which in turn led to the creation of sex, entails such an assumption. Kubiak describes the performative theory of Butler as follows:

> Judith Butler examines gender in terms of what she refers to as performativity in *Gender Trouble* and other later works. Sexual identity "becomes" through the moment of enactment in the body, not as a construct or the "congealing" of a particular sexual identity: "One is not simply a [gendered] body, but, in some very essential sense, one does one's body" (272). However, this performativity is not a performance. In Butler's views, performance as a more or less deliberately articulated act or series of acts cannot be performative because it is too a priori, too aware of its biases and internal, societal forces. More a showing than a becoming, performance is. In performativity, hidden, concealed, and self-concealing forces are increasingly pervasive (1).

Categories like gender, sex, and sexuality are seen in this light as cultural creations that are placed in binary opposition to heterosexuality. "As a result, many later feminists, like Butler, who were more interested in tearing down this form of binary opposition, saw it as problematic. Butler is actually rather interested in examining how the categories of sex and/or gender come to be

established as basic and to analyze its key function in the institution of "compulsory heterosexuality" in *Gender Trouble*" (Jagger 2008).

1.2. Theories Of Judith Butler: Performativity, Gender and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Judith Butler's formulations of gender, sex and sexuality as unfixed and constructed entities have proved immensely influential in the contemporary theories of feminists, as well as in the humanities and social sciences. The fundamental concern of Butler throughout her writings is to ask questions about formation of identity and its relation to subjectivity in other words, she aims to unearth the process by which men and women become subjects, especially in the face of the sexed, gendered and raced identity which is constructed for us (and to a certain extent by us) within existing power structures. She strives to find the answer to the questions that revolve around the construction of identity such as through what process subjects come into existence, by what means they are constructed and how those constructions work or fail. Her discussion finds a forward move at this turn where she contemplates the failure of an identity and thus seeks to demonstrate how such failures provide opportunities for a subversive reconstruction of identity.

Butler's conception of gender, sex and sexuality is an unfixed and fluid construct which must be placed within its immediate discursive backdrop. As such, a stable and homogenous definition of the female subject cannot be envisioned. In the same regard, she struggles to prove the mechanisms in which sex and sexuality are discursively constructed. In this chapter, Butler's account of gender as performance and performative is examined as she rejected the idea that 'sex' was the biologically determined entity it was previously taken to be and the implications of her ideas for understanding subjectivity are explored.

Thus, Butler calls the existence of the category of gender into question and continues to ask through what process subjects come into existence and by what means they are constructed. Through affirming the indeterminacy and instability of sex, gender and sexuality, she examines the claim that there is no pre-discursive sex and that, contrary to the naturalist fallacy in which gender is somehow caused by sex, it is rather discourses of gender that produce sex as a causal category (Salih 9). According to Butler, the subject is not a pre-existing, essential entity and that our identities are constructed. She, thus, calls the category of 'the subject' into question by arguing that it is a performative construct.

The idea of gender identity is a politically motivated social construction. It is also "informed by a socio-historical context of patriarchy and other social laws like heteronormativity"; therefore, gender is shaped by the traditions, laws, language and norms that we internalize and reiterate over time, so gender identity

is "'an agentic process of achievement' that we come to create only as a result of social pressures" (Durante 108). If a person wants to persist as a credible gendered subject, they have to recite the socially defined "gender norms, demeanour, dress and behaviour. Thus, in order to become signified in society one has to conform to the expected gender identities and act out as it is dictated by social, cultural, and linguistic laws" (Shams and Pourgiv 2013).

Judith Butler offers a comprehensive analysis of sex, gender, sexuality, and the body in order to clarify the idea of performativity in her discussion. This analysis involves a deconstructive critique of identity categories in which not only gender, but also sex, sexuality, and the body are conceived as cultural products. It will be conceivable to have a "female" physique and not exhibit attributes typically associated with "femininity," according to Butler, who also says that there is no inherent relationship between one's body and gender. In other words, one may be a "feminine" man or "masculine" female. In doing so, she rejects the idea that sex, gender, and sexuality have pre-established inherent relationships with being female, feminine, and desiring males, respectively. In doing so, she stresses the importance of what she terms "compulsory heterosexuality" and challenges the naturalization of sex, gender, the body, and (hetero)sexuality and following Irigaray, 'phallogocentrism' in the production of these categories (Jagger 1).

She is concerned, in particular, to reveal the ways in which sex and gender are produced within a binary framework that is conditioned by heterosexuality, rather than the other way around. Butler sets herself the task of desolidifying or deconstructing those forms by enquiring into how 'woman' came to be so widely accepted as an ontological given (Salih 48). In other words, it is argued that it is not sex and gender that produce heterosexuality but that heterosexuality produces sex and gender in a dyadic form. Basically, then, Butler is rejecting an account of gender in which femininity and masculinity are taken to be the cultural articulations of a biological sex. Butler claims that gender is a 'choice', that is to choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that organizes them anew (Salih 46). She argues instead that the category of sex is itself a gendered category. The idea that the subject is an effect rather than a cause is the key to Butler's theories of performative identity.

The sex/gender distinction provided the ground for early second-wave feminists to accept biological determinism as a given and to avoid examining the cultural production of gender. However, in Butler's theorizations, it is thus rejected as inadequate to understanding the performativity of gender. She continues to state that gender is constructed and that it is not in any way 'naturally' or inevitably connected to sex; thus, further destabilizing the distinction between sex and gender.

She examines the ways in which the categories of sex and/ or gender are constructed and analyzes their pivotal role in the institution of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Her foundational argument is that embodied selves 'do not pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies' (Butler 526) but rather 'the foundational categories of identity – the binary of sex, gender and the body – can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original and the inevitable' (Butler viii)

One of the starting points of this account is Simone de Beauvoir's claim that 'one is not born a woman but becomes one', which is set in the context of Foucault's view of the body and subjectivity as effects of power and normalization. Butler builds on the Foucauldian notion that subjectivity is discursively produced and that this does not involve the notion of a pre-existing subject on whom power and discourses act, but rather that subjects are formed through their discursively constituted identity. She develops the notion of performativity to explain how this works in relation to gendered subjectivity (Jagger 3).

Gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire and sexuality do not seem to follow from gender. Heterosexuality does not prove to be a natural result of a biological sex or sexed nature, orchestrating the production of sexed subjects and identities. Butler's departing point from the previous line of feminists is the concept that gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and

desire and sexuality do not seem to follow from gender. She rejects this presumption on the ground that it denotes a false sense of stability and coherence that reinforces reproductive heterosexuality and conceals the inherent discontinuities associated with it. According to Butler, gender is a discursive construction which is produced, not a natural given. Instead, she refers to imitation and parody as the two main constituents of gender formation and remarks that it is thus not a natural product of sexed and gendered bodies and, as such, it is essentially unstable.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler concentrates on the approaches to demonstrate the performative production of sexed identity, focusing on the processes through which sex and gender are formed as natural extensions of a biological body. She states that gender is both constructed in and constrained by the power structures within which it is located. She wishes to establish a critique of the construction of the categories of sex, gender, sexuality, desire and the body as identity categories, and the binary framework that structures them, to be products of 'compulsory' heterosexuality and 'phallogocentrism'. Gender identities that do not conform to the system of 'compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality' expose how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained (22).

Butler wants to show that identity categories are 'fictional' products of these 'regimes of power/ knowledge' or 'power/discourse' (Butler xi) rather than natural effects of the body. They are performative in the sense that the categories

themselves produce the identity they are deemed to be simply representing. Butler asserts that 'gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity' (63).

> A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin. (x–xi)

Thus, Butler wants to show that these apparently foundational categories are actually cultural products that 'create the effect of the natural, the original, the inevitable' (viii). Another important aim is to destabilize the epistemological and ontological regimes that produce them (xi). Hence, she goes on: 'The task of this inquiry is to center on and decenter such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality' (xi). She is not just concerned with the denaturalization of identity categories but also with the possibilities for resistance and change within all this. She wants to reveal that heterosexuality, and the binary system of sexual difference on which it is based, is compulsory and unstable and this instability opens up the space for change. The subversion of identity becomes a matter of opening up the space for alternative significations and the displacement of the discursive regimes of compulsory heterosexuality and

phallogocentrism. According to Butler, gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time (33).

Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gendered. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no 'natural body' that pre-exists its cultural inscription. This seems to point towards the conclusion that gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being' (Salih 62).

Butler strongly resists the misconception by some critics that the notion of performativity only involves the idea that gender is a performance in a theatrical sense and so could be changed at will. In order to clarify, she emphasizes the distinction between gender as performance in a theatrical sense and gender as performance in a performative sense. Butler's account of the performativity of gender does involve a notion of performance and often does invoke a sense of theatricality; however, the model that she is employing is not a theatrical model. "It is rather a speech act model based on a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity. There is a distinction between performance in a theatrical sense and performance in a performative sense" (Butler 1988).

Butler argues that gender is a kind of cultural performance, which is enforced by compulsory heterosexuality, and as such, it is performative. Gender is the effect rather than a cause of discourse. There is nothing given about gender nor is there any pre-cultural or pre-discursive sex that provides the basis for its cultural construction. Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. Identity is rather an effect of signifying practices rooted in regimes of power/knowledge characterized as compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism. As such, it is a matter of social and political regulation rather than any sort of innate property of individuals (Jagger 20).

Butler draws upon the discussion initiated by Nietzsche in which he elaborated on the role of the doer and the deed. She uses the argument to state the difference that, according to her, lies in the constituting role of the 'doer', or pre-existing self behind these acts. Whereas in earlier accounts of gender by second-wave feminists, they seemed to imply a 'true self', a 'doer' who is doing the acting, in Butler's notion of performance the 'doer' is produced in and by the act, in a Nietzschean sense, and importantly does not stand outside of, or before it. This separation allows the subject to be (mis)taken for the cause of action rather than a product of it. She wants to get at the ways in which neither sex nor gender is a natural or material fact whose essence can be determined through an examination of physiology or biology and to show that gender identity is a

performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo' (Jagger 20).

Moreover, Butler's concern with the constitution of gendered subjectivity involves the ways in which heterosexuality, as a compulsory and unstable regime structures the gendered norms. Gender is a 'corporeal style', an act (or a sequence of acts), a 'strategy' which has cultural survival as its end, since those who do not 'do' their gender correctly are punished by society (139–40). Gender, then, is an act in the sense that 'doing' gender involves 'sustained social performances' which involve the repetition of socially established meanings. It is also an act in the sense that 'gender attributes and acts [are] the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification' (Butler 141). In other words, gender acts are what constitute embodied beings as gendered subjects in keeping with the norms of compulsory heterosexuality. They involve an on-going process of continual repetition ('sustained social performances') through which individual subjects do (act out) their gender, in a 'stylized repetition of acts'. This 'stylized repetition of acts' involves bodily movements and gestures (corporeal styles) that are socially approved and politically regulated in keeping with 'a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality' (139). The enactment of gender is thus socially approved and politically regulated rather than dictated by some kind of internal nature.

Gender is tenuously constituted in time through this 'stylized repetition of acts'. It is through this that the illusion of a stable fixed identity is promoted. She views gender as a kind of 'corporeal enactment (Jagger 27). These 'acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality' (Butler 136). This makes it seem as if the 'cause' of these acts, gender and desire, lie within the self.

Such gender practices, in return, perpetuate compulsory heterosexuality along with the belief in its naturalness. Butler argues that the fact that people who act outside of appropriate gender norms are looked down upon and punished is evidence of this. Gender, then, is constituted and constructed through the repetition of gender acts in which all aspects, are unnatural products compelled by reproductive heterosexuality. Reproductive heterosexuality is also a fictional regulatory regime. She argues that sex is a political category. This involves the view that the binary restriction on sex, and the understanding of sexual difference as essential, serve the interests of reproductive heterosexuality as a compulsory system. It also involves the idea that bodies are culturally constituted. Heterosexuality is not only a compulsory system, but is 'an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself' (Butler 122). Heterosexuality is both compulsory and fundamentally unstable. Compulsory in the sense that 'acting out of line with

heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions' (Butler 24).

Thus, Butler associates the denaturalization of heterosexist gender categories with instability and the possibility of subversion and resignification. As mentioned earlier, her stated aims in *Gender Trouble* were not only to denaturalize but also to destabilize identity categories such as sex, gender, desire and the body and the epistemic ontological regime that produced them.

> I describe and propose a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame (xii).

According to her, gender is an imitation for which there is no original, or 'real' foundation seems to imply that gender is a mere artifice that can be changed at will; and describing the perpetual displacement involved as constituting a 'fluidity of identities'. The point she aims to make is the fact that heterosexuality is a matter of parody and imitation. Butler criticizes, the "parodic repetition" of gender performance in that it "reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of [a] *natural*" gender (43). If such an association can be established between the performance and drag, in similar fashion then, an analogy can be drawn between drag and subversion, resulting in demonstrating the

ultimate fluidity, dislocation and instability of the category of gender and its fabricated nature. Such on ongoing process of decentering constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to re-defining and re-signification of gender identities that work in the interest of opposing the existing regime of compulsory heterosexuality.

In this study, theories of Judith Butler along with pertinent scholarship on Williams will both be applied to the analysis of *A Streetcar Named Desire* to figure out how and why gender-related issues are taken to such an essential point in the author's work, and what this liminal point reveals about Williams's mindset regarding the concept of gender.

CHAPTER TWO

The Twisted Tales of the Two Sisters:

Character Analysis of *Blanche* and *Stella* in

A Streetcar Named Desire

Gender has always been Williams's constant concern. While on the first reading, the characters in *A Streetcar* appear as random individuals grappling with the ordinary struggles in their everyday lives, they reveal the undertones of gender politics which emerge as the underlying backdrop to the entire workings of the plot on a second reading; where the readers start to realize that the main body of the stories are, predominantly concerned with men and women engaged in the modern war of the sexes among other things.

If we agree on the point that fictional characters are created in response to the reformations and reformulations of societal (gender) hierarchy, then it will be easier for us to understand this notion that for the generation from which Williams emerged as an artist, the discontinuities and the dislocations in gender roles came as a traumatic experience. Struggles at different levels were at work between the sexes including debates on personal and sexual freedom as well as on economic and political independence. In this play, too, the main characters, Blanche, Stanley, Stella along with Mitch, are each trying to find and define their space within their newly-formulated social context.

These thoughts will serve as a springboard for the discussions in this chapter where I will be analysing different aspects of Blanche's character as one of the main voices in the play whose struggles for survival in the hostile surrounding environment move the story line forward. The areas in Blanche's personality that I will be covering might seems different yet they all have one element in common; that is, the decisive role of patriarchy which lies at the core of them all. These categories fall into the following headings:

1. Trauma

2. Sex and Sexuality

3. Body Politics and Performativity

4. *Stella* as *Blanche*'s Foil

2.1. Trauma as a Tool of Dominance

In the years building up to the point when the story opens, Blanche goes through a series of traumas which all have one feature in common: the presence of a male figure at their core. Looking back at the chronology of the events that have dragged her down to this point in the play, the readers learn that the series of her traumas began first with the death of her father, as the first incident which initiates the series of unfortunate events for her, which in turn leads to the loss of Belle Reve, their family property. She next loses her husband, then her job at school and eventually her sanity; a nexus of tragic events which culminates in her eventual downfall in the form of hospitalization in a mental institute. In this section, the context, functionality and subsequent consequence of these losses and traumas will be discussed as they pertain to fundamental features of patriarchy. The term "trauma" refers to an unexpected incident that has atrocious effects on a person's identity, psychology, emotions, beliefs, and so on. Human beings by nature seek love, purpose, connection, security, and order. The experience of a tragic encounter or loss may lead to our failure in maintaining one of these denominators and leave us traumatized. As such, trauma influences a person's decision-making abilities, their sense of reasoning, and capacity for comprehending the reality of the world around them. Memories of the traumatic event in the form of distressing and upsetting remembrance can be a symptom for

'individual trauma'. However, 'cultural trauma' while being equally traumatizing for individuals, can be caused by the inherent discriminatory behavior arising from such larger discourses such as patriarchy, racism, sexism etc. Thus, cultural trauma, also known as collective trauma, is when an incidence traumatizes not just one person but also larger groups of community and this is where the link between trauma and patriarchy comes into existence.

The link between trauma and patriarchy was first made by the second wave feminists during the 1960s and 1970s through their efforts to bring the private experiences and personal history of women to the public and strip away the shame and stigma that have traditionally been associated with the personal accounts of women being abused, harassed and traumatized by men at home, work places and public spaces. However, this was not all that these activists were aiming for. The movement was taken to the next level when feminist activists began to link the 'public' to the 'political'; meaning that they sought to prove the role of the dominant ideology in the formation of the individual acts and experience of women. They tried to make the shift from what were deemed the isolated, private and domestic traumatic experiences of woman to where they believed these experiences originally stemmed from or rather to where they belonged: the public and political spheres which nurtured and provided the grounds for the systemic abuse of women. These activists contended that the interventions for approaching trauma must be politicized through the study of the dominant culture and sources of power and their effect on women's exposure to, and experience and reception

of trauma. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as something that: [...] "does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned" (150). In other words, she is trying to say that trauma is not something of the past only; it's rather a living phenomenon that continues to live with and within the person. With this short introduction, we might be able to better comprehend the nature of the losses and difficulty of the situations that Blanche has been facing. While we might interpret the loss of her father in the light of a more individual trauma, it certainly sets the tune for the subsequent losses which evolved into increasingly complicated moments in her life and began to demonstrate a context in which patriarchal elements maintain a consistent presence.

The line of the story tells us that Blanche accidently learns about the homosexual tendencies of her husband and when the young man learns about his wife's knowledge of this secret, he cannot bear to live with the shame and embarrassment that has arisen from the situation and prefers to take his own life than to look his wife in the eyes again. This simple formula unfolds multiple layers of significance about the dominant discourses of the society in which they were living. During the 1940s and 1950s, homosexuality was categorized as a psychological disorder and even later it was regarded as a severe form of identity crisis. It was an absolute show of cowardice and failure for a man to be labelled as "un-man"; that is, anything less than what was then regarded as normalcy in all manifestations of their sex, sexuality and gender.

The discourse of heteronormativity which lies at the heart of the concept of patriarchy, is reinforced in return by the famous myth of phallogocentrism; an ideology which secures a superior position for men in all aspects of social, political, economic and sexual life where superiority entails power and this power brings dominance. Within a patriarchal system, the extent of individuals' access to opportunities, their share of social and economic power and exertion of individual agency, all depend on very strict yet narrow confines which define the struggles over power and survival; these narrow confines delineate what is regarded as superior: being Male, White and Heterosexual. Anyone who deviates even slightly from these attributes will be dismissed immediately and automatically. Our knowledge of the function of binary oppositions in the societies tells us that within a system, the existence of these categories in the position of power entails the re-positioning of a second set of markers which will inevitably be assigned the 'no power' position. Therefore, Woman, Non-White and Homosexual will fall automatically into the inferior position.

This could be the explanation of the operation of patriarchy in a nutshell and this may help us to understand why Blanche's husband preferred to take his own life and put an end to what would be an eternal cycle of shame and failure in the face of patriarchal society; a society which would have for sure castigated him for both *who* he was and *how* he was. In this light, he, perhaps, assumed himself a failure as both a husband to his wife and a man to his immediate social circle.

As a result, he turns to suicide as it would, in his vision, save him, and perhaps his wife too, from the ensuing disgrace; not knowing that in taking his life, he is also taking the possibility of recovering from this trauma from Blanche forever. This would be a turning point for what comes next in her life as she has now started a downhill trend in her social functionality in what seems to be a series of 'wrong' decision-makings and 'bad' choices which leave her jobless, homeless and penniless until she is forced to seek refuge in her sister's house.

There is however, another line of interpretation which renders Blanche responsible for the death of her husband in that 'the knowledge of her husband's homosexuality seems to suggest that Blanche also is sexually tainted in some way, for no "normal" woman would have driven her husband to such actions." (Leibman, 30). As we see later in the play, she confesses in a conversation with Mitch that she feels guilty and responsible for his death, saying "It was my fault. I didn't understand." Leibman goes on to say that "The obvious implication is that Blanche bears the guilt for her husband's suicide, but this can be read more significantly as an unconscious expression of blame for his homosexuality." (30) With a bit of optimism, we can still claim that she might not blame herself directly for his homosexuality, yet she feels she deserves to get the consequence for forcing him to deny his sexual orientation in marrying her which eventually led to sexual frustration for him and culminated in his death.

Through exposing her to several experiences of loss and trauma, Williams endows Blanche with an air of spontaneity, immediacy and impulsiveness. Throughout the play, she uses impressive language to either describe her desires and emotions or to addresses other characters. For instance, in her final encounter with Mitch, she says: "I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic. I try to give that to people. I do misrepresent things. I don't tell truths. I tell what ought to be truth." (T. Williams 135). Or in her argument with Stella where she uses a more assertive tone and goes on: "What you are talking about is desire - just brutal Desire. The name of that rattle-trap streetcar that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another." (79). She also uses a charming and at the same time convincing language in her conversation with Stanley where she states: "I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty per cent illusion, but when a thing is important, I tell the truth: I haven't cheated my sister or you or anyone else as long as I have lived." (43). These examples reveal a truth about her character to the reader which is her knowledge and awareness towards the power of language and her wit in using it in most critical moments in establishing the mood she hopes to invoke in her audience.

These descriptions on the other hand, align her with the neurotics of the archetypal 'mad woman in the attic' and associates her with the line of insane females in literature; that is, her Victorian predecessor, Bertha Rochester who was doomed to death and annihilation by being locked up by her own husband for

years on end in a room with absolutely no possibility of (re)claiming her autonomy, agency – not to mention her sexuality – ever again; an identical feeling which is now being shared by Blanche in a quasi-similar context. In her discussion of Blanche, Leibman claims that "[Blanche's] madness is punishment for entering the male territory of expressive desire" (27), a statement which further links the causes and origins of her traumas to their repressive and oppressive roots in the existing system of patriarchy.

2.2. Sex and Sexuality: Blanche as a 'New Woman'

As attested by readers and critics alike, *A Streetcar Named Desire* has a sexually-charged atmosphere. As Liebman describes it as being a play "about the expression of female desire, and […] that this expression is linked to and causes the heroine's breakdowns." (29). The question of sex and sexuality lies at the heart of the developing tensions and relationships among the characters which turn out to be in close affinity and correspondence with the performativity theories of Judith Butler as presented earlier in chapter two. In this section, I will try to demonstrate how Blanche is performing what is now considered 'regulatory fiction' as inscribed by the heteronormative structure of the society.

In order to fully understand the historical context of Blanche as a modern fictional female prototype, and the prevailing social milieu prior to the creation of her character, it would be useful to look back at the decades before the publication of the play and the social phenomenon that came into existence called 'New Woman'. The character of Blanche shares a number of features with this social icon that will help us to better understand her motivation and analyse the characters in their immediate, real-life setting.

In the late nineteenth century, the two categories of male and female were clearly separated by the gender attributes that were at work, such as strength, sovereignty, and moral toughness for men, and purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness for women. However, with the advent of the feminist campaign in early twentieth century and the success of the suffrage movement, and the American women's historic achievement of the right to vote in 1920, the status of women changed dramatically in comparison with their condition in the late nineteenth century. As a result of the consequent reformation in the discursive body of the society, a new category of women came into existence in societies of the time. The New Woman of the 1920s was a flamboyant figure which both attracted and amazed the culture it opposed. Sanderson describes "the best-known manifestation of the "New Woman" as "the sexually permissive flapper, an urban creature who was young and tomboyish in appearance and behaviour. Unlike earlier hour-glass-shaped, fully-skirted women, the flapper had short hair, bound

her chest, wore short straight-cut dresses, played golf, drove a car, smoked, danced, drank, and displayed various degrees of sexual promiscuity (172). Such a character, prevalent in the fiction of the time, evinced physical freedom in the form of sexual liberation, stood for feminist self-assertiveness while still retaining aspects of traditional and domestic femininity. This image played a major role in the formation of the modernist attitude toward female fictional creations.

The backdrop to the critical opportunity for women to embrace social and economic advancements initiated well before the 1920s, as far back as the early nineteenth century and even earlier, as women challenged the roles that defined them as fundamentally different from men. Through her research, Evans recognizes that in defining male and female roles, the "slippery definitions of 'public' and 'private,' 'male' and 'female'" have been evolving "over the course of four centuries" (3). Women were mainly engaged with "issues such as health, education, and poverty" in the domestic environments; with the advance of time, however, working women became an "integral part of the cultural definitions of both 'public' and 'manliness.' Women created female professions such as teaching, nursing, and social work, making public roles which originated in domesticity" (Evans 4). She explains that the suffrage movement's activity in public spaces traditionally dominated by men also served to blend gender roles: "American women shaped that new order with a profusion of new voluntary associations, institutions, and social movements. The collective power of women,

which had been building throughout the nineteenth century, reached its apex in a massive push for political reform and woman suffrage" (145).

However, as in the case of any other social transformation, these new opportunities, too, were met with resistance by essentialists who believed that the female sphere should remain bound to home and other related domestic affairs. Yet, despite that, a new surge of demands for autonomy on the side of enthusiastic women who called to change their social status in the twenties was consolidated over the years, which in turn translated into women's desire to create meaning in their lives outside their domestic responsibilities. As Fantina reflects: "The emergence of the New Woman coincided with the consolidation of a self-centred capitalist economy that became the preserve of men. Women were now treated as equals in theory, shorn of traditional privileges…Men who opposed the new values, who clung to a now outdated devotion to women, became isolated" (39). As such, a growing number of women began to resist and reject the traditional patriarchal role of a submissive housewife to their husband and children. "Thus, the post-Victorian women bonded to acquire a new identity and the social and economic opportunities complemented their desires to break from tradition and helped create a new standard for women" (Jakubas 4). As Evans states:

> Stung by the accusation that they unnaturally refused motherhood, and by research purporting to show that too much education could harm the female reproductive system, [career women] turned to the gender

solidarity and reforming zeal of their mothers' generation honed in a host

of female environments from missionary societies, to women's clubs, and

made a new public claim in the name of domesticity (147-8).

As such, women of the 1920s, through assuming traditionally male roles, challenged traditional roles, attempted to create a truly blended, androgynous identity (Jakubas 4). Evans discusses the shift from the Victorian tradition of the domestic sphere, a shift partly due to "new 'domestic politics and a flowering of female voluntary associations" (146-7). The New Woman and the working girl began a cultural move from "communal domesticity" of the Victorian culture with a new focus on "autonomy, pleasure, and consumption" (146-7) The flapper, so identified with the 1920s, was already a powerful image by 1913" (161).

All this was happening in the face of the centuries of traditional, restrictive roles ascribed to women; therefore, it was not surprising that when they began to act against the grain of the commonly accepted routine structure, some initial discomforts were observed. Gilman blames much of this uneasy state on tradition: "Pictorial art, music, the drama, society, everything, tells her that she is *she,* and that all depends on whom she marries. Where young boys plan for what they will achieve and attain, young girls plan for *whom* they will achieve and attain" [emphasis in the original] (86-7). Gilman further argues that male and female roles have been identified according to gender, in large part because women's roles have been tied to domesticity. With social roles strictly identified as either

male or female, they limit either sex who wishes to assume the roles associated with the opposite sex. She proceeds to explain that "an advanced society cannot remain limited by sex-roles, in which sexual relations with men define women (143). Gilman identifies that the role of a male or female as a romantic entity constitutes just a little part of their identity, but she further asserts that sexual identity limits and therefore inhibits women more than men (145). The overall movement of the women in society and the gradual, slow-moving acceptance of the new definitions of gender ascribes, partially by men and in larger perspective, by the patriarchal institutions of the society, paved the way for the appearance of a new mode of gender construction in the form of the New Woman.

This change of balance in redefining gender roles was, in essence, an impetus for the change in power relations which could potentially result in the loss of power for men. "If women were to gain more masculine roles and positions, inevitably, some men would lose this status, and therefore, their accustomed position in society. At the core, this fear of a potential loss of power served as the major source of societal resistance to increased female agency" (Jakubas 14).

However, in the face of all the resistance and the obstacles posed by the patriarchal structure of the society on women on their way to gain a socially equal condition, the decision was partially welcomed in certain male circles. With the enormous aftermath of the First World War came a generation of disillusioned

men who were struggling with both physical and psychological traumas from the war. Gilbert mentions "Despite the massive tragedy that the war represented for an entire generation of young men—and for their grieving wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters—it also represented the first rupture with a socioeconomic history that had heretofore denied most women chances at first-class jobs—and first class pay" (287). As Jakubas reflects:

> Male sense of a loss of masculinity during and after the war resulted in women who adopted more traditionally male attributes by seeking work and status outside the home. One way that reflects this changed balance is through women who responded to the traditional, patriarchal society with a more liberated voice. Liberated 1920s women found success in adopting a more androgynous role in their relationships, and often times, an equally androgynous physique to complement their new societal position (8).

This discussion can be a springboard for our understanding of some of the dynamics among the characters. It is in such a context that Blanche formulates her social standing. She is presented through her unique use of language and the particular wit she employs in her dialogues, as an adventurous young woman who is sexually attractive. Her constant concern with her appearance could, at one level, be potentially interpreted as another reason for realizing the importance of her understanding and awareness of her sexual appeal on others. Her sexuality

lies at the center of her character as we will see how it comes across when analyzing the practices of patriarchy. The element of sexual attraction is the major link to the image of Blanche as the New Woman in this play. The burgeoning sense of anxiety and insecurity that she constantly expresses about her appearance throughout the play is a metric to understand the weight of the pressure she feels to always be seen with an impeccable beauty and radiance that are indispensable qualities of New Woman.

Blanche possesses many of the qualities of her fictional predecessors; fictional characters like Hedda Gabler and Madame Bovary who introduced to the world of literature the early models for female voice and independence. She is a modern woman who is conscious of the liberty that has been granted to her by the societal changes and reformations which gives her in return the measures for the expressions of her sex and sexuality in general. She is a successful receiver of the norms and standards set down by her former fictional and historical forerunner who had introduced the concepts of sexual liberation and the social status of women. For a woman of that station, it wouldn't be easy to be sent back to the domesticity and submissiveness of an ordinary housewife role. Blanche retains the grains of freedom in her conscious and unconscious choices about the ways she interacts with the world and people around her. However, what impedes her way to exerting her will-power is the perceived imbalance in the reception of liberated and autonomous women in society during the 1950s. The patriarchal discourse in the society while being appreciative of the long and rocky path that

has been undertaken by women to arrive at such a point in history, still maintained a partially discreet preference for '*angels in the house*', a term that became popular after the publication of Coventry Patmore's poem which referred to the Victorian embodiment of the feminine ideal as primarily a mother and a wife who is a role model in her selfless devotion to her children and more importantly a paragon in submissiveness towards her husband.

In this light, the flappers are only welcome if they function to serve the desires of the men in society; in other words, the structure of patriarchy along with its various operating tools such as compulsory heterosexuality and notions of performativity require women to keep the limits of their freedom to where it meets the longings and needs of men, and by consequence not that of their own. Therefore, in their perspective, it is *fine* for women to be sexually active and expressive but only as long as their sex drive is at the service of satisfying the sexual needs of other men.

Coming full circle back to the context of the play, it would be relevant here to hypothetically imagine how a male character would have been treated in a similar situation to realize that they probably wouldn't have been so harshly scolded or criticised for their 'sexual adventures' in Hotel Flamingo or Laurel. On the contrary, our hypothetic male hero might have even received praise upon sharing the stories of his 'good old days' with his other male comrades. That is how the biased and discriminatory structure of binary opposition operates within

the structure of patriarchy where moral and ethical codes differ from one group of people in the society to another, where rules can be bent for some and not for others. Placing these arguments within the context of Judith Butler's theories, men typically wouldn't receive an equal degree of moral and ethical judgment for their actions in similar occasions since they are in theory conforming to the societal expectations laid down by the dominant discourse; in other words, 'the regulatory fiction' inscribes for them what a man is and what a woman is. By having (hyper)active or polygamous sexual adventures, they are simply 'performing' the daunting male role that is considered masculine normalcy. This argument is in fact a social construct that has existed throughout the course of history and is therefore a further proof for the famous iteration by Fredrich Nietzsche who famously stated that the deed pre-exists the 'doer'. By comparison, we can see why Blanche's past appear to be so negatively and dramatically received by other people in her circle, mainly because her presentations of morality and sexuality go against the social constructs laid down by the 'regulatory fiction' of femininity, therefore, she is being penalized not simply because what she has done is deemed profane or a show of promiscuity, rather because the choices she has made in the context of her sexual interactions, regardless of their consequences on her psyche and mind, contradict the performativity standards of female roles and in many ways enter the domain of male performativity. As Leibman mentions many stories "about female madness situate sex and sexuality as the primary catalyst in the heroine's illness. […]

Woman are usually victims of their own sexuality. […] They are punished with insanity for expressing their desire" (27). At a later passage in her discussion, she refers to patriarchy's oppressive role in controlling female sexuality through reversing the binary between male and female expressions of sexuality. She maintains that whereas in most literary metanarratives, it is the *repression* of sexual desire that causes mental illness for the male characters, it is the very *expression* of those sexual desires that leads to female characters' tragic downfall. "Woman who claim lust in their hearts are doomed to a life of social ostracism at best, mental incapacitation at worst" (28).

2.3. Body Politics and the Theory of Performativity

What is central to the characterization of Blanche is the primal role of her body as the locus for both her desires and insecurities and also a determining factor in navigating the course of action in the play before the point where the story begins and also throughout the different passages. Blanche's female body is a very classic case study for unearthing the institutional oppressive discourses on two levels; initially, there is the link to the theories of body politics and the ways in which its mechanisms work towards owning the female body and turning

it into a ground for further discrimination and objectification. And secondly there is the link to Butler's theory of performativity and its different manifestations in Blanche's character.

Through the practice of body politics, oppressive systems attempt to own the individual bodies, be it black or female or physically-impaired bodies and uses them against those same individuals belonging to the specific social, sexual or racial group. An extended analysis on this topic has been offered within the framework of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1991) which compares these isolated yet inherently related forms of discriminations to an intersection in which different roads lead to the center where discriminatory relations are at work to target the individuals. Among these attributes are categories of racism, sexism, classism, ablism, agism and so on, which provide the ground for further reinforcement of these policies.

A thought-provoking observation here may lead us to the question of why traditionally women and LGBTQ + community members use their bodies more often as a tool for protests while heterosexual men typically do not. The answer might lie in the fact that the male body has not historically and traditionally been the subject, locus and tool for sexual oppression and control. Throughout history, nakedness has always been associated, in one way or another, with protest and challenging the solid structure of power in the patriarchal system of oppression against women and members of LGBTQ+ community whose bodies have always been a ground for their oppression and control. In response, they have turned their

bodies into tools for the violation of oppressive rules. As mentioned above, the female body has historically been subject to discrimination, harassment, and humiliation, therefore, it is only fair for them to use the same tools to make their voices heard as it might be, in some cases, the only tools they are left with in the face of the oppressive systems of patriarchy.

What should be noted here is that turning your body into tools for protests is not inherently a wrong decision by any means; rather it is viewed as a highly bold and clever method in civil right movements. However, using female bodies as a tool contradicts the feminist ideals only when it serves to perpetuate the intentions of oppressive systems or the ideologies such as capitalism, communism, or religious ideologies and so on, or else when the bodies are being exploited as a tool by a third party. For instance, a woman might, at will, decide to use her voice, her hair, her art or even her sealed lips as a tool for protest. Similarly, they might decide to use their naked body in this process. In the case of the latter, her choice will elicit a different response and will immediately be labelled as a taboo; a reality that reflect on the existing mentality that has been shaped around the female body as a sexual object. A very common example could be the social debate over mothers' breastfeeding in public and some harsh criticisms that it aroused which originates from considering female breasts as sexual organs.

The sad reality is that, thanks to the discursive teachings of patriarchy, the female body has evolved into a taboo. The naked body is only on the surface an

expression of nakedness; however, at its core, it demonstrates the history of hundreds of years of oppression and discrimination. Reducing the concept of the naked body to the choice of clothing or nudity is an unforgivable mistake and a fallacy which is again a socio-historical construct made by the oppressive regimes. In a similar fashion, protesting with the naked body must be considered the right over one's body; a body that has been oppressed and controlled and discriminated against for years on end; it places the spotlight on those oversized or thin bodies that have been bullied and mocked; it raises the voice of those disabled or partially-disabled bodies that have been kept away from the public eyes and public spaces for ever. It's a show of protests against those bodies that have been raped, tortured and mutilated in the name of honour, ideology and oppressive systems of patriarchy. A naked body challenges hundreds of years of discrimination and oppression and brings these systems to their knees.

This concept can be clearly read in line with the practices of patriarchy since, as always, there's the element of discrimination operating at the heart of oppressive systems. The many occasions during which Blanche has been labelled and charged as neurotic, insane and eventually a prostitute first by Stanley and later by Mitch, all have one element in common: they have all used her female body as a locus for exerting their discursively-charged accusations, whether rightfully or not, against her. What I would like to suggest here is the link between body politics and Butler's theory of performativity and how they are working together towards further undermining Blanche's identity and sanity.

From the nuances of the implication of the theory of body politics, we can understand how the female body is being in fact considered a threat against women's very existence. However, the course of actions in the play have dragged Blanche down to a point in which she is left with her body and her body only to survive. In her attempt to confront all the antagonistic forces that have targeted her directly or indirectly and in the hope to invalidate her sense of mental, emotional and financial insecurity, she seeks refuge in the gender performances that would help her conform to definitions of what a 'lady' is supposed to be within the framework of regulatory fiction. In this light, performativity becomes an integral part of Blanche's character as her performed gender acts are not always truthful representations of her sexual identity, rather they are manifestations of her confirmation of and conformity to the social standards and expectations of the category of woman. In other words, in order to save her body from being further manipulated and used against herself, she turns to perpetuating the preexisting social constructions of femininity and female sexuality and tries to reproduce them in an almost theatrical and exaggerated form. For instance, the trunk she carries with her which is so precious to her and contains her dresses, her jewelry and fake furs, is a metaphor for her social constructionism and serves as a symbol throughout the play to remind the readers of the physical presence of these feminine expressions. Her refusal of desperate Mitch on the one hand and the inviting pose and gestures toward Stanley on other occasions on the other, her parading in front of the poker players in her slip, or caressing Mitch's hand while

looking at his cigarette case and also her repeated requests to Stanley and Mitch to light her cigarettes, are all techniques she uses in order to fit as closely as possible to the pre-established norms and standards set down by the gender performances that are required from her by society.

Such gender performance is not an isolated act, Butler adds, but precisely demands "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (44). Consequently, both sex and gender produce "regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression" (44). As John S. Bak explains, "we are conditioned to read sex and gender from the outside in_ that is, what one wears or how one talks or gesticulates." (97). He later asserts that Blanche "defines and is defined by the clothes she wears, strips off, or packs neatly into her trunk, but those definitions lie with us first." (ibid). She, therefore, tries to adapt herself to the dominant frames that define the category of women in society in order to survive. Her extreme preoccupation with her appearance and constant demand for approval and reaffirmation of her beauty is another reflection of her consciousness toward the functionality of her body as a vessel that can either break her or save her. She evidently bears anxiety as regards her beauty and compares it to 'a daisy that has been picked a few days ago'. Her fear of light and her insistence on staying in the dark and keeping her age a secret are other references in the story that demonstrate her efforts to stay

aligned as closely as possible with the delineated patterns of femininity in the society so much so that they enthrall her in a world of far-fetched illusion which in turn feed her with more fantasies for survival. Williams brings forth the complexities of gender roles as his constant thematic concerns in this context too. Blanche grows increasingly disturbed in the presence of and participation in the family setting. These are all different means through which Williams condemns the contemporary standards of femininity of his time as regards womanhood and proposes new forms of female subjectivity.

By and large, the character of Blanche represents an average, middle-class woman in America of the 1950s who is wrestling hard with the deep-rooted construction of patriarchy in a society that has been chasing her and her dreams of a normal life, stability and love for the better part of her life, a narrative that decides the gender practices and roles of its men and women before they are born, where expressions of masculinity and femininity are limited to the narrow confines of phallogocentric discourses; a society in which women will have to, at times, pay with their lives the price for owning a voice of their own, going through the normal process of aging, expressing their sexuality or performing their expression of gender preferences in whatever way they decide and are able to.

2.4. Stella as Blanche's Foil: '*The Road not Taken*'

This discussion takes us in turn to an analysis of the character of Stella who represents the flip side of the coin which has Blanche on one side of it as a classic case of discrimination and manipulation by the dominant ideologies and network of gender-power. Stella in her totality epitomizes the notion of '*angel in the house*' introduced earlier. She has followed the guidelines delineated by the Victorian ideal of femininity and womanhood as diligently as possible in marrying at quite an early age, running a household in compliance with her husband, and now is on her way to fulfill her so-called 'sacred duty' of becoming a mother as well, which will, in theory, presents an ideal image of performativity of her gender in a context of compulsive heterosexuality. She understands and experiences domestic, verbal and physical abuse; the three categories that will be discussed in the next chapter in the analysis of Stanley's character.

She, in one way or another, also functions as a foil to Blanche in that it gives the reader an alternative to her story's ending. On paper, Stella is in possession of everything that Blanche is striving for. On the outside, Stella has settled down and has formed a family, has a household of her own regardless of the abusive network of relationships happening in there, enjoys a certain degree of stability and security and most importantly, is now expecting a baby.

If we take a quick look at the wide range of advertisements, posters and other visual cultural prompts that were produced during the 1950s and 1960s we will

see an emerging culture of consumerism forming in the West, especially in the United States which affected almost all walks of life. This image was also partially created in response to the consumerism ideology largely at work in accordance with the political and economic realities of the day. The concept of consumerism is a social phenomenon which, along with the baby boom notion, had prevailed all over America at that time. After the Second World War, America was turning into an affluent and prosperous country. Every day, there was a new product being introduced to the market and as a result of the huge wave of production and advertisements, people were turning into passive receivers of goods and purchasing became a social and economic value. Generally speaking, consumerism in all its forms was one of the most prominent features of middle-class culture. Big mansions, home appliances, cars and a host of other materials became an indispensable part of the life of the average American family of the 1950s. In fact, the 1950s were the era of mass consumption, with its emphasis on conformity and similarity which produced types rather than authentic individuals. This image gives us a clear context for the cultural milieu from which a character like Stella originates. She responds in full accordance to the social and cultural formulations of her time and is in turn fed with a satisfactory sense of gratification that plays strongly on her sexual bonds with Stanley in the primitive role of a predator.

Her infatuation with Stanley's expressions of masculinity places her in a state of inaction in which she is repeatedly presented as mesmerized by him. This

inaction or inability to decide demonstrates another layer of the compulsive heterosexuality system in which the husband is represented as the head, boss or chief in a marriage and the role of the wife is best exemplified in being submissive and an accepting lamb who conforms to what society is presenting to her as the ultimate and ideal form of femininity – that is, being a selfless wife to her husband and a sacrificing mother who places her family above her needs and wants. Blanche obviously does not favor such an idea of her sister; however, the performative patterns of femininity that she is following in her relationship with others in effect stems from the same dysfunctional nature of male superiority in the discourse of patriarchy. Therefore, the ending of the play leaves the reader in a state of moral and literary dilemma as we see Blanche leaving this toxic household and thereby, we tend to recognize her as the tragic hero of the story who sees her tragic downfall coming upon her; however, we also can't help but notice Stella as the other sister who stays behind, one who should await another looming ending as now we can clearly see the mechanism of this giant machine called patriarchy that is operating at full blast and will take everything or everyone that comes its way in their attempt to find their voice, or establish an identity of their own or diverge from the long-established patterns of performativity for gender and sexuality alike.

CHAPTER THREE

Male Bonding: Character Analysis of

Stanley and Mitch and Allan Gray

Through the depiction of his male and female characters in "*A Streetcar Named Desire*", Williams has tried to push the gender lines both for his characters and for his readers and in pushing them, he has blurred the barriers. Through portraying an intricate network of relationships within a society that is overridden by patriarchy, he consciously moves toward introducing a wider range of masculinity in the form of a spectrum which includes such varied expressions of masculinity as that of Stanley, who represents the extreme version of masculinity, and Allan Grey, who stands on the far end of this spectrum with his homosexual identity as a male characters who "shrugs off the pressure of genital sexuality and

with it the patriarchal "law of the father" (Fantina 38), and last but not least with Mitch being placed somewhere midway on this spectrum, which might be defined as soft masculinity. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the ideology of patriarchy and network of gender-power and its resulting systems of oppression work together to secure power and dominance and also to argue that their function is not simply targeted against what has historically and traditionally believed to be only against women, but rather against men, too; men who presumably do not follow its strict and narrow definition of masculinity.

3.1. Stanley: Victim or Victimizer?

The play "*A Streetcar Named Desire*" displays people at war in different moments in their lives and on different levels. Some are fighting with their past, some for their future and still others are at war with and within themselves. Among the characters, Stanley and Blanche are represented as the main characters through whose growth and development the readers follow the generic and thematic focus of the play. And these two characters are involved in a constant rivalry over power, authority and dominance which can simply be translated into survival, and over forming allegiance with other characters and

establishing their own version of the narrative. However, in this battle only one voice can prevail and only one side of the war can claim to be victorious and the victory of one can only take place at the cost of the loss and elimination of the other.

This power struggle is an evolving concept that is fluctuating and oscillating constantly throughout the play. The dynamics behind this struggle is multi-layered and originates from different factors at hand. From a classic perspective, it is a war of sexes with Stanley and Blanche each playing their own part to the best. It can also be regarded as the war of narratives in which whoever succeeds at presenting a more valid and reliable narrative will overcome and win. Still from a different perspective, it can be considered a war between past and future, or, in another light, between life and death. It is a classic battle for survival in which the prevailing narrative will take over and will therefore survive. In this section, I am going to take a closer look at the motivation and context for the character of Stanley, as the ultimate winner of this war; motivations that both inform and help to formulate his actions and decisions and their effect on other characters in the play.

Starting early in the play, Blanche is introduced as a character who does not fit into the hustle and bustle of Elysian Field; her strong Southern accent makes her sound like an outsider to people, her seemingly upper-class style and outfits seem to be inappropriate for the place and make her look like a misfit.

However, more importantly her lack of familiarity with 'this place', as she refers to Kowalski's household strips her of her self-confidence as she feels (and we know that in reality she is) both displaced and misplaced. She is thrown into this new world of social conventions which she does not seem to be able to make sense of. All these factors put her in a fragile and sensitive position compared to Stanley, who apparently has been the monolithic source of order and dominance in the household and beyond, and who, in turn, seems to be strongly disturbed by Blanche's presence and addition to his household. It is not very difficult to speculate about the power balance in that household prior to the arrival of Blanche. Williams gives us several hints in that direction whether in the inclusion of the neighbouring family who lives upstairs in whose relationships the reader can clearly find the mirror for Stanley and Stella's marriage, or in the dramatic first appearance of Stanley when he throws the pack of raw meat at Stella in a primitive show of masculinity, all of which are further reinforced by the poker nights and the established mood therein.

However, Blanche with her heavy trunk which contains objects that represents femininity in its extreme form, the jewellery, the furs and the 'solid-gold' and satin dresses, with her different way of dressing and undressing and her unique socializing and mannerism, is posed as a threat to the existing patterns of family structure and gender roles that govern over the Kowalski's household. She is immediately challenged and her authenticity is equally questioned by Stanley

who is carefully planning to dethrone her from the temporary position of power and authority that she has attained at the beginning of the play. His strategies in this regard can be divided into two phases at least.

He first starts to investigate into the history of Belle Reve and goes on to accuse her of taking advantage of Stella's absence and selling the house. He tries to back up his claim by rummaging through Blanche's trunk to which she has previously referred to as her only possession, saying that "everything that I own is in that trunk" (T. Williams 43). In a threatening move, however, Stanley brings in references and evidence from the outside world to further establish his credibility and validity; not surprising, though, his sources are other men he knows who can help him either estimate the value of the furs and jewels or lawyer acquaintances who can interpret the remaining documents from Belle Reve. In doing so, he is in effect turning his weak point, that is his lack of knowledge of the matter, into his point of strength by referring to some unnamed and unidentified friends through whose presence he is trying to create an illusion of power, knowledge and threat. From a symbolic perspective too, his act of usurping the private content of the trunk in a moment of frenzy and throwing out and investigating every single item that was inside it, is a symbolic foreshadowing of his eventual act of rape that will be discussed later.

To him, Blanche appears as an unwelcome guest, a nuisance, and ultimately, a witch who possesses strange and super powers that can change the status quo

and threaten the so-called stability and balance he has created by extending his dominant masculine image onto his family, friends and neighbours. In its most classic definition, witches and witchcraft have always been associated with women having demonic and destructive superhuman powers. The image of a woman flying on a broomstick has been a prevailing stereotype throughout the Middle Ages; an image that might be of interest for our understanding of the play. As Jennifer Farrell explains, "the notion that a witch might travel by broomstick (especially when contrasted with the male who conjures a demon horse on which to ride) underscores the domestic sphere to which women belonged." She goes on to indicate that:

> The perceived threat to established norms inherent in the idea that women were moving beyond their expected societal roles is also mirrored in a number of the accusations levelled against male witches. […] Magic was then, in many ways, viewed by the church as an expression of rebellion against established norms and institutions, including gendered identities (*theconversation*.com).

This might help us have a better grasp of the potential threat that Stanley feels is being evoked by the presence, and in larger sense, the existence of Blanche, in that she symbolizes an unknown territory about whose past Stanley does not know much; a land that needs to be discovered, tamed, reigned over or destroyed if circumstances demand so. As we see in different scenes in the play, Blanche

walks around the room which has been claimed by Stanley and his male circle as their 'natural habitat'; she listens and dances to the music on the radio and she has begun to win Mitch over. All these factors trigger a primal fear within Stanley that puts him in action in an immediate and impulsive mood that eventually culminates in the most barbaric side to his human character, the act of rape, as we will see later.

After his disappointment with the legal and financial approach to discredit Blanche, Stanley makes his next move in order to eliminate her through means other than what he has tried previously and this time decides to investigate into her past and find out what has brought her here in the first place. At first glance, this move may not sound too antagonistic as she is now officially residing in their household and it would sound like a friendly move to want to know people you share the space with on a more human level. However, what does mark Stanley's query into Blanche's past as unbenevolent are his intentions and bias in doing so, since he is mainly carrying out his investigation with the intention or what might also be argued as the 'hope' of fault-finding in order to present her as a failure, or even more to his advantage, as a lunatic, and he embarks on the idea with the help of those he describes as 'very reliable sources'; people that are never named or described, but who are always there in the shadow to create an illusion of power to both protect and support him in carrying out his intentions. The sources have informed him about Blanche's inappropriate (sexual) conduct in the past, the

frequent acquaintances she had made in Laurel and in a certain lodging called Hotel Flamingo, and also about the story behind how she lost her job as a school teacher. However, what does not go unnoticed by a meticulous reader as an outside observer is that these judgments are strongly filtered through the proxy of male bonding and the mechanisms that these sources have used to handpick what Stanley needed in order to present his claims as socially valid, culturally convincing and personally defendable.

This rather long introduction can give us an insight into the web of patriarchal relationships that have evolved around the characters. Stanley bears the unconscious fear of being moved out of his position of power and authority as they have been traditionally, historically and naturally bestowed on him within a context of male superiority, and this in turn threatens his sense of male subjectivity within the phallogocentric context of the society. As previously discussed, in order for any binary opposition to exist and fully function, it requires two opposing poles to be set against each other and in contradicting those elements, keep the balance. Thus, male superiority can only be validated in its juxtaposition to the notion of female inferiority. Stanley has already subjugated Stella by moulding a strong sexual infatuation that appears to have hypnotizing effects on her. However, more important than that is the financial setup of their family. As discussed in the previous chapter, Stella is a housewife; she depends on Stanley for her daily life which includes the question of shelter, food, and

security. However, more important than these is for her to maintain the discursively inscribed and expected societal and gender role as a happy housewife who's happily married to a man. Within this framework, Stanley does not have to make any extra effort to subdue Stella. However, as mentioned above, it is Blanche that now presents herself as a peace-destroyer and can potentially, even if she shows no signs of having any intentions to do so, cause a shift in the power balance regarding the gender roles that is at the moment entirely focused on Stanley. Therefore, in his attempt to deflate this potential threat, Stanley feels he is entitled to utilize whatever means of control and suppression that he needs and consequently all his actions and decisions regarding Blanche and her past, present and future, include and rely on the use and application of violence.

As we are very well aware from the advances made in the fields of psychology and sociology, violence exists in different forms and can be practiced on multiple levels. The out-dated, old-fashioned view of violence as an aggressive action limited just to physical abuse and mistreatment has now changed and is extended to verbal, psychological, sexual and physical violence which can all be said to have taken place within the context of this play. Stanley, wittingly and intentionally, presents himself as a living symbol of threat and danger for Blanche. Both in her presence and while she is off-stage, he maintains an intimidating and foreboding presence in order to intentionally invoke fear and anxiety in Blanche and by extension in Stella.

Stanley's use of verbal violence becomes in essence an indispensable part of the scaffolding of his character. He loses his temper very easily and the slightest difference in opinions or criticism makes him furious. The language he uses around other characters is loaded with threats, anger and ferocity. He clearly is conscious of the power of language in establishing his figure as the authority within the household and in maintaining his desired image as the head of family who has the final say in matters and also as the person who makes decisions for others. His insatiable zest for exerting control over everything and everyone in his circle is another example of the psychological violence that he imposes on others. The illusion that has been created within his mind by the intricate dynamics of the patriarchal system insinuates to him that he is beyond and above everyone else in the family and that whatever course the actions and decisions of other people around him are taking must first go through his filter as the ultimate source that gives credibility and validity to matters. For instance, based on his judgement and decision, Blanche needs to know about Stella's pregnancy despite Stella's request to keep that piece of information away from her as he is the one who decides on the relationship between the two sisters. In a similar fashion, immediately upon Blanche's arrival, he starts to make investigations into her belongings which later takes the form of a thorough investigation into her life before joining them in Elysian field, including her job, her stay at Laurel and more. This psychological desire to control everything that happens around him is a lucid reflection of the power that he feels he possesses and which clearly extends

beyond him as an individual and spills over to almost everyone and every decision around him.

As expected, the patterns of verbal and psychological violence will find their factual correspondence in Stanley's manifestation of physical violence. "Ultimately, Stanley's authority derives from the same sources which most of us are forced to acknowledge in one way or another all our lives: physical violence, intimidation, and above all economic domination. In the quest for authority, Stanley profits from staying within the parameters set for him by his sex and class, and Blanche loses because she fails to conform." (VIasopolos 337). He presents multiple layers of violence during his encounters with both Stella and Blanche. He smacks Stella early in the play in the presence of other characters in a masculine show of sexual possession of his wife's body which is strongly refuted by her. However, more prominent is his unleashed ferocity in his conversation with Blanche over Belle Reve and his erratic and impulsive movements when he approaches her trunk and tries to seize its contents including the official documents of the property as well as the love letters from Blanche's deceased husband. His ultimate show of violence though is the scene at the poker night when he repeatedly bellows and yells at Stella, Blanche, Mitch and his other friends. However, his rushing into the bedroom and throwing the radio out of the window and breaking the window glass presents him as a character who relies solely and primarily on his primitive physical power to find his way through the

matters by exerting violence and therefore reinforcing his image as the absolute voice and the monolithic authority. This practice of toxic masculinity becomes the new norm for his interactions with all other characters over time and will be repeated as long as it takes in order to satisfy his need for recognition and power. That is how the dysfunctional cycle of violence operates in reality: that is to say, in Stanley's mentality, he can only be masculine i.e., powerful enough, through the practice of violence; therefore, for him masculinity translates into the simple formula of the practice of violence. The concept of violence is therefore so deeply interwoven into the multiple layers of the fabric of masculinity that at a certain point, it practically becomes impossible to separate the two. In other words, the existence of one would be ineffectual without the practice of the other. And this is the formula that grants Stanley the pass to justifying his act of rape as a way to assert his role as the male head of the family.

The question of rape has very obvious literal and implied significations as it concerns the male-female power balance and the entailing gender roles denotations. By raping Blanche, Stanley is closing a chapter in the history of his family dynamics and the crisis that momentarily threatened his position. In its general sense, the act of rape is a highly primitive form of practice of violence. An estimated 91% of victims of rape and sexual assault are female and 9% male. Nearly 99% of perpetrators are male. It has always been used as a means of terrorizing and demoralizing the victim. When used against young boys, it is more

of a humiliating sexual weapon to metaphorically un-man them and supposedly bring down their sex, sexuality and gender subjectivity to the level of a woman. In the context of the play, through the literal subjugation of Blanche's body, Stanley is claiming to be the metaphorical conqueror of a land that seemed unknown and mysterious to him at the beginning. The references to the female body as the land is another reference to the archetypal significance of women as a symbol of nature and mother earth. Therefore, Stanley is conquering the long-abandoned and deserted land and in seizing it is restoring order and peace in a colonial pose and manner.

The patterns of violence in Stanley's behaviour owe their validity to the superior position that he is enjoying within the male-dominated regime of truth in that society and that is, in effect, a proof of how the system of patriarchy manipulates the male psychology in order to fill them with the illusion of power that ensues such a dynamic. As such, this turns into a simple and at the same time reciprocal game of mental, ideological and social dimensions through which both parties feed each other and get fed in return; by exerting violence on the female circle around him, Stanley is perpetuating the discourse of patriarchy within his domestic and social sphere; a system that, once established, will continue to give him more power and authority to exert further violence and other tools to guarantee his dominance.

On another note, the character of Stanley can also be considered as a victim of this system himself. The structure of patriarchy operates in more complicated and intricate systems than appears on the surface. This system is self-correcting and evolving constantly, meaning that in order to secure higher degrees of power, the mechanisms that are involved within this ideology adapt themselves to new circumstances continually. One of the strategies through which patriarchy can ensure maximum efficiency and efficacy is the mental and psychological reward or punishment systems it applies to individuals. The system is designed in a way to reward its faithful adherers with having more power and access to opportunities as long as they agree to reproduce the cycle of patriarchal practices. This psychological impression of possession of power can be extended to almost all walks of life where men are supposed to make decisions for their wives, daughters, sisters and sometimes mothers. In some countries and under certain political regimes, women cannot study, work, travel, leave the country or even leave their houses without the permission of their fathers, husbands or a male relative in their family. In the case of a divorce, the woman cannot divorce her husband and will not have the custody of her own children after separation. The father in a family will not be charged with any legal persecutions or crimes if he murders his own wife or children since, based on the patriarchal structure of the society, the father as the head of the family is 'the blood-owner' and therefore, the decision over the life and death of his family members remains within the scope of his power. These are only a few examples to elucidate the extent of the

practices of patriarchy and how it can play on the value-system in a society. In such circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine how secure men would feel in the knowledge that they are supported by the entire social, economic, judicial, moral and political structure of the society and more importantly how this knowledge and security would reward them in a reciprocal pact. However, the facts of this case lie before us as external observers of such societal systems and from a psychological perspective, we would agree to say that it is not women who are the only victims of these injustices and malpractices; it is rather every single person, including men who are involved in its operations. Stanley can be singled out as a classic example of a victim of the system that he himself is perpetuating since through the unlimited practice of violence, he now has established himself as a godly figure who is beyond reproach or criticism and in doing so has represented himself as a man lacking in basic human traits including sympathy, respect or love for others. He is trying to create the silhouette of a rational man who makes decisions based on reason and research; one who doesn't allow his emotions to cloud his judgements. This is in practice a reproduction of the stereotype of toxic masculinity where men are always associated with power and reason and wisdom whereas women are defined by their emotional responses, lack of rational thinking and inability to make sound decisions as a result of their failure to separate their thoughts from their emotions. In a similar fashion, we can see that phrases like 'boys don't cry' or 'boys will be boys' continue to circulate in the popular culture from one generation to another and thereby insinuate the

impression onto young boys and men in the society that men who do allow their emotions to be involved in their decision makings or even to simply demonstrate their soft, human and authentic feelings are immediately labelled as effeminate and are considered less of a man and lacking in basic masculine codes and conducts. This is precisely what the system of patriarchy targets through the reward and punishment system; that is, by rewarding those men who help perpetuate these deep-rooted stereotypes, it bestows further power in exerting more violence and occupying more space in the societal, political or domestic spheres while, at the same time, punishing other men who refuse to conform in close allegiance to the codes and standards that have been set down by the patriarchal discourse. However, what will never be discussed in their male circles is how these same men who feel empowered by gaining advantages in society are in fact functioning as the system's agents in advancing its ruling ideologies at the cost of their own humanistic, individualistic properties. Boys who were told they should not cry lest they be labelled effeminate or 'less of a man' will carry this anxiety for the rest of their lives and this simple formula turns into a pattern of gender performativity that dictates to them what they can and what they cannot do; how far they can go in their interpersonal human relationships and what their boundaries are as men in this violence-producing, character-dismantling and self-censoring cycle of patriarchy. Over time, they become symbolic agents who work for this system and are rewarded in return with more and more illusion of power

that might save them temporarily, however it probably takes away more than it gives, as we will see in the following section.

3.2. Mitch and Allan Gray: Alternative Masculinities

This discussion will bring us to the analysis of the two other male characters presented in the play, Mitch and Allan Gray who respectively indicate the different expressions of masculinity on the spectrum of gender performances and who both gets penalized for stepping outside the narrow confines of heteronormative normalcy and the resulting male superiority discourse that ensues. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Stanley, Mitch and Allan each represent a different practice of masculinity with Stanley and Allan positioned in two opposing poles and Mitch placed at the centre. Mitch represents the practice of what might be argued to be 'soft masculinity' in his civilized and affectionate manner by which he approaches women around him, namely his mother and Blanche. He openly cares about the health and well-being of his mother and does not shy away from expressing his human side that contains his emotion towards his family. On the other hand, his confrontation with Stella and Blanche is outstandingly different from Stanley and his other fellowmen; a fact which clearly

does not go unnoticed by the two sisters and by Blanche in particular, who feels she might have found a safe haven in the midst of all the chaos and discordances happening in her life at that moment. He is a typical, working-class man who, similar to Blanche, is in 'pursuit of happiness' and for some time believes that he has found one in the character of Blanche. However, as a male figure who is living in the context of the patriarchal system, he is also expected to keep up his masculine profile and follow its steps in his actions and mannerism. Tennessee William juxtaposes the two characters of Mitch and Stanley and intentionally highlights their differences in order to demonstrate the extreme interpretation and application of toxic masculinity in the character of Stanley and at the same time, to depict how this monolithic reading of patriarchy penalizes those people that are believed to be 'not suitable' representatives for its ideology. In this light, Mitch is presented as 'not man enough'. He lacks basic attributes that would place him in the position where he should belong; in other words, he is too gentle with women, he gives them too much space and treats them in an equal way wherever he can. He shows his genuine emotions to Blanche and yearns to be loved and cared for in a mutual way. All these are far too effeminate for the patriarchal context that is being represented by a character such as Stanley. He simply cannot cope with the reality of the space that Blanche is occupying in the company of Mitch.

The patriarchal motivations of Stanley's decisions and actions in this regard become more evident when we think about their living circumstance. Blanche and Mitch were on the verge of getting married and starting their own new life outside the Kowalski's household, a fact which could have potentially improved the situations for all of them and put a happy ending to this family's drama, since Stanley was clearly not happy with Blanche staying in their house and has expressed that on more than one occasion. In a normal situation, he would have been happy for the two of them to get married since this would have accelerated Blanche's exit from his household. However, the irony in this situation is that, that is not 'just' what he wants. His patriarchal mentality is at a rage in this case through insinuating a sense of threat and insecurity that arises from the combination of events. His superiority-seeking ego maintains that everything happens under his radar; therefore, watching the two of them forming closer and closer bonds makes him feel that he is losing what was once his absolute power over people in his circle. And yet, more importantly, he decides to inform Mitch about the secrets that he has discovered about Blanche's past because he simply believes that Blanche deserved to be punished and penalized for being a failure at her performance of femininity, a gender traitor who has failed to fulfil her moral, societal and ideological duties as a woman. By passing judgements on her past undertakings and extending it to her present circumstances, he makes the moral decision for Mitch and intoxicates him with his share of toxic masculinity to the degree that in scene nine, it is as if Mitch is

mimicking, reproducing and mirroring Stanley's traits in his exertion of violence and attitude regarding Blanche's *cleanliness* where he says: "You're not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother." (T. Williams 139) He is a changed man in that scene and the reader who has already spent some good time reading through the pages and between the lines of the play can easily understand the change in his mannerism and the ways in which he has been intoxicated by a manipulative mask that Stanley's hand has drawn over his face. His fury does not simply stem from what appears to be a question of honesty or dishonesty on the surface. It is rather a painful recognition of the blow to his male pride as he was persuaded to believed that he was about to marry a not 'clean' woman. However, the question that arises is that what makes a clean woman and what makes a clean man in that society. If Blanche's past mistakes turns her into an epitome of female failure in adhering to societal and gender roles, is what Stanley doing, in unearthing her utmost private secrets and exposing them in public, morally and socially acceptable? In the same light, are Stanley's judgements and decisions about her based on the very biased, un-holistic, and male-gaze-oriented proxies that he, as the voice of patriarchy decides to apply, morally and socially acceptable? The answer might be hidden for us to discover in borrowing these lines from Anca VIisopolos where she states that "What is this? Can a sister just send someone to an asylum without medical advice? If so, which one of us is safe? […] we are not safe so long as the measure of insanity depends on the powerlessness of the individual." (336). In this regard, both Blanche and Mitch

are being punished as they are not closely aligned with the dominant narrative in the society and are not fully adhering to their discursively prescribed gender performativity codes.

The character of Allan Gray, although not fully developed or described, is an essential part of our understanding of William's addressing of the question of gender. Interestingly, we as readers never get to see or hear the character of Allan and all our knowledge and understanding of him in transferred to us through the words Blanche reveals to us. With his short addition to the cast of characters, he functions as a crucial turning point in Blanche's life and consequently in the course of actions in the play. Allan could be considered an extension of the newly-formulated gender practices discussed earlier in the previous chapter. With his different expression of his sexuality and gender, he exposes and undermines Stanley's version of masculinity on the famous gender spectrum exemplified through the characterization of these three male characters. As we move on this spectrum and distance ourselves from Stanley's, we are entering a domain of more fluidity, higher flexibility and more variations in the expressions of masculinity. This is a move from strict code of compulsive heterosexuality towards the more liberated practices of androgyny and homosexuality. In her introduction to *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, Carolyn Heilbrun defines androgyny as a shift in social roles that amounts to a transformation of gender:

Future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen….a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned….Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to proprietary or custom (x-xi).

Yet, the term androgyny was translated into different practical definitions for men and women in the context of society. While for women, possessing androgynous quality was less a matter of a loss of femininity than of gaining socially equal opportunities, for men, this transformation necessitated abandoning their masculine properties and moving toward a less masculine/more feminine pathway.

This revision is further marked by challenging fixed frameworks of sexuality, and by an attempt to distort the rigid and incoherent ideal of heteronormativity. As Heilbrun explains in this period: "gender roles as God-given and Darwin-selected categories, characterized by a set of invariable natural attitudes, were inevitably crumbled" (1982).

The once-superior account of masculinity was now severely shattered and, in its lieu, alternative forms of masculinities were being formulated by men and for men. Homoeroticism and homosexuality were among the most prevalent patterns of masculinities practiced on the large scale. Whatever the forms, the concept of androgyny remained at the core of them as the founding ground upon which new definitions of gender formulations came to be discursively acknowledged and accepted. Jakubas explains that being androgynous was synonymous to a union between these two [genders], not to be less of either, but more whole by adopting an androgynous identity "in order to generate authority and inspiration" (17).

As human beings, we have proved to have complicated interrelated networks of genetics, psychic and social factors. In terms of theory, psychologists and gender theorists maintain that there is no such concept as the wrong body; instead, we are faced with the phenomenon of different bodies according to which, different estimation of the 'body's wrongness' are formed. Scientists believe that lines must be drawn between the two categories of social body and biological body and they must be separated from one another. Whereas the term biological body refers to the genital organs that define our sex at birth; a notion which was later refuted by Judith Butler, the social body refers to the bodily functions assigned by the social discourses, for which strict lines are drawn and distinct demeanours are defined. According to these discursive definitions, individual men and women (must) fall into either the category of male or female,

which are accordingly described by rigid characteristics such as a certain physique, certain bodily size, proper mannerism, standard qualities, and so on. These qualities are formed and reformed, in a constant cycle of production, through depiction and advertisement on media, educational system, law, medicine and other societal institutes. If anyone transgresses these clear-cut formulations, they can get severely punished by the entire system. In case a certain body does not correspond to the existing definitions and standards, the agent is faced with two alternatives; conformity or resistance. In an end-to-end closed, patriarchal social system, the majority of those who possess more fluid concepts of gender and sexuality, are forced to adopt the former, which will, in turn, culminate in either a repressed sense of homosexuality or at best, result in transgender surgical operations. The latter, however, will result in alternative, informed sexual expressions, which, therefore, will not function according to the assigned male/female dichotomy and in most cases, it will come about in the form of changed bodily features. Yet, social pressures on these individuals, exerted, knowingly or unknowingly, by social, educational and familial institutions, might, in some cases, translate into a psychological identity crisis when the basic biological dispositions contradict the patriarchal heteronormative system teachings and as such, are overwhelmed by multiple social discourses.

This is precisely the situation that Blanche's husband gets involved in. The societal and familial pressures that are targeting him eventually bring him down

to his knees. He cannot cope with the pressure of being an embarrassment to his wife and in order to defy that sense of failure, he decides to take his own life; thereby suggesting a third alternative to the 'conformity or resistance' duality. The tragedy of his suicide keeps reverberating in Blanche's life and the silhouette of their marriage maintains a constant presence throughout her actions and decisions until the end. The addition of this story line adds yet another layer of significance to the already intricate power-balance in that society where men and women are equal victims of this labyrinth of oppression and cruelty and perpetuating violence. By condemning Allan's sexual identity and labelling him as effeminate and unworthy of the masculine personality on the one hand, and accusing Blanche of being morally corrupt and mentally sick and eventually 'insane', the formidable forces of patriarchy prevail over their individual identities and break them into shattered pieces both physically and mentally. However, the real tragedy lies in the fact that the oppressive regime of truth within the structure of patriarchy mesmerizes people and in doing so strips them of their power to think independently and decides for their own concepts of right or wrong, the good or the evil. And within such a context, voices like Stanley's will prevail while all other characters turn into either victims of injustice or silent observers of these practices, immersed in the morbid fear that their turn will arrive soon.

CHAPTER FOUR:

'HOW TO CENSOR A LOVE STORY': A HANDBOOK BY MR. PETROVICH

The mechanisms of patriarchy take up roots in various ways in different parts of the world. Different cultures adopt varying features of this discourse based on their own specific wants and local properties. Often, these ideologies are paired with the other existing discourses in the society in order to either reinforce or repel each other. In the specific case of Iran as the country where the events in the novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* take place, the discourse of patriarchy is strongly situated within, and amplified through, a religious background that historically and traditionally exist in the country. These two

ideologies function as the two sides of a coin in a mutual agreement where one benefits from certain features that exist in the other and in this way perpetuate the extremely powerful impact they create on individuals and on society.

The novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* is a grotesque manifestation of a society in which absurdity is introduced as a social and moral value and is the most important element from which power is generated; it is a society in which human relationships are filtered through the proxy of moral, sexual, ethical, and literal censorship. In this novel, patriarchy is no longer only a backdrop to the events within which the story develops; it rather comes into life and becomes one of the characters who lives among us; a living creature that breathes and talks, a character who walks around the streets on snowy nights, gets angry at other characters, holds grudges against others, threatens to kill them and even falls in love. The presence of patriarchy and the magnitude of its influence is so unspeakably vast that the main characters in the book appear to be merely meager extensions of its existence. These characters are people whose most personal thoughts, words, actions, emotions and decisions are closely monitored and constantly censored; people whose social roles and relationships are predestined for them; people who know that the omnipresent eye of 'Big Brother' is watching over them at all times, in all place. In a place like this, patriarchy is not an external force you fight against; it rather is born with you and grows inside and with you as your emotions grow and as your sense of identity and individuality develops.

Patriarchy tells you where to go, what to wear, what to eat or drink, what to say and more important than that, what not to say, and of particular importance to us, what to write and what to cross out.

This is in close corresponding with the theories of Judith Butler, in particular her theory of performativity as discussed in the previous chapters. In this society, Mr. Petrovich, a pen name based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's detective in the novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), as the ultimate voice of ruling power and patriarchy, decides every single action and movement of both the characters in the inside story, i.e. Dara and Sara, and the author in the second plot line (Shahriar). In the same fashion, MandaniPour is reflecting on the Iranian authors' anxieties in including the character of Mr. Petrovich as the government's censor since his presence in the novels implies that the author "must attempt to insert his [Mr. Petrovich's] subjectivity into their text. The author cannot think freely, [s]he is thinking of two subjects at the same time: what to say that is worth saying, and what to say that can be published. Rarely can these two competing desires be reconciled, […] and it is the censor's job to ensure that they never do" (Atwood 41). Mr. Petrovich represents the ideology that predestines the social roles and identity of individuals in the society. It doesn't matter how hard those characters strive to find their space among the increasingly narrow confines of the societal norms and expectation; his is the hand that slides through the lines and pages of the book and reverses the course of actions to his own desire goal and topples everything the characters have planned for. It is he and the office he represents

that decide what words can stay in the narrative and what words should be deleted and what passage should be taken out altogether; it is he that decides what words are exchanged between the two main characters, Dara and Sara, and where and how and in what tone and with what literal and figurative implications. It is he who decides the life and death of the characters; it is he who orders the author to kill off a certain character and let the course of actions in the plot take the pitch that he deems appropriate. This is the accurate translation and the living epitome of Butler's theory of performativity as it clearly showcases the overarching role of ideologies and discourses in determining the societal, interpersonal and gender roles of the character.

In this chapter, I will make a brief analysis of the novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* published by the Iranian author Shahriar MandaniPour and will look for the elements and apparatus of patriarchy as they are depicted in the context of the book. This chapter serves only to illuminate further the function of patriarchy as it exists in different parts of the world in order to provide a common ground for comparison between the novel and the other text I analyzed in the previous chapters (*A Streetcar Named Desire*) and aims at demonstrating the fluidity of the nature of ideologies and the dissemination of ideas and concepts.

4.1. The Book as It Is: Form Follows Function

MandaniPour and all the other authors and artists who attempt their hand at writing within the boundaries of Islamic Republic of Iran have already come to terms with the fact that they are destined to work under what has been recently termed 'geographical determination'. They automatically consider two different versions of a story whenever it enters their heads: the story as it is and a bowdlerized version that might escape official censorship. The latter will be submitted to the 'Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance'_ a title which is sufficiently ironic in itself and by itself, which reviews all publications before they are published; nonetheless, this is just the start of the writer's voyage. *Censoring an Iranian Love Story,* a novel by Shahriar MandaniPour is no exception either. It is a novel that explores the impact of censorship on literature and freedom of expression in Iran. The novel is a meta-fictional work that tells the story of an author named Shahriar who is trying to publish a love story in Iran, but his work is constantly censored by the government, which is represented by the character of Mr. Petrovich. The novel is written in a complex and layered style that uses various techniques, such as letters, interviews, and dreams, to convey the impact of censorship on the creative process and the imagination. It illustrates the ways in which censorship can stifle creativity and limit the range of voices and ideas that are available to the public. One of the techniques

MandaniPour uses in order to demonstrate the overwhelming presence of patriarchy through censorship is the method he has used in striking through large sections of text wherever his intuition warns him. "His [Mandanipour's] technique of striking through portions of the text he has written is ultimately an act of self-reflexivity. Since no Iranian agency has censored the text, the crossed-out font indicates those areas for which the author anticipates censorship. It is a form of self-censorship, and mechanisms of state control achieve success when individual citizens internalise the procedures and participate in censorship on their own. The author-narrator in *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* is constantly altering and mutilating his own work in order to avoid censorship. The novel, with its various typographic emphases, visually demonstrates how censorship—and perhaps more often the anticipation of censorship—refashions the very pages of literature." (Atwood 40). It also highlights the impact of censorship on the psychological well-being of individuals and the society at large. As a novel that explores the impact of censorship on literature and freedom of expression in Iran, it is a powerful critique of the regime's censorship and its impact on the artistic expression and the society at large. It is also considered an important and powerful work of contemporary Iranian literature.

The novel follows a dual narrative which in itself is a metafiction tool to further complicate the context of the story and allude to the absurdity of the entire setup. The second plot line starts concurrently with the first, and the

writer/narrator is trying his hardest to produce "a love story...with an ending that is a doorway to light" because he is "weary of writing dark and bitter novels" (*Censoring an Iranian Love Story* 8). His difficulty, though, is that he wants to publish his narrative in his native country, where doing so under rigorous censorship seems to be even riskier than falling in love. The author, Shahriar, who is actually MandaniPour himself, faces risks and challenges in telling his experience much as Sara and Dara do when pursuing their romance. Shahriar includes the readers in the creation of each line and scene, sharing with them his concerns with the censorship agent's assessments. Will he order the book's deletion or amendment, or will he just refuse to grant it a publication license? The author humorously and ironically reveals how the Iranian censorship system functions and how he is even banned from mentioning the word "breast," much less expressing love trysts, lust, and passion. The reader quickly understands that "...as much as humor dominates the novel, it discreetly gets at something else— the omnipotence of tyranny by following along on his quest to crafting a love story. In the book, censors remove anything that might arouse lust or love from books, publications, and films. A tragic oxymoron is the idea of an Iranian love story" (Daniel 2009). Staying on the topic of love and the Islamic Republic's approach in handling the theme of love in works of literature brings us to what Atwood refers to in his article as 'the government's own sexual anxiety and guilt". He goes to explain as such: "Representa- tions of love challenge the government's role as moral compass, and the notion of love threatens the very existence of the

Islamic Republic, which established itself on war and violence and con- tinues to maintain itself by remembering and memorializing mistrust and hatred." (38). He concludes that "literary love provides an alternative, a powerful and subversive tool that simultaneously challenges and underscores the unyielding absur- dity of censorship." (ibid).

This book is a novel about the exasperating and occasionally risky state of the publishing industry in the country, which presents both writer and censor as fictional characters. The two protagonists, Dara and Sara, whose names are taken from characters in elementary school books, meet and fall in love while participating in a student-led political demonstration against the government. However, at a time when gender separation is forcibly imposed on society and ubiquitous patrols from the 'Campaign against Social Corruption' – another notably ironic and debatable title – arrest young couples who exhibit any degree of closeness and friendship, being in love and sustaining a romantic relationship in the Islamic Republic of Iran is very different from what happens in many other countries. Thus, the young couple use inventive means of communication and meeting despite their apprehensions. They exchange letters in books, meet in a hospital, and even go to a mosque. Gradually, the comic and occasionally tragic scenes their trysts produce begin to have an adverse effect on their love. MandaniPour explains the history of censorship in Iran as their love story develops, drawing on the centuries old and subtle metaphors and complex allegories used by poets like Rumi, Hafez, and Khayyam. However, censorship

was not legally implemented and largely practiced until the rise of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The 'Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance' and its agents may take weeks, months, or even years to react to a manuscript under this system. The response could be as simple as a yes or no, or it could include a full list of the chapters, dialogues, sentences, or even single words that are in question. In a country where even the slightest contact between a man and a woman could signal the beginning of a horrible sin and where illicit passion is punishable by imprisonment or even death, telling the most redemptive of human stories becomes the greatest literary challenge. This reminds us of Blanche's predicament in establishing her own version of narrative about her encounters with men in the past as opposed to Stanley's. She, too, has to pay the price for what has happened between her and the men in her life up to this point and justify the reasons which were categorically caused by elements beyond her control. She, too, loses control over the narrative of her own life at a certain point in the story which brings about her eventual downfall. Thus, we can see how in both the play and the novel, the apparatus of patriarchy operates in different yet inherently similar ways and succeeds at destroying Blanche and the protagonists of the existing novel in strikingly similar fashion.

It is not easy to have a relationship in contemporary Iran, and it might be even harder to recount the tale of that relationship. In the book, censorship takes many different forms, occasionally with strange outcomes. We learn that even naming one's children requires approval from the state bureaucracy; a fact that

refs to the ubiquitous presence of ideology and patriarchy within Iranian society where even the naming of the citizens is a matter of 'collective good' and must be controlled and approved by the government, which once again, traces the discussion back to Butler's concept of 'dominant ideologies' and their domineering role in determining the performative nature of individual gender and identity. In another case we see that the government hires a blind person with the help of numerous experts to screen movies for 'morally improper content'. The attempt to write a meaningful story reads like a journey through a house of mirrors in a society where regulations limit freedom of speech. Even in the translated version of the book as we read it today, the reader can sense the actual MandaniPour's enthusiasm for his work when his fictitious counterpart, that is Mr. Petrovich, crafts a few particularly scandalous situations and even has his characters discuss Shahriar MandaniPour's works. "MandaniPour's writing is exuberant, bonhomous, clever, profuse with puns and literary-political references; the reader unversed in contemporary Iranian fiction might easily think of Kundera … or of the Rushdie of *Midnight's Children*" (Wood 72).

Within the intricate web of relationships in the book, two compelling stories are woven together. The author's imaginary alter ego, Shahriar, has been fighting Mr. Petrovich, the all-powerful censor at the 'Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance', for years. He has now realized, as he approaches the age of fifty and grows weary of penning gloomy and cruel tales, that "the world around us has enough death and devastation and suffering" (*Censoring an Iranian Love*

Story 7). Instead, he decides to write a seductive love story that is situated in contemporary Iran. It might be his biggest test yet. Shahriar would be just as dangerous as his lovers if he freely wrote about Sara and Dara's interactions and desires. As a result, knowing that they will never be published, we read not only the scenarios that Shahriar has penned but also the sentences and words he has crossed out or simply imagined.

By warning and threatening the writer not to commit a crime by writing provocative and sexy scenes, the censor, Porfiry Petrovich, has gruesome yet realistic encounters with the writer and makes his job seem impossible. "In fact, at its best [the novel] becomes a kind of Kundera-like rumination on philosophy and politics, exploring the nervous interface between the public and the private in a totalitarian state, even as it playfully investigates the possibilities and limits of storytelling" (Kakutani 1). However, the writer attempts to find ways to avoid the censor's scissors and fool the censorship apparatus while using his literary expertise. "One of the great successes of this book is how thoroughly it persuades the reader that a novel about censorship could not help also being a novel about fiction-making" (Wood 72). In MandaniPour's book, Mr. Petrovich, the ministry censor debates with the author about specific words and phrases he wants taken out of the story out of concern that they might cause readers to become sexually aroused, harm Islamic values, endanger national security, or spark a revolution. Every offensive word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, or even entire page is underlined by him. At this point, Mr. Petrovich is seeking to persuade the author

to assassinate Dara and clear the way for himself, adding to the complications caused by his increasing love for Sara while editing the story.

The author strives for and develops new literary strategies to relay scenes of his story to the reader, just like the protagonists in his novel, who are motivated by love to come up with fresh schemes in order to meet one another. To direct his reader's mind, the author occasionally employs literary and figurative devices in his language. In order to avoid the looming death threat over both his story and himself as a writer, he displays censorship-defying ways by restricting his own story. "It is clear from the novel's outset that what seem like Calvinoesque intellectual literary games are, in an Iranian setting, played for far higher stakes: MandaniPour's narrator writes in an attempt to divert the course of history" (Messud 58).

At the conclusion of the book, the story's censor surprises the author by announcing that he has fallen in love with the imaginary Sara and that the author must use his imagination to eliminate his love rival, Dara. Ironic, hilarious, and surreal scenarios are produced through the author's encounters with Mr. Petrovich, as well as by his periodic appearance in the lives of characters. As noted by a critic, "MandaniPour wants his Western audience, to understand that in contemporary Iran, there is no boundary between realism and surrealism," (Messud 58).

4.2. Patriarchy and Censorship

In Iran, traditional patriarchal values and customs have been deeply ingrained in the culture for centuries, and these values continue to shape the country's society and politics today. Despite some progress in recent years in terms of women's rights and representation in government and the workforce, patriarchal attitudes and discrimination against women remain widespread in Iran. The regime in power bases its core values and identity on the teachings and traditions of Islamic as it is clearly stated in its full name: Islamic Republic of Iran. The religion of Islam, however, in itself does not promote patriarchy, but it can be used to justify it by interpreting religious texts and teachings in a way that supports the patriarchal system. In some Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, there are laws and cultural customs that discriminate against women and limit their rights and opportunities. However, it should be noted that the situation varies greatly from one country to another and that there are many Islamic countries where women have more rights and are more empowered.

What the novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* presents to us at first glance is the horrendous apparatus of this giant machine called censorship which is fully operating and through its operation, creates terror, hatred, deprivation, and loss. However, what the novel doesn't explicitly target is the patriarchal backdrop to all these events as a mother system which crafts these cultural

extensions through an appalling mechanism. Censorship and patriarchy are two separate yet related issues that intersect with gender roles. As discussed earlier, patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. Similarly, gender roles refer to the societal norms and expectations that dictate how men and women should behave and what roles they should occupy in society. In correspondence with these, there's the function of censorship that is the suppression or prohibition of any parts of social, personal, academic, political, artistic or even economic life in society that are considered religiously corrupt, morally obscene, politically unacceptable, or simply a threat to security. In patriarchal societies, censorship is often used to maintain the status quo and the power of men by suppressing the voices and perspectives of women and other marginalized groups. For example, censorship may be used to silence women who speak out against patriarchal practices or to prevent them from accessing information that could empower them. Additionally, censorship can be used to control the representation of women and other marginalized groups in the media, which can further entrench patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes. Censorship can also be used to control the way gender roles are portrayed in media, this way reinforcing the societal expectations of men and women and, therefore, can be used to prevent the dissemination of information about gender equality and women's rights, thus limiting the ability of individuals to challenge patriarchal norms and gender roles. Overall censorship and patriarchy can work together to

keep power and privilege in the hands of men, while limiting the rights and opportunities of women and other marginalized groups.

As discussed in previous chapters, Judith Butler as a feminist philosopher and gender theorist whose work has had a significant impact on the study of censorship and gender, is best known for her theory of gender performativity, which argues that gender is not an inherent characteristic of an individual, but rather a set of societal norms and expectations that are performed and reinforced through daily actions and interactions. According to Butler, censorship plays a crucial role in shaping and enforcing gender norms and expectations. She argues that censorship can be used to silence and marginalize those who do not conform to societal norms and expectations in general and of gender in particular. For instance, censorship can be used to prohibit the publication of literature that portrays alternative gender identities or to limit the representation of women in the media. This way censorship can be used to maintain the binary gender system and to prevent the questioning of gender norms. Butler also argues that censorship can be used to control the way gender is represented in media, reinforcing patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes about gender. For example, censorship can be used to prohibit the depiction of women in positions of power or to limit the representation of women in the media. Butler's theories highlight the ways in which censorship and gender are interconnected and how censorship can be used to maintain the patriarchal and binary gender system, by silencing and marginalizing those who challenge societal norms and expectations of gender.

Feminist movements and activists have long fought against censorship, recognizing it as a tool used to silence and marginalize their voices and perspectives. They call for freedom of expression, information and access to knowledge, as well as the representation of diverse women's perspectives in the media, in order to break the patriarchal mold and promote the rights of women. In other words, censorship and feminism are interconnected in the sense that censorship can be used to maintain the patriarchal system and limit the rights and opportunities of women, while feminism is fighting against censorship to promote the rights of women and to challenge patriarchal norms and practices.

*Censoring an Iranian Love Story'*s portrayal of censorship in the context of gender and love aligns with the theories of Judith Butler, particularly her concept of gender performativity. In the novel, censorship is used as a tool to shape and enforce traditional gender roles and societal expectations. The protagonist, Dara, struggles with the all sorts of obstacles on the way of his love story with Sara, as their relationship is not in line with the traditional societal expectation imposed by the Iranian government. The characters in the novel are forced to conform to societal norms and expectations of gender and love, which often lead to their repression and marginalization. The censorship in the novel also serves to reinforce patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes about art, creativity, gender and love. The novel also illustrates the way censorship can be used to control the representation of love and relationships in the media, reinforcing patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes about gender.

What was discussed above in analyzing *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* should serve only to reflect further on our prior knowledge of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* in demonstrating how patriarchy travels across time and place and leave their impact on individuals regardless of their nationality and gender and the age in which they are living. Characters such as Blanche and Sara suffer equally from what can easily be labeled as societal expectations of femininity and the boundaries they exert on human relationships. What Stanley exemplifies in *A Streetcar Named Desire* can be closely aligned with the role and descriptions of Mr. Petrovich in that they both represent the voice of power and authority, but in the long run, we see how they both become actual victims of their own toxic masculinity traits. In the case of Mr. Petrovich, he literally becomes a figure of ridicule at the hand of his own censoring machine and falls into the same trap that he has envisaged for Shahriar, Dara and Sara by falling in love with his own literary creation. And perhaps to conclude we can borrow the words of Atwood where he comments on the nature of censorship in the Islamic Republic of Iran and adds "censorship affects the entire spectrum of citizenship and not just a society's artists. Accordingly, censorship is not a singular event but rather a "lifelong experience" that "is intertwined in one's mode of thinking when one grows under censorship." (41), an argument which further highlights our earlier discussions of Butler's theories of gender performativity in its reference to the inherent and interwoven functions of patriarchy in Iranian society.

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, I tried to analyze the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams in the light of the performativity theories of Judith Butler and to compare it briefly with the Iranian novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* by Shahriar MandaniPour in order to demonstrate the mechanisms of patriarchy as the dominant ideology in both texts and the way in which it operates and also to bring out the similarities of their functions in different parts of the world at different times, that is, in two different centuries.

As discussed earlier, *A Streetcar Named Desire* explores the patriarchal societal norms and traditional gender roles of the 1940s in America. The play critiques the dominant cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity and how these expectations shape the lives of its characters. The character Stanley is depicted as a stereotypical male figure who dominates his wife, Stella, and exerts control over other characters in his life including Blanche and Mitch. On the other

hand, Blanche, the female protagonist, is portrayed as challenging in her fragility and defies the patriarchal ideal of dependent, motherly-figure femininity. The play sheds light on the oppressive nature of patriarchal society and the negative effects it has on both men and women. As a play that is regarded as one of the classics of 20th century American literature, it is known for its exploration of themes such as sexuality, desire, class, and gender roles. The character of Stanley is seen as representing traditional masculine ideals, while Blanche represents a fading southern belle who is struggling to hold on to her traditional values in a rapidly changing world. The play's depiction of the clash between these two opposing characters has made it a seminal work in the study of gender and sexuality in literature. The play explores traditional gender roles and societal expectations of masculinity and femininity. It criticises these norms by showing the limitations they impose on characters and the negative effects they have on both men and women. Stanley is portrayed as the epitome of traditional masculine ideals, with his rough exterior, physical strength, and assertiveness. On the other hand, Blanche is portrayed as the embodiment of traditional femininity, with her fragility and emotional instability. The play also shows the ways in which those ideals of masculinity can be oppressive, as seen in Stanley's treatment of Stella and Blanche.

Blanche DuBois can be seen as a classic victim of the patriarchal system. She is depicted as a fragile, disillusioned woman who has been scarred by the traumas of her past and is struggling to find a place in a world dominated by men.

Throughout the play, Blanche is subjected to sexual harassment, degradation, and abuse at the hands of Stanley and other male characters. Her delicate mental state is also a result of the oppressive societal expectations placed on women during the time period. These experiences serve to illustrate the ways in which the patriarchal system can harm women and strip them of agency and power. Blanche's character serves as a critique of the patriarchal norms and the limitations they place on women's lives. Stanley, on the other hand, can be seen as a representation of toxic masculinity. He is depicted as a rough, physically imposing man who exerts control and dominance over those around him, particularly his wife Stella. Stanley's behaviour is characterized by aggression, anger, and a lack of emotional intelligence, traits commonly associated with toxic masculinity. He is also portrayed as being sexually promiscuous and aggressive, as we saw in the rape scene, further emphasizing the toxic elements of his masculinity.

By portraying Stanley as a toxic and ultimately self-destructive figure, the play serves as a warning about the dangers of traditional masculine ideals gone wrong. Stanley can be seen as a victim of the patriarchal system and toxic masculinity in the play. While he embodies many of the traits associated with toxic masculinity, the play also suggests that these traits have been imposed on him by societal expectations of what it means to be a man. The play shows the ways in which these expectations have limited Stanley's emotional range and led to destructive behaviour, mainly towards the women in his life. In this sense,

Stanley can be seen as a victim of the patriarchal system and the toxic masculinity it promotes, as his actions and behaviour are a direct result of the performative nature of gender roles clichés placed on him as a man. The play serves to illustrate the negative effects of toxic masculinity not only on those around Stanley but also on Stanley himself, as it might lead to his eventual downfall.

A Streetcar Named Desire has been widely recognized as a classic of American play in which themes of sexuality, desire, class, and gender continue to resonate with audiences. The play's enduring popularity and cultural impact can be attributed to its powerful writing, complex characters, and exploration of timeless themes that remain relevant to audiences today. Overall, *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been received as a landmark work in American literature and continues to be widely regarded as one of the great American classics of the 20th century. Making a comparison between this play and the novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* is an attempt to close the gap between what is regarded as a 'world classic' and 'canonical literature' on the one hand and what might be perceived as the 'diaspora literature' of a 'Middle-Eastern author' who is not even writing in his own language or in his own country. Yet, despite all these wide gaps, what brings these two texts close to each other is the undeniable role of ideology, in this specific case, patriarchy and its implications, on the literary productions of two artists/authors who have lived in two different times, in two different continents and who speak two different languages and come from two entirely diverse cultural and linguistic background. This might be only one of the

many wonders of literature that make the world look like a smaller place where ideas travel far and beyond across time and place and are disseminated in literary circles that are drastically different from their place of origin.

It is crucially important for the readers of the novel *Censoring an Iranian Love Story* to fully understand and appreciate the significance of the story's backdrop as an integral part of the narrative. In the case of this book, the author, the readers and the characters, all alike, are dealing with a case of long-standing and systemic gender apartheid that goes way beyond the individual cases of violence against women or malpractice of masculinity. It is the author's attempt, and probably wish too, to make us wary of what patriarchy is capable of doing and how far it can go in its wide scope of influence and practice. In such a society, patriarchal values and norms are woven into the fabric of the culture and are deeply ingrained in social and political structures. They are often seen as one of the root causes of gender apartheid, as they perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and practices against women and reinforce their subordinate status in society. This can make it difficult to (challenge and) change the existing power dynamics, and to promote gender equality. Some of these challenges are "logistical, but others [are] reflective of the failure of words to communicate the kind of collective trauma that censorship, [as one of the most influential tools of patriarchy] has inflicted on Iranian society." (Atwood 41). This might be the linking point in helping us understand the similarity in the nature and function of ideologies across temporal and geographical borders in their wide range of

practices which can include some of the most varied topics such as subjugation of women, domestic violence, rape, self-censorship, fear and anxiety generated by the regime's system of thought-control, formation of toxic masculinity and last but not the least, personal and collective trauma; all the attributes that were analyzed in the context of the two works discussed here and were at work to bring the protagonists to their knees in the face of this ginormous apparatus called patriarchy.

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