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EVOCATION OF THE *OLD SOUTH* IN FILM ADAPTATIONS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: THE SPACE AS A NARRATIVE ELEMENT

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ABSTRACT:

The south of the United States plays a decisive role in the literary work of the American playwright Tennessee Williams. This universe, which is centered on the main city of Louisiana, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta, has an important cinematographic representation thanks to the adaptations of the main works of the writer, carried out between 1950 and 1968. Thus, the southern space has a notable prominence in these films, and in some cases it acquires the nature of character, due to its relevant narrative weight and the constant evocation that characters make of it. With the objectives of emphasizing the Old South as poetic and romantic in the classic American cinema, reflecting on the relationship of Williams with his place of origin, and approaching the representation of the southern universe in its main film adaptations, this paper intends to show how the South influences the construction of the themes and characters of the playwright. In this sense, films like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Baby Doll*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* or *Sweet Bird of Youth*, among other prominent movies, share the same scope despite carried out in different locations of southern United States. From these considerations, this paper aims to reflect on how the south inheriting the Old South stands as a narrative element that determines the dramatic evolution in the film adaptations of Tennessee Williams.

KEY WORDS: Narrative space – Audiovisual narrative – *Old South* – Film adaptations – Tennessee Williams – Hollywood – Melodrama

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LA EVOCACIÓN DEL *OLD SOUTH* EN LAS ADAPTACIONES CINEMATOGRAFICAS DE TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: EL ESPACIO COMO ELEMENTO NARRATIVO

RESUMEN:

El sur de Estados Unidos tiene un papel determinante en la obra literaria del dramaturgo norteamericano Tennessee Williams. Este universo, que está centrado en la principal ciudad de Louisiana, Nueva Orleans, y en la región del Delta del Mississippi, cuenta con una importante representación cinematográfica gracias a las adaptaciones de las principales obras del escritor, realizadas entre 1950 y 1968. Así, el espacio sureño tiene un notable protagonismo en estas películas, y en algunos casos adquiere el carácter de personaje, debido a su relevante peso narrativo y a la constante evocación que los seres de ficción hacen de él. Con los objetivos de poner en valor el *Old South* como espacio poético y romántico en el cine americano clásico, reflexionar sobre la relación de Williams con su lugar de origen, y realizar una aproximación a la representación del universo sureño en sus principales adaptaciones cinematográficas, se intenta reflejar cómo el sur influye en la construcción de los temas y personajes del dramaturgo. En este sentido, películas como *Un tranvía llamado deseo*, *Baby Doll*, *La gata sobre el tejado de zinc*, *De repente... el último verano* o *Dulce pájaro de juventud*, entre otras destacadas, comparten un mismo ámbito a pesar de desarrollarse en diferentes lugares meridionales de Estados Unidos. Desde estas consideraciones, este trabajo pretende reflexionar sobre cómo el sur heredero del *Old South* se erige como un elemento narrativo que determina la evolución dramática de las adaptaciones cinematográficas de Tennessee Williams.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Espacio narrativo – Narrativa audiovisual – *Old South* – Adaptaciones cinematográficas – Tennessee Williams – Hollywood – Melodrama.

1. INTRODUCTION

Space is a first-class informant in a literary or film work because it provides a wealth of information about the characters, the action and the location of the story. The authors who have a marked universe usually use it or construct it with a clear narrative purpose, as it happens in the melodramas of Douglas Sirk, the films of Federico Fellini, or, at present, in the films of Woody Allen, Tim Burton or Pedro Almodóvar, among others. In spite of their disparity, these filmmakers stand out for a careful treatment of the space, because it participates actively in the creation and the evolution of the characters; the topics; or the cinematographic genre in which a film is framed. Thus, this narrative element "gives us the basic indications to understand the staged world" (Casetti and di Chio, 2007, p. 113), since *what* and *who* need a *where* to be able to develop fully. In this context, the dramatic and cinematographic production of the American writer Tennessee Williams (Columbus,

Mississippi, 1911-New York, 1983) is very interesting because of the role that the South inheriting the *Old South* plays in the presence of characters of great psychological wealth.

The dichotomy between the North and South of the United States has traditionally been one of the sources of inspiration for the American literature and, consequently, for Hollywood cinema since the silent stage, because of its social, cultural, political and economic complexity. The model of society based on white lords and black slaves, fertile plantations, aristocratic feasts, and rooted concepts of honor, tradition, family and culture, gave way to a way of life, idyllic to some and very unfair to others, which fell into decay after the Civil War (1861-1865):

What had really happened here, indeed, was that the gentlemanly idea, driven from England by Cromwell, had taken refuge in the South and fashioned for itself to world to its heart's desire: a world singularly polished and mellow and posed, wholly dominated by ideals of honor and chivalry and noblesse. (Cash, 1991, p. Xix

Life in the so-called *Old South* was not without controversy, mainly because of the strong opposition of the Confederate States of America - South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North, Tennessee, Missouri, and Kentucky- to abolish slavery. Nevertheless, the European cultural tradition, the supremacy of the cited values to the detriment of the economy, or the aesthetics of its cotton fields and cities, have been the signs of identity that many southern authors decided to recover and highlight in their works. For this reason, and despite the scourge of slavery, the evocation of the *Old South* in the arts is often also linked to a world of culture and wealth, whose values were lost after the war. Although Tennessee Williams was born almost fifty years after the war, he received a southern education in tradition and values, as his parents and grandparents had. However, his critical spirit led him to show in his works the decline in which the South was immersed, as well as the xenophobia, homophobia, or chieftainship present in the twentieth century. In this sense, the origin of the playwright, his idealization of the years of childhood spent in Mississippi with his maternal family, and his personal vision of this space determined the constant presence of the southern parts of his country in his pages. In addition, as did other prominent contemporary Southern authors, such as William Faulkner or Carson McCullers (González Groba, 2015), his vital, personal, and emotional bond with the South in which he was born, grew up, was educated and later took refuge was reflected in its output:

Since the end of the War Between the States many southern writers have engaged in a love-hate relationship with the native region, from which they drew inspiration [...] but two majors authors who never denied their southernness were William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. No writer of this century more than Williams, who was strongly influenced by his Mississippi youth and his many years of residence in New Orleans and Key West, has been markedly southern in his choice of settings, characters, plots, and themes. Mention of his name evokes for readers and playgoers all over the world a vivid image of the Deep South. No

influence, other than his family and his sexual orientation, had so much influence on shaping the dramatist's work as the South that produced him. (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, p. X)

In most cases, it is the characters of Williams who introduce the space, or their mental construction of it, through their memories or references of various kinds over the South. Moreover, in its texts, the space takes on such a scope that it can even play a leading role in the story. This aspect "refers to the weight that the element assumes in the narrative, that is to say, the amount of history that rests on its back, to the extent that it stands as bearer of events and transformations," because "The greater the weight, the more the existing one acts as a 'character' rather than as an 'environment' "(Casetti and di Chio, 2007, p. This is the case of New Orleans, a city closely tied to Williams' experiences, as it influences fictional beings and plays a significant role in arguments. However, it is necessary to take into account that although "it is possible to speak of cities as characters, in most cases this will be the result of a constant referentiality and an exalted praise on the part of the protagonists, rather than a true narrative treatment of the City "(García García, 2011, p.150). In this sense, it is interesting to begin an approach to the portrait that the filmic adaptations of Williams make of the South of the United States and, besides, of a city as charismatic as New Orleans, to verify the weight that this space occupies in each history:

Tennessee Williams was constantly renewing his love-affair with the New Orleans where he was to attest to the end of his life, he wrote more than fifty percent of his best work. The city had provided him with inspiration and material, a debt he repaid more than amply by making his vision of New Orleans a permanent part of the literary map of American. (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, p. 93)

Unlike other medium-sized North American cities, which are often culturally and touristically eclipsed by cities as dynamic as New York or San Francisco, "the cultural identity of New Orleans has traditionally had a great impact worldwide" (García García , 2011, p.162). In this respect, Williams' texts and film adaptations have contributed significantly to this. In short, it can be said that, in the literary output of the southern playwright, there is a close link between space and characters, since it is the lofty, claustrophobic and decadent south where his tormented beings of fiction are.

2. Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to bring to light and reflect on how the southern United States influences the construction of the characters of Tennessee Williams, in particular, those of his major film adaptations. Thus, it tries to establish a relationship between the space as a narrative element and the complex beings of Williams, who, to a great extent, are determined by the evocation of their lost southern past and the decay of their present. In this way, the following specific objectives are established:

1. Value the evocation of the *Old South* as the poetic and romantic space of the United States in the narrations of classic American cinema.

2. Reflect on Tennessee Williams' connection to the place where he was born and educated, and his critical eye toward an already extinct world.

3. Approach the representation of the southern inheriting the *Old South* in the major film versions of Williams, and delve into how this space determines the psychology of his tormented characters.

3. METHODS

The study of space in the literary work of Tennessee Williams helps to understand the development of the plots and the creation of the characters who participate in them. This idea is reinforced in their cinematographic adaptations, because the controversial subjects they dealt with and the complex beings of fiction that they carried out caused a greater impact in the Hollywood of the fifties and sixties than in Broadway, because the cinema did not have the stylistic freedom of the New York scene, being dominated by the Hays Code since its introduction in 1934 (Durán Manso, 2016). Despite this, the universe of Williams made it possible a more intimate and psychological cinema that gradually broke down the iron censorship guidelines, as various producers and filmmakers, including Elia Kazan and Richard Brooks, committed themselves to the necessary thematic freedom in Hollywood. For this reason, Williams' deep, complex and daring works were very interesting to the new course the world's leading film industry began to take after World War II (Barton Palmer and Bray, 2009). Based on this, the hypothesis that arises is how the spaces strongly rooted in the South inheriting the *Old South* condition the evolution of the characters of the southern writer, focusing on those of his film versions made from 1950 to 1968, a period when the classic American cinema and traditional melodrama evolved towards more realism.

For the development of this paper, a methodology based on a literary and film analysis of Williams' film adaptations, centered on the construction of spaces, has been used. Since they are melodramas, the psychology of the characters has an important influence on the action, and the space where they are located or where they are immersed has a special impact on their character and evolution. Thus, in the universe of Williams, there is a close link between the origin, personality, circumstances and destiny of his fictional beings, with the southern space where their lives develop. The relation with the characters, the action and the time define the cinematographic space, and this is essential in the relation that the author and the viewer establish with the history, and more concretely between the public and their (literal) orientation in the story "(Rodríguez Terceño, 2014, p.40). In short, this existing is a fundamental thread in the narrative, since, among other things, it indicates the emotional states of the characters, the world in which they are immersed, and their dramatic evolution; something elementary in Williams' films. On the other hand, space has a series of characteristics that determine it: the type, the mode, the purpose, the relation and the location, that is, *what, how, with what, with whom, and where*, respectively. They all influence the definition of space as an environment, but the location "allows anchoring it to geographic and temporal coordinates, with the sociocultural conditions connoted by that anchoring" (Nieto

Ferrando et al., 2015, p.588). This is a key concept that sets his stamp of author (Rodríguez Terceño, 2014).

On the other hand, the representation of the evocation of the *Old South* is linked to a specific time that, at the same time, gives a sense to the history that is developed. Thus, it is necessary to state that "no space is given without a relative time to guide the exploration, just as, at the same time, no time is given without a space to act as its support" (Casetti and di Chio, 2007, P 133). In the literary output of Williams, the South inheriting the *Old South* is influenced by the time before the Civil War, but in most cases it is represented in present tense, that is to say, in the period between the decade of the thirties and that of the sixties. This stage, which reflects the decline of the southern world a century after the war, is interesting because it also takes in the internal conflict and the decline of many of the author's characters, establishing a parallelism between the two existing. This way, it is observed that "when we compose the space, we do more than 'decorate' the place where the action is going to take place" (Díez Puertas, 2006, p. Normally, in the works of Williams, the reference space prevails, since it is determined by its place name. For this reason, the dialogues speak of New Orleans, Memphis, Mississippi, Louisiana or the Gulf of Mexico, although there is also a tendency to speak of the south as a broad universe that brings together the previous ones. In this respect, it is appropriate to point out that "the reference space contributes to a realistic effect, but also allows the viewer to identify it clearly" (Niето Ferrando et al., 2015, p.594). Undoubtedly, the mention of the different spaces within the narrative allows us to qualify the position of fictional beings within that space - both physical and psychological - and, in addition, better locate the audience in front of the story. In short, the construction of the space helps "the viewers to locate themselves in the film, to have the feeling of being in the place where the action takes place, to read the space correctly and understand the geography of the film" (Rodríguez Terceño, 2014, p.42).

The major southern spaces of the United States that articulate this work are the evocation of the lost south, New Orleans, the southern plantations, the small southern cities and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. So happens with *The Glass Menagerie* (Irving Rapper, 1950) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951), in the first case; again *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1959), and *This Property Is Condemned* (Sydney Pollack, 1966), in the second; *Baby Doll* (Elia Kazan, 1956) and *The Cat on the Tin Roof* (Richard Brooks, 1958), in the third; *The Fugitive Kind* (Sidney Lumet, 1960), *Summer and Smoke* (Peter Glenville, 1961), and again, *This Property Is Condemned*, in the fourth place; and finally, *The Rose Tattoo* (Daniel Mann, 1955) and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (Richard Brooks, 1962). It is a total of ten films based on Williams' texts, of the thirteen that were filmed from 1950 to 1968, since *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone* (José Quintero, 1961) was set in Rome, *The Night of the Iguana* (John Huston, 1964) took place on the Mexican Pacific coast, and *Boom* (Joseph Losey, 1968) took place in Sardinia, Italy. Also, these titles had a great success in the fifties and sixties by their thematic plot in the Hollywood after World War the fight against the Hays Code, and the presentation of characters who broke, in many cases, with the Current models of

masculinity and femininity. This selection is a representative sample of Williams' filmography and, therefore, is the one that is analyzed in the present study according to the proposed spatial scheme. The viewing of these films allows us to conceive space as "a privileged and indispensable place to understand the whole discourse" (Cobo Durán, 2014, p 123).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 The *Old South* in classic American cinema

In the collective imagination, the *Old South* is closely linked to the stories of American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to cinema, where the classic Hollywood melodrama had a southern slope of remarkable development. Perhaps because of this, the large screen has transmitted a makeup, and even a sweetened image of the reality of the deep south during the pre-Civil War era, because in the films there was prevalence of the sentimental and dramatic aspect of the relationships between the characters, and not the social, due to the characteristics of the genre itself. For this reason, since the years of silent films, the films set in this period, which were developed in states ranging from Georgia to Texas, were noted for the high socioeconomic status of the protagonists, who had fertile plantations, a lifestyle where culture, religiosity and aesthetic elegance played a major role, as was the case in Europe; and a cordial relationship with the slaves, which did not place too much emphasis on the prevailing racial inequality. This pattern manifested itself especially in the film *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), considered the paradigm of southern melodrama:

Its social pattern was manorial, its civilization that of the Cavalier, its ruling class an aristocracy coextensive with the planter group [...], and in every case descended from the old gentilefolk who for many centuries had made up the ruling classes of Europe. They dwelt in large and stately mansions, preferably white and with columns and Grecian entablature. Their estates were feudal baronies, their slaves quite too numerous to be counted, and their social life the thing of Old World splendor and delicacy. (Cash, 1991, p. Xix)

Also, these films had a certain epic nature when they focused on the avatars of the Civil War, which ended in 1865 after "four years of fighting for the preservation of their world and their heritage" (Cash, 1991, p.), which were devastating to the south. Although classical cinema often shows the pride of the defeated southern society and a rapid capacity to overcome the tragedy, the complexity of the conflict and its economic, political and social consequences in the southern states have not been addressed until more recent films. The south that replaced the mythical *Old South* was characterized by exaltation of the values that had identified its world, to avoid losing its roots before an industrialized and prosperous north that it considered to be its enemy. However, its economy, being eminently agricultural, was diminished, extreme conservatism appeared that intensified racism after the liberation of the slaves, and the corruption at local level became the dominant political standard. Classic cinema did not begin to show this latent reality until the 1950s, when the successful works of Tennessee Williams moved from Broadway to bet on themes, characters and spaces closer to the everyday life of the viewers, who were then

more seduced by the recent arrival of television to their homes (Durán Manso, 2016). This way, the artistic question was united to the economic one in the way started by the industry towards thematic freedom.

Hollywood's interest in the *Old South* and the Civil War originated in silent movies. In this period, films were released that approached the south from different perspectives, like the essential one *The Birth of A Nation* (David W. Griffith, 1915); comedies such as *The General* (Buster Keaton and Clyde Bruckman, 1926) or *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (Buster Keaton and Charles Reisner, 1928), set in present-day Mississippi; or *The Wind* (Victor Sjöström, 1928), focused on Virginia and Kansas. Nevertheless, this space had a greater development in the sonorous melodramas of classic cinema (1927-1972), where its treatment evolved according to Hollywood and the own genre. Thus, from the splendor of the Southern past within the framework of the war, as in *Jezebel* (William Wyler, 1938) and *Gone With the Wind* - developed in the two major cities of the South, New Orleans and Atlanta respectively- , the industry then turned to a more critical view of the current south, as it did with *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949) and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Nevertheless, in these years there were also outstanding melodramas focused on different historical stages of the south, like *The Little Foxes* (William Wyler, 1951) -based on the homonymous novel of Lillian Hellman-, *Saratoga Trunk* (Sam Wood, 1945), or *Flamingo Road* (Michael Curtiz, 1949), starring, in this order, three of the most outstanding actresses of the genre: Bette Davis, Ingrid Bergman and Joan Crawford. The success of this trend continued in the following decade with the premieres of the musical *Show Boat* (George Sidney, 1951) and the melodramas that still followed the wake of *Gone with The Wind*, such as *Raintree* (County, Edward Dmytryk, 1957) or *Band of Angels* (Raoul Walsh, 1957), who, again, had New Orleans as their main space.

In addition, the racial question played an important role because of the cruel discrimination suffered by the black population living in the South, a century after the war. Following precedent of *Pinky*, titles set in the southern states proliferated, questioning the inequality between whites and blacks and denouncing current racism, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962) -based on the novel of the same name by Harper Lee, or the incisive *In the Heat of the Night* (Noman Jewison, 1967). In addition, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), the first film to clearly address interracial relationships -prohibited by the Hays Code- and the familiar dilemma they assumed, was also highlighted. In this sense, the cinema of these years decided to show the most negative, or perhaps realistic, side of the Southern universe and also the movements of society against racism:

The black and white activists who fought for civil rights in the 1950s and 60s made racial integration possible by building on the work of the abolitionists who, in the previous century, had made possible the freedom of blacks that had once been unthinkable. (González Groba, 2015, p.70)

On the other hand, the widespread acceptance, both critical and public, of the playwright's films allowed Hollywood to look at the literary successes of other contemporary American authors. For that reason, in these years the works of William Inge, like *Picnic* (Joshua Logan, 1955) and *Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961);

of Edna Ferber, such as *Giant* (George Stevens, 1956); or William Faulkner, such as *The Long, Hot Summer* (Martin Ritt, 1958); all set in the south, were played in the large screen. This way, melodramas with a strong sexual charge and Southern origin, such as those of Williams, had a prominent place in the American cinema of the fifties and sixties, and reached a remarkable repercussion outside their borders. Other films developed in the South that stood out for their sexual, violent, and even tragic nature like *Walk on the Wild Side* (Edward Dmytryk, 1962), *The Chase* (Arthur Penn, 1966) and *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (John Huston, 1967) -based on the works of Nelson Algren, Lillian Hellman and Carson McCullers, respectively-, where lesbianism, social corruption and male homosexuality were the protagonists thanks to the decisive weakening experienced by the Hays Code (Durán Manso, 2016).

4.2 Tennessee Williams and the *Old South*

Tennessee Williams' close relationship with the southern United States dates back to his childhood. From his hometown, Columbus, he moved with his family to other southern locations such as Nashville, Tennessee; Canton, Mississippi; and, finally, Clarksdale, also in Mississippi. There he settled with his mother, Edwina, and his sister, Rose, who was only fourteen months older than he, in the home of his maternal grandparents, due to the work situation of his father, Cornelius, who was continually traveling. His childhood was spent in the rectory of his grandfather, Reverend Dakin, in a southern environment where tradition, religion, social patterns and cultural life still had a major role:

My first eight years in Mississippi were the most joyful and innocent of my life thanks to the beneficial home life provided to us by my beloved grandparents, the Dakin, with whom we lived, and the silly semi-imaginary world in which we moved with my sister Rose and Ozzie, our beautiful black nanny, a world apart and almost invisible to others, except for our little cabalistic circle of three. That world, that enchanted time, ended with the abrupt transfer of our family to San Luis. (Williams, 2008, p.31)

His stay in this city of Missouri, where his progenitor finally settled down, was very difficult for the future writer, who considered Clarksdale to be his home. In San Luis he knew the accused social differences and the poor working conditions of the people, and this reality was a collision with the sweetened conception he had of life. At first, the Williams lived in a pension that was in the antipodes of the house of Dakin, very spacious and with a garden, and after several changes, they settled down in a small apartment that later served to him as the location of its first great work, *The Glass Menagerie*. Although this move was an economic improvement, the family did not enjoy the status it had in Mississippi, and this especially bothered Edwina. The experience in St. Louis affected Williams' health and the development of his introverted character, for "to him Clarksdale, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, was the one spot on earth where the memories of his early years were stored away until the end of his mortal days "(Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, 21). Therefore, after the birth of his younger brother, Dakin, in 1920, he returned to his grandparents' house to spend a season. During this time, which finally lasted a year, he regained his vitality, developed his imagination and found a multitude of picturesque spaces and people that he

would later include in his literary work. Upon his return, Rose traveled to Clarksdale to enjoy a rest similar to his, so he had to confront in solitude the reality that made him unhappy. His refuge was reading and writing, and when he was twelve, his mother gave him a second-hand typewriter, where he could express his fears and dreams in his first poems and stories. Undoubtedly, his bitter existence in St. Louis had an impact on the construction of his idyllic image of the deep south.

The relationship with his grandfather Dakin was essential for Tennessee to approach the people of the south, their way of looking at life, their economy, and, ultimately, a world that stuck to their personality eve before the Civil War. During this period in Clarksdale, he met many people who would inspire him to define his characters, as can be seen in the number of names, surnames and physical features of neighbors in the area that are present in his texts:

Through his grandfather young Tom met several Clarksdale families as well as people throughout Coahoma and neighboring counties, including the Wingfields (among them "a lady named Laura Young", who had prisms hanging between two rooms that, recalled in 1945, "became a Play", obviously a reference to *The Glass Menagerie*); The Venables; The Cutrers (one of whom was named Blanche, another Stella, and a young man who married Cutrer was drowned in nearby Moon Lake). The Bobo family in nearby Lyon provided [...] the nickname of one prominent local woman, Baby Doll, supplied the name of a play and one of its main characters. One of Tom's schoolmates was something of a bully named Brick Gotcher, who, along with another young man who broke his leg one night jumping over the elk statue at the Elks Hall, provided elements for the character of Brick Pollit in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, pp. 41-42)

This way, it is verified that a good part of the fictional beings of the works of Williams have their origin in his southern surroundings, like the construction of the spaces, since the majority correspond to the Mississippi Delta. In addition to these clear allusions to Clarksdale, the second space that decisively influenced the playwright was New Orleans. After graduating from Washington University in St. Louis, he left home, and in December 1938 he settled down in the French Quarter, in the heart of the city, where he discovered a world totally opposed to the isolation he suffered in Missouri. This city became the main influence and inspiration in his personal and professional development, when he came in contact with the bohemians who lived there, and liberated at an artistic, social and sexual level, far from the strict Puritanism in which he had been educated. Here he was surrounded by a cultural elite that allowed him to cement, strengthen and project his career, for the city was also frequented by such well-known writers as William Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis or John Steinbeck, among many others. He was also captivated by its heterogeneous, open and multicultural character, since the same space brought together whites, blacks, immigrants, workers, entrepreneurs, poor, rich and artists, from actors to painters or jazz musicians:

The shabby but genteel and romantic old French Quarter, very little affected then by progress and modernization, had become by the 1920s a gathering

place for writers and artists, a romantic hideaway in which to escape what problems one might face. Rents were low, excellent food was inexpensive - especially seafood, which Tom relished- and an aspiring writer could meet and commune with others of a similar bent. (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, p.60)

This way, the region of Mississippi Delta and New Orleans are his spaces of reference and, therefore, those that appear most in his literary and, in extension, film output. There are many characters who talk about their Southern past, for better or for worse; make continuous direct or indirect references to the aforementioned city of Louisiana, which tend to be positive; or reflect on the southern society. Thus, the fictional beings themselves bring much information to the readers or viewers about the space where the stories in which they are immersed develop. On the other hand, the traditional family has an important weight, but Williams usually presents it in an unstructured way by the influence of his own. This gives a great complexity to the characters, who are inspired by relatives or people from his direct environment, and respond to a typology composed by ladies on edge, tormented young people, integrated into life, dominant parents, and fugitives and souls adrift (Durán Manso, 2011). Although these categories complement each other, the conservatism of fictional beings collides with the anxieties of freedom of others, and space is decisive for the development of the conflict. In this context, the films of the playwright made a new contribution to the evolution of the thematic treatment of the South inheriting the *Old South*, by showing aspects of the present of this universe, such as the decadence of the social elite, racism, intolerance or the Ethnic nature of the Delta, which was inhabited by descendants of British settlers and European, African-American and Spanish-American immigrants. In the film representation of the universe of Williams, "only adequate research and proper documentation are manifested as valid activities for the exact or more approximate configuration to the recovery of real historical scenarios and settings" (Cabezuelo Lorenzo et al., 2013, p 8).

4.3 The film representation of the *Old South* in Williams

4.3.1. The evocation of the lost south

Life in the extensive cotton plantations of the southern United States is one of the hallmarks of the *Old South*. Tennessee Williams valued some aspects of this endangered world, such as pride of race, respect for the past or cultural enrichment, over and above the main value of Northern society: economic benefit. For this reason, he understood very well the native people of the South, and managed to represent this way of life in the nostalgic evocations of the two main southern ladies of his dramatic output: Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois (Durán Manso, 2011). Both are exiled in St. Louis and New Orleans, respectively, and from there they continually evoke the south where they grew up and were respected by their surnames. For them, it is an arcadic space because of the strong emotional component implicit in them: the years of childhood and youth, social success, love or beauty. Thus, idealism is one of the main features that Williams uses in the

construction of the lost southern space.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda lives in a dilapidated apartment in St. Louis, which only reminds her of the idyllic life she had as a maid in Blue Mountain, her family's plantation. As she is unable to adapt to her new life, and detests the city in which she resides, she behaves as if she were still in the south. Therefore, she tries to instill in her children, Tom and Laura, the importance of having good manners and speaking correctly, as she had been taught. This is perceived in the way in which she eats and behaves at table, since around it were articulated a good part of the select social acts in which she participated as a young woman:

Amanda organizes family dinners according to a protocol not for the simple satisfaction of a natural need, but for manners and courtesy to differentiate us from mere animals and transform food into the source of almost artistic delight. (Torres Zúñiga, 2013, p.160)

With this kind of details, she intends to transmit and perpetuate the exquisite education she received - and that in her mind she associates with the southern world - but this desire collides with the apathy of her offspring. Amanda only seems happy when talking about Blue Mountain, and this is reflected especially when she remembers the party where she was entertained by seventeen suitors. In the film, this scene has a special meaning as far as space is concerned because it takes place in a typical house with white columns; The protagonist wears a white dress and a hairstyle similar to those of the guests of party of *Jezebel* - one of the films that best represents the era of Southern splendor aesthetically - and during the dance, the orchestra plays the waltz of Johann Strauss II *Rosas del Sur*, no doubt, a nod to her southern youth. The evocation of this space appears associated with the fame of the parties of society and to the success of love, and the clarity of the illumination manages to communicate the joy of the protagonist. This scene contrasts sharply with the gloomy light and small dimensions of St. Louis's apartment, reflecting Mrs Wingfield's frustration and parallels with Williams' mother:

In this dramatic piece, the most autobiographical of all his literary output, he created a character identical to his mother: a woman of southern origin, elegant, educated, strict, protective, very religious and with a special sensitivity, who never got used to her new life in an industrialized city like Saint Louis after having always lived in the south, and who, moreover, suffered the absence of her husband. All these traits coincide with Edwina's personality and circumstances. (Durán Manso, 2014, p.17)

The protagonist is totally determined by the space, and the apathy that feels in Missouri is so deep that she manages to emphasize her mythification of Blue Mountain. This glorification of the lost south is also shared by the protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois, who was born and raised on the Belle Rêve plantation. Unlike Amanda, she not only recalls the opulence in which she was brought up, but also how she lost everything because of her parents' illnesses and her funerals, the care and burial of black servants, and the scarcity of financial resources. In this sense, Williams goes one step further by showing in a character the face and tail of this idyllic life, and highlighting its darker side. Blanche lives in the first person as her lineage passes from the most absolute splendor to ruin, and

this reality, aggravated by the suicide of her husband, who was homosexual, leads to personal destruction without limits. The last stronghold to start from scratch is her sister Stella's battered apartment in New Orleans, but the fantasy she builds before her and her brother-in-law Stanley cannot erase a past of bankruptcy, alcoholism and nymphomania that haunts her. The memory of Belle Rêve - who, like Blue Mountain, is inspired by Clarksdale - expresses her illusion for the splendor of yesteryear, but at the same time torments her for all she has suffered. This occurs every time the polka played by the orchestra when her husband died, followed by the shot that killed his life, comes to her mind. This ambivalence leads from illusion to panic and from desire to repulsion, and madness becomes its only way out. For this reason, space influences in a decisive and tragic way in her dramatic evolution.

4.3.2. New Orleans

The southern city par excellence, New Orleans, presents various spaces in the works of Williams that allow us to define the status of the characters. The main city of Louisiana proudly maintains its culture and history - marked by French, Spanish, Creole and Cajun influence - as well as its traditions, cuisine, music and multicultural character. Although it has been in decline since the end of the Civil War -since it never recovered its economic position-, this dramatism contributes to its marked personality and accentuates its similarity with the beings of Williams. The author's long stays in this city, as well as his various experiences there, determined the vision of New Orleans that appears in his texts and films. The main areas that he recovers are the French Quarter and the Garden District, two opposite zones in economic, social and cultural level, that show the two realities of the city. Williams places it nowadays, specifically from the 1930s to the 1940s, rather than placing it in its splendorous years as the capital of the *Old South*, which is when it is usually represented in literature and films.

The French Quarter is considered the essence of New Orleans, and is manifested in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and in *This Property is Condemned*. As he had shown in *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams used to write based on his experiences and, to locate the tragedy of Blanche DuBois, he left the San Luis of his adolescence for the most emblematic neighborhood of the southern city where he was fully happy. The historical and stifling atmosphere of the French Quarter was perfect to define Blanche's last refuge, as her popular, chaotic and cosmopolitan character was totally opposed to the protagonist's personality. In addition, jazz - the musical essence of the city - symbolized the antithesis of the poles of European origin that she used to hear in Belle Rêve. Thus, space is also defined by the sensual jazz music that accompanies credit titles, as it communicates to the viewer that the plot runs in a city as passionate as New Orleans. As for the incidence of the spaces in the characters, it is interesting the train station where the delicate Blanche encounters a crowd that prevents her from walking with the solemnity that she accustoms herself to, as Williams correctly presents the clash of a character that comes from another world and has just landed in her new reality. This idea is reinforced when the dazed Southern lady walks the bustling French Quarter looking for her sister's apartment, whose psychological illumination later accentuates her drama. In the film, the bank

of the Mississippi river and the typical buildings of the neighborhood with their peculiar railings of wrought iron also appear.

On the other hand, *This Property is Condemned*, set in the time of the Great Depression, has numerous scenes shot in New Orleans. At first, the idea that the viewer has of the city is part of the multiple references that the protagonist, Alva Starr, realizes, because she longs to leave her native Dodson, in Mississippi, to escape the yoke of her mother. The girl has an idealized image of the city of Louisiana - where her father also took refuge for the same reason - and needs to start from scratch in a place that she associates with freedom. When she manages to escape, she walks quietly and alone in the French Quarter, and the panoramas and slow camera movements are recreated in St. Louis Cathedral, the streets of the neighborhood and various parks, to show the special meaning they have in the personal fulfillment of Alva. This way, the mental construction of space that the protagonist performs previously corresponds to the end with reality.

The most elegant neighborhood in New Orleans is the Garden District, a residential area near the French Quarter with white mansions that evoke southern plantations. The film adaptation of Williams where it appears is *Suddenly ... Last Summer*, whose most significant space is the spectacular garden of the house of Violet Venable. She explains that "it is like the dawn of creation"², the place where everything begins and where, inevitably, everything ends. It is a space full of exuberant vegetation composed of exotic trees and shrubs, and also carnivorous plants, which highlights the complex, convoluted and destructive relationship between Violet and her late son Sebastian. Through the garden you can access the studio of the young man, a space that reflects his artistic concerns and, also, his homosexuality, through several paintings with naked men, the torso of a male sculpture and a large painting with Saint Sebastian crossed by arrows that presides over the large room (Durán Manso, 2016). In this case, two spaces of the same house explain the personality of its elitist owners, a mother and a son with a strong oedipal link that evolves in a tragic way.

However, New Orleans appears with a negative character in *The Tattooed Rose* due to the experience of the protagonist, Serafina delle Rose. For her, it is a place where perversion, gambling and adultery are the protagonists, because that was where her deceased husband met his mistress. For this reason, Serafina's perception of this city is tied to impurity and sin, and this collides with her deep religious beliefs. In short, the influence exerted by this southern city on Williams' work is so strong that "surely the image that most people have of the city still comes from having a live performance or the movie or from having read Streetcar" (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, p.94).

4.3.3. Southern plantations

The longed and lost plantations of Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois have their current representation in the family estates of Baby Doll and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

² This phrase appears in minute 1:23:55.

Both are located in the fertile Mississippi Delta region and are inspired by the plantations that the playwright observed in Clarksdale. The former is in a ruinous state due to the inability of a southern family to thrive in the cotton business. For its part, the latter shows the opposite, the splendor of a property of 28,000 acres considered the richest in the area. Both show the ambivalent reality of the agrarian economy of the Delta in the mid-twentieth century: the decline of the lineage and business vision.

From the start of shooting *Baby Doll*, which began in the town of Benoit, Mississippi, Elia Kazan asked Williams to move there to write the definitive ending. The writer was very reluctant to this proposal, because, as the filmmaker explains, "he was very afraid to go to the South, he said: "These people threw me out. I left the South because of its attitude to me. They do not accept homosexuals, and I do not want to be humiliated!" (Ciment, 1998, p. 119). In spite of his origin and his emotional connection with the south, he feared the conservative and religious reactions that his presence could cause, which demonstrates the radical mentality of the southern society. However, after agreeing to Kazan's wish, and fleeing after two days, he had the denouement that the director included in the film. Regarding space, the main one house is the home where the married Archie Lee and Baby Doll live. Far from showing the opulence of yore, the typical mansion having two stories, white columns and a triangular pediment appears almost in ruins; a symbol that in the 20th century the *Old South* was more than a myth. The state of the housing is deplorable, since there are scarcely any pieces of furniture, plaster has come off the walls and everything is very old. With this aspect, the building "acquires the category of pseudo-protagonist" and becomes "a material symbol of that southern decadence" (Cuevas, 2002, page 297).). In addition, there is a parallel between the house and the unfortunate relationship of marriage. On the other hand, it emphasizes a group of blacks of Benoit that are not actors, but that participate like witnesses of the history, since they emphasize the southern immersion of the story.

The location of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* on a splendid Mississippi Delta hacienda on a summer's day serves to confront the seemingly united fictional beings: members of the Pollit family. Most contain traits of the playwright himself and of relatives or people of his surroundings. Thus, while his psychological weakness appears in the protagonist, Brick Pollit, to draw Maggie he was inspired by his friend Maria St. Just, from whom he took the expression "no-neck monsters" to refer to her nephews, although the nickname 'The Cat' refers to Margaret Lewis Powell, whom he met in Macon, Georgia, in the summer of 1942. Here, the summer before, he had seen the father of his friend Jordan Masee, Jr., a southern landowner who his granddaughter called Big Daddy for his self-satisfied figure. This way, "with his imposing girth and white linen suit and such of plantation life in the South, Jordan Masee, Sr., is often cited as a source for Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*" (Devlin and Tischler, 2000 , Pp. 329). To create the character's past, Williams was inspired by one of his grandfather's friends, G. D. Perry, who went from foreman to owner of a 28,000-acre estate in Tunica County, Mississippi. In addition, he took from his father the phrase "You're making me as nervous as a cat on a hot tin roof," which he used to use when he was having an argument with Edwina. With these features, Big Daddy

embodied the prototype of a southern patriarch who ran his plantation with the same tyranny he treated his family. On the other hand, the difficult relationship between Brick and his brother Gooper is inspired by that of Williams with his brother Dakin.

In this film, an important role is played by the verticality of space from a narrative point of view. This is evident in the southern mansion of the Pollit, whose ground floor represents the land, that is, everyday life; The former evokes the sky, where Brick evades his problems; And the basement emulates hell, the place where the protagonist has to face his own reality to be able to ascend again. Although Brick's main dramatic space is his bedroom, located on the top floor, this structure accurately indicates that the various psychological states he is going through have an analogy with spaces. However, as in other works of Williams, rain is a cathartic element to clarify the truth, and in this case it appears when this character confesses to his father who suffers from a terminal illness. In this sense, "meteorological phenomena (storms, rain, wind ...) are of fundamental importance in some stories because they are a projection of human emotions on the space they inhabit. That is, they convert space into an atmosphere" (Díez Puertas, 2006, p.220). On the other hand, the forging bed in the bedroom has a dramatic significance to Maggie, since its high bars symbolize the prison in which she is trapped by her husband's continued rejections. Without a doubt, "if our home or our room portrays us is because they are a metaphor of our psychology. Its outward appearance shows our inner state "(Díez Puertas, 2006, p.220).

4.3.4. The small southern towns

In addition to New Orleans, in Tennessee Williams' work there are references to other southern cities, like Memphis, in Tennessee, which is mentioned in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Nevertheless, the playwright never develops scenes in them and, for that reason, they do not appear in movies. Curiously, the small, provincial towns of Two River County, Glorious Hill and Dodson, where the films *Snake Skin*, *Summer and Smoke* and *This Property is Condemned* are developed respectively, are fictitious. All are located in the Delta region, have a certain resemblance and agree in not offering any exit to their anguished characters.

The toponym of the former is closely linked to the origin of the writer, for "in several dramas there are references to Two Rivers County, and Clarksdale, like Columbus, is situated between two streams" (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, 37) . In *Snake Skin*, a strict social hierarchy is maintained by the conservatism of the old families, there is deep racism towards the black population and a strong suspicion is shown to the outsiders who settle down there, even encouraged by the sheriff himself. This hermetic scheme determines the coexistence among the neighbors and, especially, the protagonists: Lady Torrance, a woman of Italian origin; Val Xavier, a wandering musician with a murky past; And Carol Cutrere, the wayward daughter of the most prestigious family. Thus, following the myth of Orpheus - the work on which Orpheus Descending is based - this city represents the underworld to which Val descends to rescue the two candidates for Eurydice. Therefore, the spaces of the film, such as the dungeon, Lady's house / shop - where most of the action takes place -, the

cemetery, or the road bar, usually have dim lighting that accompanies the fugitive characters from themselves towards their tragic destiny.

In *Summer and Smoke*, a close parallel is established between the protagonist family and the author's maternal family. Here, Glorious Hill emulates Clarksdale, and the Winemillers evoke the Dakin, for the father is a valued preacher in the city and his only daughter, Alma, is a cultivated, educated young woman with intense religious convictions. The southern space in which the action takes place is marked by the dichotomy between the repression suffered by the protagonist and the sexual liberation that characterizes John, the neighbor with whom she is in love. While the space that best identifies it is the rectory, where she teaches singing and holds her literary club, the one that defines him is the controversial Moon Lake Casino party room - also present in *A Streetcar Named Desire* - where he spends most of his time after graduating in medicine. Although they initiate an idyll, because both need a part of what identifies the other, among them there is an abyss that condemns them to live apart. Thus, spirituality and passion have specific spaces for each character. Finally, Dodson is the small town where *This Property is Condemned* develops almost entirely. Due to its setting in the Great Depression, and to the gradual search for greater realism in the cinema of the sixties, there is a suffocating climate through the lighting, which is accentuated in the main space: the battered pension of Hazel Starr. This succeeds in transmitting the suffocating heat of Mississippi, the sexual tension between the characters, and the inability of the protagonist, Alva, to escape.

4.3.5. The coast of the Gulf of Mexico

Tennessee Williams places two of his major dramas in a southern space uncommon in his work: the Gulf of Mexico coast. This setting is not tied to any real experience of the playwright - as was the case with Mississippi Delta and New Orleans - because he never resided in this area. However, he has an emotional bond with it since it is located halfway between this city and Key West, Florida, one of the main shelters where he found inspiration.

The Tattooed Rose develops in an indefinite town of the coast of the gulf that is next to New Orleans, since the characters mention it with familiarity. In this sense, "its references to the banana import business and nearby New Orleans clearly locate it on the western Mississippi coast" (Holditch and Freeman Leavitt, 2010, p.19). This population has numerous immigrants of diverse origin, out of whom stands the protagonist, who is Sicilian. The houses with wood and straw roofs, the numerous palm trees and the tropical climate are the main features of a place where Serafina is the victim of a double crossroads: one, because of her status as that of an immigrant in a society that treats her with disdain, and another, because her passionate character collides with the strong religiosity that determines it. As in most of Williams' texts and adaptations, the protagonist's home is the most important narrative space. Serafina's modest house, which looks like a hut, has several spaces that indicate her psychological complexity: an intimate one, the bedroom, which is where she gazes longingly at her husband, Rosario, before she dies; another space is

professional, which refers to the stay in which she spends long hours sewing; and a last one that is personal, which corresponds to the small altar where she speaks with devotion to the Madonna. In addition, its somber illumination does not correspond with the luminosity of the exterior, so that the own home reflects the torment of the personage.

For its part, the action of *Sweet Bird of Youth* takes place in the fictitious coastal town of Saint Cloud. Unlike the original work, the film has several interior and exterior spaces to avoid its marked theatricality, but the main one is still the beach hotel similar to Buena Vista of Biloxi, Mississippi, which was for many years the usual place for the neighbors of that state and for other southerners to go on vacation. At Regal Palms Hotel - which was called Royal Palms in the text - Chance Wayne and Alexandra del Lago, an aspiring actor and a actress undergoing a crisis, take refuge in the luxurious suite they occupy, talking openly about the personal destruction they have arrived to. Male prostitution, alcohol, blackmail and drugs characterize the relationship of convenience that exists between them, despite their beautiful appearance and the admiration they awaken for living in Hollywood. This idyllic lodging is similar to the couple, because its pleasant aspect conceals its depravation, as reflected in the corrupt characters that are related to it. It is one of the boldest films of Williams because it also addresses issues such as abortion, gender violence and manipulation, populism and extreme aggressiveness of the cacique politics that governs in the south.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The representation of the *Old South* in American literature is one of Hollywood's main topics of interest. Life on the plantations, defeat in the Civil War, or slavery have been transmitted in a romantic or epic way in films framed in classical cinema. However, beginning in the 1950s, there was a shift in this trend with the film adaptations of Tennessee Williams. This playwright portrayed a current vision of the South inheriting the *Old South*, which was far from the sweetness that used to show the melodramas set in the past of this universe. In this regard, it is appropriate to highlight the interest of several South American writers born in the South to place their works in this space and offer a melancholy vision of its past and a negative vision of its present. In addition to Williams, there were other outstanding writers of this trend like William Faulkner, Lillian Hellman and Carson McCullers, from the states of Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia, respectively. Also, their main texts also aroused the interest of Hollywood that made movies based on them.

The research work we developed allows us to show that space occupies a decisive place in the production of Williams, especially the one of the South of the United States, and becomes a thread of his histories. This is evident in the many plays he developed here, especially in the Mississippi Delta region and New Orleans. This shows the developed sense of belonging of the author and is one of his main signs of identity as a playwright. In this sense, it can be said that his place of origin is one of his most important sources of inspiration, since his childhood in Clarksdale and his youth in New Orleans marked him personally and professionally. This is reflected so

much by the ambiances of his works and the mental recreation and the evocation of the south that his characters perform; the majority, conditioned by this universe.

This idea has a great relevance in cinema. Out of the total of thirteen adaptations of his works that were made in Hollywood from 1950 to 1968 – the time in which there was a great interest to adapt the controversial subjects and characters of the author -, ten developed in the south. Undoubtedly, this is a fairly broad sample to understand the close physical and emotional bond of the author with this area of the United States. In addition, the southern representation on movies has a number of technical elements of a cinematographic nature, such as lighting, framing and assembly, to show how the hermetic, and even claustrophobic spaces that arise reflect the vital anguish of characters. Nevertheless, although these films have scenes shot in locations not contemplated by Williams, whose purpose was to give a greater visual amplitude to the plot, their force continues residing in the power that emanates from the theatrical work. For this reason, in most of these films the exterior spaces do not usually contribute much to the evolution of fictional beings, since it is the interiors which determine them. This leads us to consider that the southern space represented and created by Williams defines the emotional state of characters who are in an emotional drift; like the decadent south where they survive.

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