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LITERATURE

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Liminality and Existentialism in Tennessee Williams's *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*

Abstract. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1983) stands as a prominent example of Tennessee Williams's existentialist outlook and his experimentations with dramatic form. Subtitled as a "ghost play," *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* depicts a fictional meeting of American authors F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald in the afterlife, through a temporally and spatially nonlinear narrative, where the characters revisit moments from their past in order to resolve the questions that have gradually doomed their relationship. Using the framework of Sartre's theatre of situations and Foucault's notion of heterotopia, this paper aims to add a novel perspective to the existing scholarship on this Williams play, but, most importantly, to suggest a reconciliation between its form and content, as opposed to the dissonance argued in the play's early reviews. Starting with an overview of Williams's existentialist approach and the prevalent criticism on the play, this paper focuses on its dramatic form through an examination of the depictions of time and space. This is followed by an analysis of its thematic content, in particular the existentialist notions of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) and the Other, to finally conclude with an argument on the correlation of the play's form and content.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, Sartre, theatre of situations, existentialism, heterotopias, bad faith, the other

1. Introduction

Tennessee Williams's plays demonstrate a progressive inclination toward experimentation in form, as well as an increased thematic focus on existentialist concerns. The playwright's exposure to this philosophy is understandable, considering that, starting from the late 1940s, "the vogue of existentialism was everywhere, and the Unit-

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ed States was no exception" (Gilbert 2012, 110). Moreover, John S. Bak (2014) lists Jean-Paul Sartre, a major proponent of this philosophy, among "Europe's intelligentsia [that] nourished Williams' creativity for over four decades" (12). Williams himself included Sartre's plays *No Exit* and *The Flies* in his reading list, published in *The Saturday Review of Literature* (1948, 26). He later reiterated this interest in his *Memoirs*, naming Sartre as an important influence "whose existential philosophy appealed to [him] strongly" (Williams 1975, 149). Thus, Williams was not only familiar with existentialist philosophy, but with existentialist theatre as well.

Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that, while existentialist notions pervade Williams's drama, this philosophy should not be considered as the foundation of his plays. After all, Sartre himself, despite naming Williams as one of the very few American playwrights that appealed to him, counted Williams's worldview to be "very different from [his]" (1976, 128), as opposed to the tenets of existentialist philosophy and theatre. Moreover, as Dennis A. Gilbert (2012) clarifies, existentialist theatre "is the study of the individual in a concrete situation (fiction) which then leads the writer to theorize about the consequences of this portrayal (nonfiction), and not the other way around" (112). Echoing Simone de Beauvoir, he also "rejects the notion that Sartre theorizes first and then uses the novels and the plays simply to illustrate certain points of this thinking" (Gilbert 2012, 112). Likewise, Williams's drama is not created upon actual philosophical ground, but instead gives way to novel readings from an existentialist standpoint. Under these considerations, this paper introduces Williams's drama, through the case of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1983), not as an example of purely existentialist theatre, but as a means of analysis through an existentialist lens, allowing therefore an interpretation of the thematic and theatrically formal aspects of Sartre's notions.

Most of the critics relate Williams's experimentations with philosophical concepts and new forms of drama solely to his late plays (Saddik 2015, 1–2), marking either *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) or the second production of *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1964) as a turning point (Prosser 2009, 8). However, this shift is evident from *Camino Real* (1953), a play focused in the conflict between individual freedom and circumstantial constraints, as characters are placed in an isolated city without any means of escape. Williams's treatment of this theme is far from the realism of his earlier plays. The same approach appears in *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958), where the rejection of realism verges on the boundaries of the grotesque, as the thematic clash between freedom and constraint is intertwined with depictions of extreme violence and cannibalism. Later on, *The Two-Character Play* (1976) places its characters in a space of absolute isolation and ambiguity, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction to the utmost degree. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1983), Williams's last play on Broadway during his lifetime, is an extension of the same approach, depicting similar existential themes in experimental theatrical form.

Clothes for a Summer Hotel (referring to the first publication of 1983 by New Directions as the definitive text, and henceforth mentioned as *Clothes*) is based on the relationship of F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, while also being populated

with other characters from real life, including their friends Gerald and Sara Murphy, and Ernest Hemingway. Subtitled as "a ghost play", it depicts a fictional meeting of the famous couple in a version of the afterlife located in the lawn of the asylum where Zelda was residing during the final days of her life. During this meeting, Scott and Zelda engage in complex conversations about their relationship, trying to recognize and justify the reasons that doomed it, as they revisit moments from their past. Despite the familiarity of the subject matter, the experimental frame of the play, where Williams "eschews realistic representation" (Saddik 2015, 66) in favor of a nonlinear structure of time and space, has generally suffered from negative criticism.

Considering *Clothes* primarily a rehashed version of the public relationship of two popular celebrities, Walter Kerr wrote in the *Times* that the play merely "told what we already know" and that there was no reason "to retrace the terrain" (quoted in Lahr 2014, 560). John Simon (1996), on the other hand, saw little merit in the form of the play, describing its first production as "unfocused, meandering, unnecessary" (273). Such reviews, detrimental to Williams to the extent of pushing him towards an attempted suicide (Lahr 2014, 566), have resurfaced in later productions of the play. Notably, Wilborn Hampton (1996) described the 1995 York Theater Company revival of *Clothes* as "straightforward biography" with "characterizations [that] have not been fully developed", in spite of the experimental treatment that further challenged theatrical conventions by having actors perform holding their scripts on stage (276). Yet, it is worth mentioning that recent approaches to the play have been more positive (see Prosser 2009, Lahr 2014, Saddik 2015). It is therefore the intention of this paper to correct earlier reviews in regards to their recurrent misjudgment of a dissonance between content and form, as well as to propose Sartre's theatre of situations and Foucault's heterotopic liminality not only as frameworks that add a novel perspective to the existing scholarship on *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, but, most importantly, to suggest a reconciliation between its form and content.

2. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* and the Theatre of Situations

Williams's approach in *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* showcases significant similarities to Sartre's views on drama, primarily in the use of familiarity and distance. Jacques Guicharnaud (1962) explains that Sartre "wanted first to get the spectator on familiar ground and then gradually bring him into existentialist drama, far from his familiar ground" (69). In the same manner, Williams presents Scott and Zelda, two figures associated with American literature, in a recognizable situation. Their tumultuous relationship and Zelda's frequent confinements in mental institutions were already well-known facts to the public eye. However, Williams pulls attention away from such biographical aspects. Prosser (2009) rightfully clarifies that "[t]he play is not an attempt at biography" (181). Lahr (2014), on the other hand, sees Williams's portrayal of Scott and Zelda as "pure idea", as characters "abstracted […] from history and from their social façade" (560).

This becomes gradually evident as the play reveals that the characters are actually ghosts, inhabiting a liminal space in the afterlife. Thus, readers and audiences become distanced from the realistic background of the play. Sartre considered this distance to be a crucial factor of the effectiveness of drama, claiming it to be "the real origin, the real meaning of theater" (Sartre 1976, 12). By not engaging emotionally with the characters, it becomes possible to rationally scrutinize the possible meanings of the play.

Secondly, *Clothes* contains elements of what Sartre (1976) calls "theatre of situations," a type of drama "no longer […] sustained primarily by character" (4). This notion emphasizes that the characters' actions are not manifestations of their psycho-emotional background and, consequently, cannot be justified by the certain natures of the characters. Instead, it is the characters' actions and deliberate choices that reveal what characters are like and what they become throughout the play, in accordance with the maxim "*doing* reveals *being*" (Sartre 1988, 193). In order to depict this notion, Sartre places his characters in situations that are often "exceptional" (Guicharnaud 1962, 64), yet "common to all" (Sartre 1976, 4), meaning that the circumstances may be extreme, but they reveal recognizable scenarios "which occur at least once in the majority of lives" (Sartre 1976, 36). It is in such conditions that "freedom is revealed" (Sartre 1976, 4), because characters are detached from any degree of familiarity with their previous background and placed in a moment of choice, a crucial instant in which they deliberately and consciously decide their path.

Sartre (1976) states that such situations must be presented from the beginning of a play, "taking [the] dramatis personae and precipitating them, in the very first scene, into the highest pitch of their conflicts" (41). While Scott and Zelda are recognizable figures, Williams echoes Sartre in detaching them from realistic familiarity, and placing them in an extreme situation. Scott's visit to Zelda's asylum does not refer to a particular point in time, nor does it follow a logical chain of causality. Instead, Williams uses the frame of a ghost play to place the dramatic action of *Clothes* in the ambiguity of a liminal space in the afterlife. In a similar way to the three characters of Sartre's *No Exit*, Scott is confined in a space that he is forced to face, without any possibility of escape. Thus, his choices and responses throughout the events of the play are conditioned solely by the situation that is imposed upon him, without directly relying on his background as an author, or as a person that has lived in the real world. As such, Scott is first and foremost compelled to acknowledge his situation, then evaluate his relationship to the other characters, and it is this process of recognition and acceptance that reveals his character.

In addition, the structure of *Clothes* replicates Sartre's theatre of situations in being "brief, centered around one single event" (Sartre 1976, 41), representing its action in a "single set, a few entrances, a few exits, intense arguments among the characters who defend their individual rights with passion" (Sartre 1976, 41). Moreover, it resembles an existentialist play in being "written in a sparse, extremely tense style, with a small cast not presented for their individual characters but thrust into a conjunction where they are forced to make a choice" (Sartre 1976, 42). Such qualities are considered by Sartre "at a great distance from the brilliant fantasies of Broadway" (1976, 41), there-

fore, Williams's play subverts the conventions of modern American drama, leading to the aforementioned critical misjudgments. Applying the framework of existentialist theatre and liminality to *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, the following sections analyze in depth Williams's treatment of space, time, and philosophical themes.

3. The Formal Aspect of Space: Thrownness and Heterotopia

The setting of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* is "Zelda's final asylum" (Williams 1983, iv), which Saddik (2015) clarifies to be the "Highland Hospital, the facility in Asheville, North Carolina, where Zelda died in a fire just after midnight on March 10, 1948" (65). Williams intentionally opts for a visually unrealistic representation, with elements like "black iron gates, rather unrealistically tall", and a building in "sudden perspective" (Williams 1983, iv). Moreover, his set includes props that serve multiple uses, most notably "a large rock which should seem a natural out-cropping on the asylum lawn, but which will later serve as a cliff above the sea" (Williams 1983, iv). In effect, not only is the site represented unrealistically, but the actions are also performed in a likely manner, contributing to the aforementioned necessary effect of distance.

Distance is further established through the depiction of space as heterotopic. Heterotopias, a term coined by Michel Foucault (1986), are "counter-sites" (24) that "have a function in relation to all the space that remains" (27), as they juxtapose external reality and enable characters to come to terms with the particularities of their existence. Williams's choice of the mental asylum falls directly under what Foucault (1986) defines as "heterotopias of deviation", that is, spaces "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (25). Williams heightens this sense of in-betweenness by entirely placing the action on the asylum lawn, an intermediary space between the asylum building and the external world. Moreover, as time constantly shifts between past and present, the lawn repeatedly transforms into the location of a party, decorated with lights and streamers, becoming a site where beauty and happiness contrast the coldness and frightening nature of the actual site.

In addition, the setting functions under its own operational rules. A typical quality of heterotopic sites is that they have "boundaries, admission points, rules" (Tompkins 2020, 102). The gate of the mental asylum is guarded by two German nuns that not only forbid Scott from entering, but also increase the ambiguity of his situation by not giving any answers to his questions. Moreover, the site is overrun by a strong wind that repeatedly interrupts certain questions and conversations. Whenever Scott asks something that may reveal more than required about the site, he is cut short by a voice without a source, proclaiming loudly that "*La question est défendue*" (Williams 1983, 3), that is, "the question is forbidden".

These visual, spatial, and operational features of the site, that make no sense on a realistic plane, put Scott in a position of thrownness. Borrowing the term from Heidegger, Sartre interprets thrownness as an implication that "we are thrown on the world without

explanation or justification" (Desan 1954, 108), that we are "abandoned" (Sartre 1978, 485) to exist amongst a set of obstacles that appear out of a person's will or control, which he names "facticity". Desan (1954) defines facticity as a "complex of facts" (102), a "whole set of obstacles which freedom has to face" (107). It implies a position that the individual is forced to inhabit, without any consideration of his willingness to do so; he has no choice but to be there. Nevertheless, while facticity is arbitrary and unalterable, it is crucial, because it creates a context for one's existence, providing one with the opportunity to acknowledge and react to its existence, and most importantly, emerging as a set of possibilities through which one can "engage in meaningful projects in the world" (Reynolds 2006, 33). Thus, despite seeming to have a restricting nature, the experience of thrownness is forward-oriented. In this sense, Williams showcases a Sartrean sensibility, considering freedom to be "defined as the escape from the given, from fact" (Sartre 1978, 485). To Williams, circumstances do not define his characters, nor do they undermine their freedom. Therefore, the formal heterotopic treatment of the situation correlates with the thematic thrownness. Consequently, Scott and Zelda seek ways to interpret and find meaning in their struggle, as they are repeatedly asked to acknowledge their ambiguous situation and perform certain actions.

In addition to the rules of accessing the space, as Foucault (1986) elaborates, "the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, […] or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications" (26). The latter applies to Williams's *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*. As such, after the revelation of all characters being actually ghosts, a series of requirements come to light. Along with the play being subtitled "a ghost play", its second act explicitly mentions this fact. During Zelda's revisiting of her past marital betrayal with Edouard, her secret lover, she refers to Scott as her "very late husband" (Williams 1983, 42), although he is physically present in the scene. The liminal site of the asylum lawn thus transforms into a space between life and death, and similar to Williams's *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, it becomes "the contour of a purgatorial landscape" (Jackson 1977, 64).

It is under this transformation that the requirement of certain rites is referenced. While Scott argues with the doctors and interns of the asylum, he is repeatedly forced to take a cold shower (Williams 1983, 25). At another point, Zelda asks Scott to perform a burial ceremony after her death, to scatter her ashes "all to the wind to be blown out to sea", and act that she considers "purification" (Williams 1983, 72). Most notably, a ritualistic effect is attached to the ring that Scott repeatedly asks Zelda to put on, as a token of "a covenant with the past that's always still present" (Williams 1983, 12). While this symbol represents the thematic thread of analyzing past choices to interpret current situations, it also points to the formal treatment of time in the play. Significantly, irregularities in the experience of time are a crucial principle of the operation of heterotopias, as they "are most often linked to slices in time […] they open onto […] heterochronies. […] The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1986, 26). This temporal treatment is perhaps the most important structural element of Williams's *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*.

4. Simultaneous Layers of Time

Different senses of time overlap from the very beginning of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, as temporal inconsistencies surface immediately with Scott's arrival. Williams (1983) introduces in his stage directions that "Scott appears as he did when he died in his mid-forties" (1), referring to a time past. As Scott looks at the mental asylum, he notices the gate "to be black as if scorched by fire" (Williams 1983, 2), implying that the building has already been burnt, so the action must take place at a later point in the future of this event. Moreover, as he is greeted by his friend Murphy, he is told that "[i]t will all be over in […] one hour and forty-five minutes" (Williams 1983, 3), referring to the time of the performance. Therefore, time in Williams's play operates simultaneously in the past, present and future, getting self-reflexively intermingled in the process with performative time as well, thus, including the present experience of the audience. While an eternal present is justifiable under the frame of a ghost play, it is important to note that all these temporal planes do not only coexist, but they also interact with each other. These inconsistencies with time cause an immediate perplexity in Scott's attempts to make sense of the situation. He is right to remark "[s]omething strange here – unreal … disturbing" (Williams 1983, 5), considering that a temporal dimension is added to his already established spatial thrownness. To clarify, three different temporal planes operate in Williams's play.

The first is the present level of the play, that is already heterotopic and heterochronic in its representation. On the surface, this level can be summarized linearly: Scott visits Zelda in the asylum, and they carry on several conversations together. Yet, their interactions point to the heterochronicity of their situation. Being told to meet Scott, Zelda says "I thought that obligations stopped with death" (Williams 1983, 8), making it clear that Scott, being already dead, cannot force her to do anything, and that she, being likewise dead, is not obliged to abide. Consequently, this meeting has to be an enactment of something past. However, later she proclaims to have "the gift of Cassandra", and that she "WILL DIE IN FLAMES" (Williams 1983, 15), placing her death in the future axis of linear time. In fact, it is her physical presence that puts her in the present level of existence. The reference to the future is extended as she makes her final wish to have her ashes scattered to the wind (Williams 1983, 72), indicating that her death is yet to take place in the physical sense. Thus, the heterochronic nature of the site is experienced not only by readers and audiences, but by the characters as well.

In addition to the present level of the plot, there exists a present level of the performance, marked by explicit self-reflexivity. The characters are aware of this temporal level, as was the case of Murphy's abovementioned reference to the length of the performance. They are moreover aware of theatrical devices. As the lights of Zelda's room flicker in a flame-resembling way to imply the circumstances of her death, an intern states that "tricks of light, sometimes illuminate things" (Williams 1983, 27). Zelda reciprocates this remark by saying "[n]ot to us. To audiences of a performance of things past" (Williams 1983, 27), revealing thus an awareness to the fact that they are characters

performing for a certain audience in order to "illuminate things" to them. This awareness is directly acted out at the end of the same scene, as "Zelda offers the audience a polite social smile and a slight bow" (Williams 1983, 28), hence, transcending from mere acknowledgment, to interaction with the spectators. In addition, stagehands change props and other elements of the setting between scenes in plain sight, as they carry on with their duty while the action continues to take place. Zelda acknowledges their presence in the second act, screaming "they've removed our room" (Williams 1983, 45). In short, the characters of *Clothes* are constantly aware that they are characters acting in a play, in front of an audience, and in the midst of a stage surrounded by different props.

In this sense, it is rather significant that when forced by the doctor and interns to meet her husband, Zelda is not told that she has to make this meeting happen, but that she "must play it" (Williams 1983, 8). This has to be done "[a]s if it existed" (Williams 1983, 8), because "[a]fter a while, it will seem to exist" (Williams 1983, 8). As characters, Zelda and the others have no other choice but to perform the script that is written for them. This points to the heterotopic nature of theatre as well. Foucault (1986) indeed includes theatre among his examples of heterotopic sites, as a space "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces … [as] the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another" (25). However, *Clothes* goes beyond this brief description, because its self-reflexivity points to a broader definition of theatre as heterotopia, described as follows by Joanne Tompkins (2020):

> It articulates theatre's world-making, turning the unknown or unreal into something of substance, even if temporarily; it demonstrates how theatre merges illusion and reality, whether through an evocation of 'real' locations or imagined ones. […] In so doing, it enables a nuancing of Foucault's heterotopia that better suits application to theatre. Theatre illustrates that its spaces are always to some extent unreal and it is their very unreality that provides the mechanism for it to communicate the material connection to the world at large. (107)

Williams's explicit self-reflexivity, the characters' awareness to them being only characters, the intrusion of theatrical processes in the middle of the action, all illustrate not only the operational rules of the space of the plot, but also of theatre in a more general sense. As such, their awareness to the performative aspect of the play, puts the characters into the position of re-enacting particular moments from their past.

This past level of the plot, is not structured in the form of flashbacks. Instead, the past is experienced *in* the present. The set of different scenes is changed without breaking the flow of action, whereas characters shift from one scene to the other without breaking the linearly progressive temporality of their performance. Therefore, from a structural standpoint, this is the most complex level of the play. In addition to making possible the ever-present time of a play and the form-content compatibility that is necessary for modern drama (see Szondi 1987), it is worth mentioning briefly that Williams's structure can be also interpreted as the playwright's attempt towards

postdramatic representation. From this perspective, *Clothes* contains several characteristics of postdramatic theatre, as defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann.

The play indeed comes across as "a theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations" (Lehmann 2006, 68), in the sense that there is almost no action or coherent plot in the play. Instead, Williams showcases several scenes that do not justify, nor explain, the current situation. The liberties taken with time present no logical order, indicating that the playwright does not aim at a narrative synthesis, opting for "a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragment rather than a logically structured course of events" (Lehman 2006, 84). Moreover, several scenes consist of a multiplicity of signs, where stage props get several simultaneous meanings, actors play multiple roles, as in the case of the intern and Edouard to be played by the same person (Williams 1983, 20–21), acting is combined with dance, and sometimes the characters' speech overlaps making it impossible to focus to either one of them (Williams 1983, 59; 75). Specific moments give priority to gesture rather than dramatic text, as is clarified in one of the stage directions:

> In this scene Zelda must somehow suggest the desperate longing of the "insane" to communicate something of their private world to those from whom they're secluded. The words are mostly blown away by the wind: but the eyes – imploring though proud – the gestures – trembling though rigid with the urgency of their huge need – must win the audience to her inescapably from this point through the play: the present words given her are tentative: they may or may not suffice in themselves: the presentation – performance – must. (Williams 1983, 26)

An additional layer of confusion is added through the play's extended intertextuality. As Prosser (2009) informs, "Tennessee used and transformed material from the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Zelda Fitzgerald's novel *Save Me the Waltz*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, and Nancy Mitford's biography *Zelda*" (158). Such intertextuality is not merely alluded, nor does it only serve as inspiration or biographical background, but several phrases and sentences are entirely borrowed from these texts. All these elements lead to a perplexity in form that mirrors the thematic confusion experienced by the characters as they face their situation. In doing so, form and content correlate with each other.

5. Existentialism as Theme: Bad Faith and the Other

In addition to the form of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, its thematic content can be likewise read through an existentialist lens. The spatial stasis and the recurrent turns to a past time indicate a state of characters being stuck in the past. Therefore, they are not only ghosts, but, most importantly, ghosts of their former selves in a process of retaining their self-created illusions in spite of their past choices that make such attempts impossible. The entire formal structure of the play as the characters' deliberate act of performance, as indicated in the sections above, implies a thematic desire to escape an inescapable

past through illusion, performance and dreams. Amongst many references to this inclination, one of Hemingway's remarks stands out, as he advises Scott to "believe whatever's a comfort to you, believe it, but don't ask me to confirm the imagined truth of it" (Williams 1983, 66). This statement recalls what Sartre (1978) names "patterns of flight" (40), actions that one participates in when he feels the anguish of his current situation.

Such actions or beliefs are the starting point of "a process of 'distraction' in relation to anguish" (Sartre 1978, 41), an attitude that Sartre defines as "bad faith (*mauvaise foi*)", a position "identified with falsehood" (48). Accordingly, an individual creates illusions to escape a certain truth, and eventually believes these illusions to be reality. In simpler words, a person lies to himself and believes the lie. The complication of this position stands in the fact that the act of lying inherently implies that one knows the truth, and this leads him to disguise or deform it. However, when one engages in bad faith, the liar and the lied-to are the same person, they exist in "the unity of a single consciousness" (Sartre 1978, 49). Since the liar has knowledge of the truth, it means that one cannot entirely inhabit the state of bad faith, because the liar is himself in the first place. Thus, bad faith becomes a means of escapism from the responsibility of acknowledging the truth.

In the play, Scott is already presented as a character practicing bad faith from the scenes that take place in his past. He uses creative work as a refuge against the disturbing circumstances of his marriage. Likewise, Edouard, Zelda's lover, claims that "public esteem, orders of merit – are what we must live for" (Williams 1983, 48). He considers them to be "benefits" that enable one to "make much of them, a life" (Williams 1983, 49). However, Zelda reminds both of her love interests that this is not an attitude that is true to themselves, and she chooses her own different path. She tells Scott that "you are better than me at the cover-up" (Williams 1983, 32), whereas she firmly reproaches Edouard's worldview, calling it a "flame burning nothing" (Williams 1983, 49). Later on, during his visit at Zelda's asylum, Scott seems to strive for the truth that Zelda had previously asked for. He urges the interns and doctors "don't encourage – hallucinations" (Williams 1983, 19), he opposes the refuge that the intern claims to have offered Zelda, opting for "*REASON, REASON*" (Williams 1983, 22), and it is through these rational attempts that he follows Zelda as they revisit moments of their past.

The reenactment of past memories brings both to the awareness of the famous Sartrean maxim that "*l'enfer, c'est les Autres* (Hell is other people)" (Sartre 1947, 75). Generally misunderstood as a statement about the inherent negativity of social interactions, the phrase, in Sartre's (1976) own words, actually means that "[w]e judge ourselves with the means other people have and have given us for judging ourselves. […] if my relations are bad, I am situating myself in a total dependence of someone else. And then I am indeed in hell" (199). The toxicity of such interpersonal relations dominates Scott and Zelda's interactions. In the opening scene of the play, Zelda refers to Scott as the "author of [her] life" (Williams 1983, 9). Later on, she expands this phrase pondering "I know that I must resume the part created for me. Mrs. F. Scott Fitzgerald. Without that part, would I have ever been known […] if he makes of me a monument with his carefully arranged words, is that my life" (Williams 1983, 44). In this regard, Scott is presented as the Other

to Zelda's individuality. He is the external actor who has always defined her through his own perception and creative efforts, a definition that Zelda has eventually adapted for herself. This clash of self against the other, of being-for-itself against being-for-the-other, becomes the crisis that has led her to the asylum.

Scott has always been an obstacle to her literary career, one serving to stifle her creativity. Their visits to past memories reveal several instances when Scott forbids her to interrupt his work, while he later ignores Zelda whenever she mentions her own work. This control over her career eventually extends to her sense of self. At one point, Zelda urges him to turn around and show her his face, a short instant that according to Williams's stage directions "must catch the paradox of the love-hate relationship which existed between them" (Williams 1983, 35). The scene recalls Sartre's notion of shame that emerges from the gaze of the other, which he defines as "shame of *self*; it is the *recognition* of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object" (Sartre 1978, 261). As such, it is not only Zelda's creativity that is stifled by Scott's presence and control, but rather her entire sense of selfhood.

This damaging effect on the other is valid in the opposite direction as well. Scott's dependence on alcohol is a recurring motif in the play. During the second act, Sara poignantly asks whether "Scott's alcoholism is driving Zelda mad, or is Zelda's madness driving Scott to alcoholism" (Williams 1983, 56). Thus, the conflict between self and the other is present in both directions of the Scott-Zelda relationship. As Prosser (2009) phrases it, they "destroy each other" (185). This effect is not only to be superficially taken in terms of its psychological consequences, merely because this conflict has put Zelda in an asylum. It may be read instead as a statement about the role of the other on one's self, as an external force that restricts freedom. In alignment with this philosophical preoccupation, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* represents what Sartre (1976) calls "the true ground of theater" (14), where besides the feelings and thoughts of the characters, what really concerns readers and audiences must be "watching a conflict of rights" (14). The fundamental right in this case is that of one's freedom.

Both Zelda and Scott, by revisiting their past memories, realize that their attempts of escaping their circumstances in bad faith have been futile. Eventually, they reach the difficult moment of recognizing the truth. Scott exclaims that this fantasy world they have created thus far "got to be stopped" (Williams 1983, 53), and he even shouts the cinematic "CUT!" (Williams 1983, 74) to indicate that the performance they are putting on has to be interrupted so that they can face their real situation. This is the culmination of his consideration of the imposition to engage in Zelda's fantasy world of past "old times" as "*UNBEARABLE*!" (Williams 1983, 25). Zelda interprets this moment as follows:

> This gentleman on the bench was once my husband and I was once his wife, sort of a storybook marriage, legendary. Yes, well, legends fade. It seems he's finally faced that. He just now admitted that despite its ideal, relentlessly public appearance, it had been, I quote him,

> a monumental error, and that it had been a mistake for us ever to have met. Something's been accomplished: a recognition – painful, but good therapy's often painful. (Williams 1983, 74)

As a result, after Scott's recognition of the damage he has caused to Zelda, she finally succeeds in establishing her own individuality away from the judgment and perception of Scott as the other. In contrast with the first reference to her husband, Zelda now exclaims "I'm not your book! Anymore! *I can't be your book anymore! Write yourself a new book!*" (Williams 1983, 77). Moreover, she also rejects his ring, breaking the ritual of making a covenant with the past, closing the gates as a final act of her deliberate choice, after which "they won't admit [Scott] or ever release [Zelda] again" (Williams 1983, 77). This way, the play ends with Scott asking a wordless question that can never receive a response.

6. Conclusion

The play ends with Zelda's return to the mental asylum, this time as an entirely deliberate decision of hers. She is at the opposite end of one of her earlier claims, where she stated that "[t]he wisdom, the sorrowful wisdom of acceptance. Wouldn't accept it" (Williams 1983, 71). Instead, at this final point, a "remission occurs", and she has indeed fallen "out of a cloud to what's called real" (Williams 1983, 71). The reality that she recognizes has to do with the fact that, despite her visits to the past, memories and past decisions are unalterable. Now that she is dead, she cannot engage in her artistic efforts anymore. In the final scene of the play, she states:

> The incredible things are the only true things, Scott. Why do you have to go mad to make a discovery as simple as that? Who is fooling whom with this pretense that to exist is a credible thing? The mad are not so gullible. We're not taken in by such a transparent falsity, oh, no, what we know that you don't know – [She is now facing the audience.] Or don't dare to admit that you know is that to exist is the original and greatest of incredible things. Between the first wail of an infant and the last gasp of the dying – it's all an arranged pattern of – submission to what's been prescribed for us unless we escape into madness or into acts of creation. (Williams 1983, 70–71)

In this regard, the solution of the artist to the experience of existentialist anguish stands between the alternatives of madness or artistic creation. Unable to attain the latter anymore, Zelda consciously chooses to be eternally confined in the asylum as a mad person. Scott, on the other hand, is left in an ambiguous state. The only thing that he has achieved thus far is the recognition of his own death. However, by not fulfilling the rite of passing down the ring that connects past and future, he remains stuck in the liminal site of the play, with his future unclear.

Interestingly, the lack of a clear resolution in the form of *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* follows the thematic thread of Scott's realization of his death. The temporal and spatial stasis in which he encountered Zelda at the beginning of the play, is now his own reality. Since apparently nothing comes after this moment, he is stuck in an eternal, endless present. In the words of Felice, one of the protagonists of *The Two-Character Play*, another of Williams's works with a similar formal structure, "[i]t's possible for a play to have no ending in the usual sense of an ending, in order to make a point about nothing really ending" (Williams 1976, 53). This idea further correlates with the existentialist sensibility. From a Sartrean perspective, the function of theatre is not to provide a certain catharsis or conclusion, but to leave room for the audience and readers to make their own interpretations. Thus, Williams retains the structure and features of the theatre of situations, as well as the sense of liminality, until the very end of the play. Ultimately, the heterotopic quality of theatre as a site between illusion and reality becomes the ending point, as the play's perplexity is transferred to the audience and reader: they have to face the freedom – and burden – of the deliberate choice, in terms of their engagement, rational position and possible interpretations of the play.

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