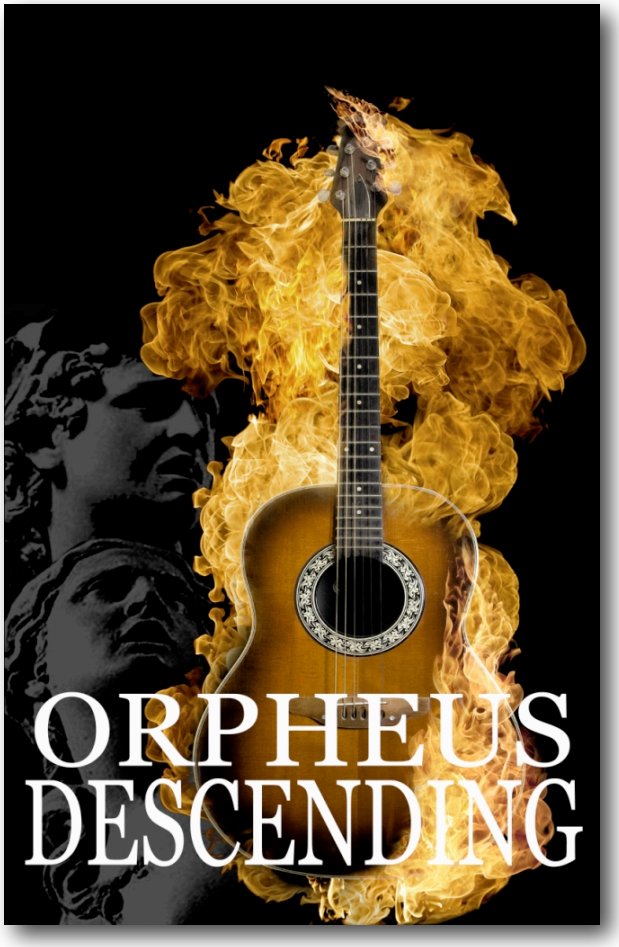
Brock University

Department of Dramatic Arts

Tennessee Williams'



Directed by Virginia Reh
Assistant Directed by Karen McDonald
Designed by Michael Greves

Department of Dramatic Arts
of the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and
Performing Arts, Brock University

Presented in the Sean O' Sullivan Theatre
Centre for the Arts, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
November 10-12, 2011

Orpheus Descending: A Study Guide

Prepared by:

Virginia Reh, Director and Department of Dramatic Arts Associate Professor
Michael Greves, Scenographer
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"There's something wild in the country..."

-Val Xavier, Act 1, Scene 4[i]

Figure 1.
"A Great Black and White Desert Snake Eating"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Collaboration

Orpheus Descending

Written by Tennessee Williams

November 10, 11, 12, 2011 at 7:30pm; November 11, 2011 at 1:00pm
Brock University Department of Dramatic Arts
Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts

Presented in the Sean O' Sullivan Theatre
Centre for the Arts, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

CAST (Students of the Brock University Department of Dramatic Arts):

Val Xavier.....Trevor Ketcheson
Lady Torrance.....Rebekka Gondosch
Carol Cutrere.....Robyn Cunningham
Vee Talbott.....Cassandra Van Wyck
Jabe Torrance.....Evan Mulrooney
David Cutrere.....Josh Davidson
Beulah Binnings.....Lauren Beaton
Dolly Hamma.....Mallory Rivest
Eva Temple.....Anna MacAlpine
Sister Temple.....Madison Roca
Sheriff Talbott.....Derek Ewert
Pee Wee Binnings.....James Lowe
Dog Hamma.....Matthew Viviano
Aunt Conjure.....Nadia Watts
Louella Mae Judd.....Justine Benteau
Nurse Porter.....Vanessa Ancevicius
Mr. Dubinsky.....Brad Deiter

PRODUCTION TEAM:

Director.....Virginia Reh
Assistant Director.....Karen McDonald, student
Scenographer.....Michael Greves
Dramaturge.....Erica Charles, student
Stage Manager.....Kate Hardy, student
Assistant Stage Manager.....Dylan Sylvester, student
Production Manager.....Brian Cumberland
Technical Director.....Adrian Palmieri
Technical Assistant.....Doug Ledingham
Lighting Design.....Ken Garret
Audio Design.....Doug Ledingham
Head of Wardrobe.....Roberta Doylend
First Hand.....Sarah Waller, student
Historical Consultant.....Tami Friedman
Discussion Questions.....Kathy Cavaleri, student

2. List of Characters[ii]

Valentine (Val) Xavier arrives in town on his 30th birthday. He has a wild and yet handsome quality, which is amplified by his easy going and undeniable sexual energy, though he does not work to deliberately cultivate it. He comes into town wearing his trademark snakeskin jacket and a snake ring. He carries an autographed-covered guitar which he refers to as his "life's companion". Val is a free spirit, which makes him a threat to the conformity demanded by the town.

Lady Torrance is unhappily married to the dying Jabe Torrance. She was "bought" by Jabe after her Sicilian father (known as "the Wop") died trying to rescue his wine garden and orchard which were torched by town vigilantes (the Mystic Crew) and she was abandoned by her lover David Cutrere. She still has a youthful figure and is a passionate and emotional woman, struggling against loneliness and the bitterness of her wasted life. Nevertheless, she possesses determination to triumph over the tragedies in her life.

Carol Cutrere is a wild, uncontrollable woman in her 30's. She has a strange fugitive beauty which she exaggerates through makeup and clothing to gain attention. Her family is one of the richest in the county and they fear her tarnishing their name with her wild behaviour. Carol is a self-declared exhibitionist who enjoys drinking and dancing and is accustomed to getting her way. Beneath this exterior is a lonely, vulnerable and strangely clairvoyant person.

Vee Talbott is the wife of the Sheriff. She is a middle-aged woman who is dissatisfied with the reality of her world and escapes into religion and her art. She paints fantastical pictures based on visions she claims to have. Val is the only person in town who truly listens to and sympathizes with her, which may explain why she sees Val as a Christ-like figure.

Jabe Torrance, the owner of the Torrance Mercantile store, is Lady's bitter and spiteful husband. He returns to town from an unsuccessful stay in a Memphis hospital. He has clearly come home to die. He is a "gaunt, wolfish" looking man. Everyone in town seems to be waiting for his death. Jabe is a hard man who completely dominates Lady. Even though she struggles hard against him, he expects total obedience from her.

David Cutrere is Carol's older brother and head of one of the most prominent and wealthy households in the county. He and Lady were lovers 15 years ago, but he abandoned her when her father's wine garden and orchard were torched by the men of the town. David then married for money to appease his family. He is a "tall, handsome man, but something has gone out of him since his youth. The power he has is the power of a captive who rules other captives. His face, his eyes, have the same desperate hardness that Lady does". He drives a sky-blue Cadillac, a gift from his wealthy wife.

Beulah Binnings is a middle-aged woman and the apparent ring leader of the town gossips. She is the wife of a small planter (Pee Wee). When we first meet her she is overdressed in a "bizarre fashion". She has the goods on everyone in town and takes pleasure in sharing all their secrets with others.

Dolly Hamma is always seen with Beulah. She is the youngest of the group of gossips in the play. She and her planter husband Dog moved to this town 10 years ago. Dolly is an outsider who has been accepted into town. Beulah quickly took her under her wing and Dolly looks up to Beulah as her role model of proper behaviour.

Eva Temple is an aging spinster and cousin to Jabe. She is the eldest of the gossiping women. She has no love for Lady and delights in Jabe's public humiliation of his wife. Like all the women, Eva is active in the church, but she is always ready to hear juicy gossip about her neighbours. Although she dislikes both Beulah and Dolly, she recognizes that they are perpetual sources for that gossip.

Sister Temple, Eva′s younger sister, is also a spinster. Like Eva, she enjoys Jabe′s harsh treatment of Lady. She is also a devout church-goer, but relishes gossip; the darker and more scandalous, the better. Sometimes Eva and Sister are so alike, one cannot tell the difference between them, but it is usually clear that Eva is the boss.

Sheriff Talbott is Vee′s husband. He is somewhere in his 40′s, a rough, bullying, law-and-order kind of man. He is openly embarrassed by Vee′s odd behaviour and treats her badly, verbally abusing her at every encounter. He is a gruff man and Jabe′s only real friend.

Pee Wee Binnings is Beulah′s husband, a small planter, who is always seen with Dog Hamma. They are functionally Sheriff Talbott′s enforcers. Pee Wee is terrifying in his emotionless expression and simple-minded in his way of doing things. This is a dangerous combination.

Dog Hamma is married to Dolly. He has been accepted into the town, in spite of coming from outside 10 years ago. He is always seen with Pee Wee, whom he seems to look up to. He too can be terrifying with an emotionless expression and seeming indifference. No one can ever tell what he is thinking, which makes him a frightening adversary.

Aunt Conjure *[please refer to the separate section on this character]* is known by all the town the "conjure woman" from Blue Mountain. Carol, who has a strong connection with her, refers to her as "Aunt Conjure" or simply "Auntie". She appears in tattered clothing, covered with dirt from living out in the wild. A mystical character, adept in Hoodoo *[see section: Faith, Myth and Spirituality],* Aunt Conjure practices folk magic, with talismans and charms. Although the women are terrified of her and force her away, they would no doubt secretly seek her out for cures and spells in desperate situations.

Louella Mae Judd is the wife of the owner the local gas station. She is one of the town gossips and clearly good friends with them all.

Nurse Porter is the nurse hired by the doctor to tend to Jabe in the second half of the play. She is a stern woman, her rigid body encased in starched white. She has the contemptuous cheer and sweetness of someone hired to care for the dying. She has eyes and ears everywhere and distrusts Lady.

Mr. Dubinsky is an elderly Jewish pharmacist who runs the local drugstore. He lives alone. He grew up in Eastern Europe and fled to the United States to escape persecution before World War II. Dubinsky is a permanent outsider in the community, but a necessary merchant.

3. The Plot

Orpheus Descending takes place in a small town in Mississippi, halfway between Memphis and New Orleans, 1954

ACT 1

Scene 1

The play opens with Beulah and Dolly catching up on town gossip while setting up a buffet supper in the Torrance Mercantile store. They and Sister and Eva are awaiting the return of Jabe and Lady from the hospital in Memphis. Carol Cutrere arrives and shocks the women with a scandalous phone conversation and her loose behaviour. They are interrupted by the appearance of Aunt Conjure, who shares a charm with Carol, and Carol gets her to do the Choctaw cry. Suddenly a handsome stranger (Val) appears in the doorway. He is followed by Vee Talbott, fussing over her clothing, food offering and painting. The women drift off and Carol takes the opportunity to remind Val they met previously in New Orleans. Jabe and Lady arrive, escorted by the Sheriff, Pee Wee and Dog. Everyone rushes in and fusses over Jabe. He cuts them off, saying he is tired and retires upstairs, but not before he and Lady square off about changes in the store. After he leaves, the women try to pry more information out of Lady, who soon follows Jabe upstairs. Carol gets another opportunity to flirt with Val and succeeds in getting him to go for a drive with her. The women have plenty to gossip about and, after a brief confrontation with Vee, they all depart.

Scene 2

Val returns to the store late the same night. He is hoping to talk with Lady about getting a job in the store. Lady comes downstairs to phone the pharmacy for pills so she can sleep. She is startled to find Val in the store. They have a strange conversation about his qualifications. After a very grumpy Dubinsky delivers her pills, Lady decides to hire Val. She gives him a dollar to get a meal at the motel on the highway and he heads off as she goes upstairs.

Scene 3

A few weeks later, Val and Lady are working in the store. Lady has just received a phone call from a woman complaining about Val's behaviour. Lady is critical of his suggestive moves and stances. Val gets frustrated and thinks he has to quit, but Lady won't let him. Suddenly Louella Mae bursts into the store demanding to use the phone. Carol has returned to town, in spite of having been bribed by her family to stay away. Louella Mae is quickly followed by Beulah and Dolly, who want a piece of the action. Beulah insists that Lady must not wait on Carol if she comes in, but Lady flatly refuses. Suddenly Carol appears and the women are outraged when Lady tries to help her. Lady finally throws the women out. Carol insists she has a message for Val. When David Cutrere calls to announce he is coming to pick up his sister, Lady goes out to watch for David's car, leaving Carol to deliver her message and get out. After an awkward exchange, Carol tells Val she has come to warn him that his life is in danger. Lady bursts into the store, shouting for Carol to get out and to Val to lock the door. It is too late as David enters, calling for his sister. They are about to leave together when Lady calls to him, stopping him in his tracks. Val and Carol are sent out, and Lady confronts David alone. She reminds him of their beautiful times together and then reveals the secret she has held all these years—when he left her she was carrying his child. Lady becomes increasingly agitated and sends him out of the store, forbidding him to ever return again. He leaves mournfully and Lady retreats upstairs.

Scene 4

At sunset the same day, Val is alone in the store. Vee appears claiming she can't see. She has just created another painting for Jabe. Val and Vee connect over the terrible things they have both witnessed in their lives. Sheriff Talbott comes down from a short visit with Jabe and catches Val kissing Vee's hands. He sends Vee out and threatens Val before he too departs. Lady comes down from tending to Jabe. She suggests that Val move into the store; she will turn the change-room alcove into a room for him and add a shower to the washroom at the back of the store. Val is hesitant, but Lady encourages him and he seems to accept. Excitedly, Lady goes upstairs to get bed linen. Val opens the cash register, removes some bills and leaves. Lady comes down and discovers the theft.

Scene 5

Later that night, an unsteady Val returns, opens the cash register, takes some bills off a wad of money and places them in the register. Lady comes downstairs angrily accusing him of the theft. He insists he has returned more than he took and he shows his gambling gains. They argue about why she wants him to stay in the store. Val tries to leave, but Lady stops him, confessing she needs him. She follows him into the alcove.

Figure 2. Val and Lady in the alcove. Melissa Shakun Scene Design

ACT 2

Scene 1

It is early morning on the Saturday of Easter. Lady comes running downstairs to warn the drowsy Val that Jabe is coming down to inspect the store. As Jabe slowly makes his way downstairs, Lady scrambles to cover up Val's residency in the store. Jabe and Val finally meet and Jabe interrogates Val about whether he brings in business and what he is paid. Jabe makes his way to the confectionery and sees the changes Lady has made, which have essentially turned it into a replica of her father's wine garden. A calliope and a voice advertising the grand opening of the confectionery this evening are heard. Jabe is furious and tells the story of the burning of the original wine garden, letting it slip that "we" did it. Lady is stunned and makes him repeat that. Jabe confirms he said "WE" did it. Lady is in shock and does not even react when Nurse Porter runs to the landing to announce Jabe is hemorrhaging.

Scene 2

Sunset of the same day, Vee again bursts into the store, again unable to see. She claims to have seen a vision of the risen Christ. She says she saw His eyes in the sky, like two great burning lights. Val tries to help her in her distress and is again seen by the Sheriff in what appears to be a compromising position. He drags Vee out of the store, leaving Dog and Pee Wee to guard Val. The Sheriff returns to compare Val with pictures of wanted men. The men get rough with Val, ripping his shirt open and mocking him. When they touch his guitar, Val attacks them, jumping on the counter and fighting back. The Sheriff sends Pee Wee and Dog up to visit Jabe. He tells Val that he must leave town before sunrise or he cannot promise that Val will be safe.

Scene 3

Later the same night, Beulah, Dolly, Eva and Sister discuss Jabe's current condition and Lady's strange absence while her husband is so ill. Lady arrives with decorations for the opening and sporting a new coiffure and a lovely dress. The women cannot believe she intends to proceed with the opening of the confectionery. Carol arrives and tells Lady that she is hoping to get a ride out of town this night with Val, as she has heard he is leaving. Aunt Conjure appears, which drives the women out of the store. Carol gets her to give the Choctaw cry and Val arrives. Carol and Aunt Conjure exit. Lady tries to get Val to dress for the opening. When he tries to leave, she takes his guitar hostage and says she will go change, pack a bag and go with him. Nurse Porter comes downstairs and has an argument with Lady, who promptly fires her. The nurse confirms to Lady that she (Lady) is pregnant and that clearly the child is not Jabe's. Fearing for Val's safety, Lady now urges him to leave, but it is too late. As she celebrates the life within her, Jabe appears with a gun. Lady throws herself in front of Val, protecting him and is shot three times. Jabe rushes out of the store claiming that Val has shot Lady. Val tries to flee as the men rush into the store to track him down. Val is caught. The men go after him with a blowtorch as Lady dies in the confectionery. Aunt Conjure enters with Val's clothing and Carol pays her for the snakeskin jacket. Carol then walks out past the Sheriff, leaving Aunt Conjure alone in the store.

4. The Playwright: Tennessee Williams

March 26, 1911- February 25, 1983

Figure 3. Tennessee Williams. "The New York Times" *Times Topic* image

Thomas Lanier Williams, better known to the world as Tennessee Williams, is considered one of the most noteworthy playwrights of the twentieth-century. Williams was born into a family with strong pioneer roots in the Southern United States: Cornelius Coffin (shoe salesman) and Edwina Dakin Williams (daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman). Later in life he considered the name "Tennessee" (the state in which his father was born) as a manifestation of his Southern origins. Williams' ties to the South, along with influences from his personal and familial life often surface within his plays, specifically regarding his frequent sense of isolation and his struggles with homosexuality. A solitary existence was evident in the early years of Williams' life. Despite the parallels between his nickname and the place of his father's birth, the relationship with his family was far from intimate. His father was often overbearing and cold toward his son, alienating Williams from any type of paternal connection he may have had at an early age.

At the age of five, Williams was diagnosed with diphtheria which rendered him immobile for two years. To compensate his mother encouraged him to formulate stories and read—ultimately sparking his love of literature. His sister Rose was schizophrenic and was a great burden on the Williams household. As a result, Williams was entrusted to his grandparents. It was in their library the fourteen-year-old Williams came across two of his earliest literary influences: Anton Chekhov and D.H Lawrence. Williams became a published author by winning an essay contest by *Smart Set* magazine with his work titled *Can a Good Wife Be a Good Sport?.* In 1929 he was accepted to the University of Missouri, however financial difficulties forced him to abandon full-time studies and work for his father at the International Shoe Company (immortalized in *The Glass Menagerie*).

Williams' career echoed the instability of his personal life, as it was a turmoil of accomplishments and failures. Following a nervous breakdown in 1935, he produced his first play entitled *Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay!* which triggered the desire to further pursue a career in playwriting. He earned an English degree from the University of Iowa in 1938 and in 1939 he won an award from the Group Theater for a series of one-act plays. Shortly after this, Williams received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship that he put towards his play, *Battle of Angels* in 1940. Though the play was gravely unsuccessful, it was a first draft for *Orpheus Descending.* Williams supported himself with a variety of jobs before he signed a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood. Unfortunately, the number of his unsuccessful screenplays led to his release at the end of his contract. However, during this period he did write *The Glass Menagerie,* which earned him the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1945. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) both received New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and Pulitzer prizes. Success was coming to Williams, although it did not come without sacrifice.

Williams' later life was defined by a personal "outsider" status, springing from the conflict between homosexual desires and his strict puritanical upbringing. With no stable father-figure and a disorderly family life, he resented his own lifestyle which ultimately led to confusion and an unshakable depression. He underwent psychoanalysis and turned to alcohol and drugs, the financial strain eventually catching up to him. He could not free himself from a sense of seclusion, and he spent his nights alone, wandering the streets of New Orleans—a colourful and musical atmosphere that once stimulated and impacted many of his plays. He was unsure of who or "what" he was, with this newfound label of "queer" bestowed on him. He developed a type of fugitive lifestyle, continuously traveling from state to state and living in constant fear of impending disease or illness.

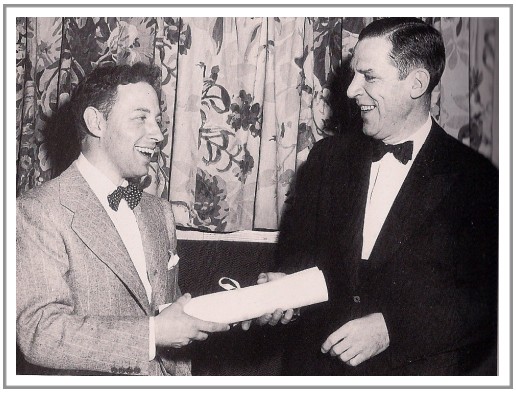

Figure 4. Williams accepts the "Drama Critics Award from Howard Burns for the best play of 1954"

"I live like a gypsy, I am a fugitive. No place seems tenable for me long anymore, not even my own skin."
-Tennessee Williams[iii]

Though longing for a meaningful relationship and companion, Williams would compensate for the affection he lacked in his life by becoming involved with multiple partners (men and women) until his first publicly announced consummated homosexual affair, at the age of twenty-eight. He eventually found love in a second-generation Sicilian-American, Frank Merlo, who served in the United States Navy in World War II. Though providing a sense of stability in Williams' life, Frank unfortunately passed away due to lung cancer in 1961, tossing Williams back into a world of deep despondency. Although Williams suffered greatly from the difficulties he endured in his life, he captures those experiences in his characterizations and situations within many of his works, including *Orpheus Descending*.

"Perhaps the major theme of my writings, the affliction of loneliness that follows me like my shadow, a very ponderous shadow too heavy to drag after me all my days and nights."
-Tennessee Williams[iv]

Works:[v]

-*American Blues* (1939)
-*The Glass Menagerie* (1945)
-*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)
-*Summer and Smoke* (1948)
-*The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950)
-*The Rose Tattoo* (1951)
-*Camino Real* (1953)
-*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)
-*In the Winter of Cities* (1956)
-*Baby Doll* (1956)
-*Orpheus Descending (Battle of Angels, 1940)* (1957)
-*Suddenly Last Summer* (1958)
-*Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959)
-*A Period of Adjustment* (1960)
-*Night of the Iguana* (1961)
-*The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1962)
-*The Eccentricities of a Nightingale* (1964)
-*Kingdom of Earth* (1967)
-*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969)
-*Dragon Country* (1970)
-*Small Craft Warnings* (1973)
-*The Two Character Play (Out Cry*, 1973)
-*Eight Mortal Ladies Possessed* (1974)
-*Moise and the World of Reason* (1975)
-*The Red Devil Battery Sign* (1976)
-*Androgine, Mon Amour* (1977)
-*Vieux Carré* (1978)
-*A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* (1978)
-*Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980)
-*Something Cloudy, Something Clear* (1981)
-*27 Wagons Full of Cotton* (1982)

5. Director's Notes

Approaching *Orpheus Descending* as director has been a daunting task. The rich layering and depth of this work offers a staggering number of avenues to pursue. This is not surprising when one remembers Williams lived with this play for at least 20 years. Selecting the strands to highlight in this production has been a long and exciting journey, but I was well accompanied by fellow explorers: Michael Greves (designer), Karen McDonald (assistant director) and Erica Charles (dramaturge).

It has been almost 30 years since I directed my last Tennessee Williams play: *Camino Real* with Equity Showcase Theatre. I always meant to return to this great American playwright. I continued to study his plays, read biographies and promise myself to go there again. I suppose that being an American by birth and education (albeit from New York and California) and having been named for a Southern state, I had an instinctual link to this playwright who was so important in the development of American theatre. It seemed the 100th anniversary of his birth was a good time to return to him.

Williams was one of several American playwrights of his generation who struggled to develop a truly American form of tragedy. In some cases, they returned to the classical roots of tragedy. Eugene O'Neill's trilogy *Mourning Become Electra* is an example. Arthur Miller is generally considered to have found the truly American idiom with his *Death of a Salesman.* With *Orpheus Descending*, Williams reached back to Greece for inspiration, but, as in most of his plays, he is firmly rooted in the deep South. He is also exploring/dissecting his own life and his perpetual sense of alienation as a misfit, an outsider.

The central theme for us has been the outsider. In *Orpheus*, Williams scatters parts of himself liberally amongst several characters: Val, Lady, Vee and Carol. They are all outsiders, as are Mr. Dubinsky and Aunt Conjure. The town destroys outsiders. The people of the town are nominally "good Christian folk", but their behaviour reveals the true bigotry and dangerous intolerance. In our production we are attempting to tie together many threads to make a living, if suffocating community. A surprising discovery was the humor in the play—a humour with frightening undertones.

Like other playwrights of his time, Williams was influenced, particularly in his early writing, by the surrealist and expressionist theatre which was coming from Europe. In the face of criticism and ridicule, Williams stuck stubbornly the non-realistic elements of *Orpheus Descending* throughout most of its versions and alterations, although successive productions watered it down. We have tried in this production to honour that exploration.

-Virginia Reh

Figure 5. Tennessee Williams. *Glasgay!* promotional image

6. Production History

Orpheus Descending is a play that underwent a multitude of revisions and re-writes by Tennessee Williams en route to the version we see today. In its most preliminary stages, the playwright referred to it as *Opus V*. This later became *Shadow of My Passion*, the early title of *Battle of Angels*; Williams' fifth full-length play. *Opus V* was first written in 1939 and contained much violent and melodramatic subject matter. Williams created this play at a time when he felt his writing was wasteful and lacked direction, and was determined to turn over a new leaf with this piece. *Opus V* endured many modifications, including both a reduction and enhancement of the symbolic fire motif still found in *Orpheus Descending*, as it was to potentially be called *Figures in Flame*.

In 1940, *Battle of Angels* emerged from these drafts, and its initial stages seemed quite promising as Williams exhibited the ability to create a violently themed play into a potentially commercial success. It was intended to be a part of a trilogy of plays, the last of which, *The Aristocrats*, would later become Williams' triumphant work, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Unfortunately, the Theatre Guild's decision to relocate of the premiere of *Battle of Angels* from New Haven, Connecticut to Boston, Massachusetts ultimately sealed its fate, with mixed reviews ranging from an "astonishing play" [vi] to creating the sensation of "having been dunked in mire".[vii] Boston reacted badly to its subject matter and morals and members of the Boston City Council, including some who had not even yet seen the play, deemed it unfit for viewing. It was due to such poor reception that the Theatre Guild was forced to close the show.

By 1945, Williams had begun his modifications to the script, attempting to present his violent themes in a way that was "acceptably controlled and measured" [viii] and providing clarification of his characters and ideas. There were more revisions in 1951, featuring a much less realistic approach to the script. In 1953, Williams began another set of changes, eventually bringing a more "earthly" tone to the play, with a simplified and more linear plot structure and characters with more resilient and realistic personas. After almost two decades the play finally resurfaced as *Orpheus Descending* in 1957. In 1960 it was made into a film staring Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani, titled *The Fugitive Kind*. In 1974, *Battle of Angels* was remounted in a revised and remarkably successful New York production and fourteen years later in 1988, *Orpheus Descending* was met with rave reviews following its production in London, England. *Orpheus Descending* was staged by the Stratford Festival in 2005.

Figure 6. Anna Magnani as Lady, Marlon Brando as Val and Joanne Woodward as Carol in *The Fugitive Kind* (1960)

7. Faith, Myth and Spirituality

In *Orpheus Descending*, Tennessee Williams has blended mythology with Christianity and, at times, an inexplicable spirituality. The plot primarily derives from the Greek myth of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, but there are elements of other Greek myths. The Christian calendar (40 days of Lent into Easter) frames the play and provides a central image of rebirth and rejuvenation. Jesus dies and is resurrected, which has its parallel in Orpheus' descent to the underworld to bring Eurydice back from the dead. Lady is barren and Val reawakens life in her. Three, which is central to Christianity and powerful in magic and literature, is a dominant number in the play. Val interacts with three women: Lady, Carol and Vee. Lady has three men in her life: David (past), Jabe (present) and Val (future).
Carol and Aunt Conjure both appear three times.

Myth

Orpheus, the son of the Muse Calliope, was the greatest musician and poet of Greek mythology. He was married to a beautiful woman named Eurydice. One day, a Satyr chased her through a field. As she fled from him, she stepped on a serpent, which bit her heel and killed her. Desperate to save her, Orpheus went to see Hades in the underworld, to try and convince him to give her back. He charmed the god with his music, and so Hades made a deal with him. Eurydice could return under one condition. Orpheus must walk ahead of her to the Upper world, and not turn to look back at her until they both reached the surface, or she would be lost to him forever. He left with her close behind him, but because she was a spirit, he could not hear her steps. He resisted as long as he could, but as he reached the surface, he looked back, fearing he had been deceived. He saw his wife for the last time, standing on the threshold of the Upper world, before she slipped back down to Hades, and the door was closed to him forever.

Figure 7. Image of Orpheus and Eurydice in mythology

There are two endings to Orpheus' tragedy. In one version, he became inconsolable with grief, and refused to play music ever again. A group of Maenads found him in this state, and attacked him when he refused to play for them. They ripped him apart in anger. Another version claims that he played his lute so mournfully after losing his wife again and calling out in song for his death, that the animals took pity on him, and ripped him to pieces as they wept for him. All versions agree that his head and lute were thrown into the river where they eventually came to rest on the isle of Lesbos. It is from there that the Muses retrieved their lost son, and took his head and lute to Mount Olympus, where he sings to them to this day.

Figure 8. Opera Atelier's production of Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (*Orpheus and Eurydice*)

Christianity

Orpheus Descending contains many references to the Christian faith. The most significant allusions surround rebirth and rejuvenation, as the action of the play unfolds in the Easter season. Easter is the celebration in the Christian liturgical year that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It follows the forty-day period of Lent; a term derived from the old-English word, "long" that mirrors the duration of time Christ spent sacrificing in the wilderness. Ash Wednesday commences this period where Christians are reminded of their mortality (coming from and returning to the earth) by being marked with a cross of ashes on their foreheads. In the last week of Lent is Palm-Sunday, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, followed by Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, the evening of the Last Supper and betrayal by His disciple, Judas. The following day, Good Friday, symbolizes His crucifixion and Holy Saturday, the day He was laid in the tomb. Easter morning, celebrated on the third day of Easter weekend, is the commemoration of Christ's rising from the dead. It marks the end of suffering and the opening of the Kingdom of Heaven and salvation for believers.

In *Orpheus Descending*, Val Xavier arrives in Two River County during Lent. The name "Val" is short for "Valentine" the Christian martyr who is linked to romantic pairings as well as death and regeneration of life. Val arrives in the town sporting a snakeskin jacket, evoking images of rejuvenation (snakes shedding their skin) and temptation (Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*). The snakeskin also ties back to Eurydice being bitten by a serpent. Val's death at the end of the play signifies the mortal being's return to ashes (commemorated on Ash Wednesday), yet his snakeskin jacket is left behind, suggesting eternal life.

Significant in the Easter story are the three Mary's: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (assumed mother of Jesus) and Mary Salome (in the Book of John she is Mary, the wife of Clopas[ix]). Val is associated with three women: Lady Torrance, Vee Talbott and Carol Cutrere. Although the parallels are not necessarily clear, there are links to Mary, the Mother (Vee and Lady) and to Mary Magdalene (both Lady and Carol). Both Vee and Carol also recall Greek prophets (Vee the blind Tiresias and Carol Cassandra), who saw the future clearly, but were never believed.

* Images can be found in the set description of the room Lady sets for Val in the mercantile in Act 1, Scene 4: "*He crosses the alcove and disappears behind the curtain. A light goes on behind it, making its bizarre pattern translucent: a gold tree with scarlet fruit and white birds on it, formally designed*".[x] The Garden of Eden is epitomized in Papa Romano's wine garden which was burned to the ground, projected in the image of the "gold tree with scarlet fruit". Lady chooses to resurrect the wine garden with the opening of the Confectionary. "White birds", such as doves, signify rebirth in Christian faith, thus temptation is combined with rejuvenation as Lady chooses to open the Confectionary the day before Easter Sunday.

Hoodoo

The term Conjure is actually a Hoodoo term for a Witch Doctor. Most Hoodoo practitioners have been African American, but there have been a few notable White, Latino and Aboriginal American practitioners as well. Hoodoo conjuration is thought to begin with the African Slaves. Cases were documented in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. It was a common practice, but has since faded from common knowledge. It is important to note that over the decades, White people have mistakenly associated Hoodoo with Voodoo black magic, but in fact, these are two different forms of folk magic. Voodoo is an organized religion, with its own gods, a hierarchy and an established theology. Hoodoo does not have gods, or any kind of hierarchy, base theology, clergy, laity or order of liturgical services like a formal religion. Hoodoo is simply a group of magical practices, used for the will of God. Hoodoo practitioners believe that any magic you do, whether for good or evil, is merely a tool to fulfill God′s will. God is considered to be the archetypal Hoodoo doctor. The Bible is a powerful source of conjuration spells and is used as a protective talisman. It is said to be the single greatest conjure book in the world—it is a strong talisman of conjuring practices. The Psalms are considered to be the most magically effective. Another Biblical conjurer is Moses, the Man of the mountain. He used his powers to save the Hebrews from slavery.

While traditions and practices vary in different areas, there is a common thread throughout each region. The goal of Hoodoo is to allow people access to supernatural forces to improve their daily lives. It focuses in on individual magical power through home-made potions and charms. It is based on folk religion, magic and medical practices, using herbs, minerals, animal body parts, possessions, and bodily fluids to create powerful charms and curses. It is an important tool for contacting ancestors and other spirits.

Tennessee Williams explores Hoodoo culture through both Aunt Conjure and Carol. While Auntie seems to be the only open practitioner, Carol has a thorough understanding of Hoodoo practices, talismans and charms. Both Auntie and Carol make multiple references to the significance of bones, particularly bird bones. These are used to make talismans to warn of danger. The bones are to be tied together and hung outside near the doorway of the house. When someone approaches who means the inhabitants harm, the bones will rattle, warning the people inside of the danger. Similarly, red-brick dust scattered in doorways and windows will prevent anyone from entering the house if they mean you harm. It is suspected that Carol may also use a love bonding spell to connect herself to Val, thus explaining her sudden premonition of his life being at risk. These spells are extensive, and take several days to complete. They require a series of candles, herbs, a Bible, and either a photo, or something belonging to the person you wish to bind yourself to. Williams uses Hoodoo to explore another side of Christian nature from Vee; a side that uses faith and meditation to bring about a deep understanding of the world and its powers.

8. Aunt Conjure and the Choctaw

Red-Blacks in Society

Tennessee Williams uses the character of Aunt Conjure in *Orpheus Descending* to explore the condition of Red-Blacks in American society. In the aftermath of the Atlantic Slave trade and European colonization, White Americans discriminated against persons of African descent as a matter of cultural tradition. Red-Blacks are the products of mixed breeding between Native Americans and African American slaves. These unions produced many children of mix race who were considered apart from the full bloods, which accommodated the potential to polarize the Native American community. Native Americans often denied their mixed children and mothers were sent out of the village with such offspring, unwelcomed by any society, and forced to scavenge for survival. Over time, the Africans—from which Red-Black Cherokee descend—were characterized as merely nameless, culture-less slaves; considered little more than animals.

These people could identify their culture with neither the Native Americans, or the African American slaves, as both groups denied and ostracized them from their communities. This mixed breed of African and Native cultures was considered to be the lowest human life form, almost to the point of becoming inhuman in the eyes of White and Native people. While the Natives provided Black slaves with a better life than they had at the hand of White masters, the Natives were ever mindful of White reactions. Keeping in mind the need for approval from their White counterparts, it is natural that some Native Americans eventually came to reject Red-Black Indians, or perceive them as inferior or someone to despise. In order to maintain a peaceful balance with their White oppressors, Natives turned away their mixed children, and forced them to fend for themselves, or die. Natives, particularly those civilized by the White community "expressed abhorrence and denigration for those who were characterized by dark skin".[xi] This group of people became a culture-less, nomadic group, wandering about the United States, endlessly seeking a place of acceptance in the modern society in which they found themselves.

Tennessee Williams uses this kind of "based human life-form" to take on the very strong earthly spiritual entity within the show. He openly acknowledges the fear White people had of this race, and their open disgust with their mixed breeding. He uses everyone in the play to degrade Aunt Conjure further, except Carol. For Carol, Aunt Conjure proves to be an invaluable tool which she can use to further her exhibitionism, and also to help with her connection to Val and the spirit world.*

** Although Williams intended this character to be Choctaw (of mixed racial background), in our production we have focused more on her strange mysticism and her Hoodoo practice (perhaps acquired by living among the stray Choctaw who remained mostly hidden in Mississippi).*

The Choctaw Nation- A Brief History

Within their tribe, the Choctaws are called Chahta, after a legendary Minko (chief). They are a Muskogean tribe, also known by outsiders as Chahchiuma or Chatot. They trace their roots back to the Mississippi Valley and parts of Alabama. Their flag contained Minko's seal, featuring a circle surrounding a calumet (a traditional smoking pipe), and a boy with three arrows to represent the three sub-tribes. They were the first tribe to adopt a flag during the civil war in 1860 when they sided with the Confederates. Their religious doctrines share many beliefs with tribes of South-Eastern regions of North America. They, like all tribes, had their own myth of emergence. They believe they emerged from the earth through "Nunih Waya", the Mother Mound. The Creeks were first to emerge, followed by the Cherokees, Chicksaws and the Choctaws. The most distinctive practice was head flattening; male infants would have a board attached to their heads to help it grow flat.

Figure 9. The Seal of the Choctaw Nation

The most important religious ceremony for the Choctaw was the Green Corn Festival. It was both a ceremony of Thanksgiving and a means of self-purification. It took place during the summer when the kernels of the corn crop filled out and could be roasted and eaten. The festival begins with a feast of the previous years food; men clean common areas, and women clean houses. This was followed by two days of fasting in which crimes and social conflicts were discussed in order to be forgiven. The festival then concluded with a fire ritual. All fires would be extinguished and the people would fall into silence. A priest would light a new fire, symbolizing the beginning of a new year. Everyone would dress up in their best clothes for this final celebration.

The Choctaw's story seemingly ends with the sad history of their relocation from their country (referred to now as the Deep South). Their path is known as the Trail of Tears. In the 1830s they were moved to lands west of the Mississippi River. This move was the result of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, which was ratified on February 25, 1831. President Jackson was anxious to make it a model of removal. They emigrated in three major stages. The first stages was in 1831 (during the fall season). The second stage was in 1832, and the final stage was in 1833. The first wave in 1831 suffered the most, the second and third waves planted fields promptly and so experienced fewer hardships than more of the other expatriated tribes. This removal of the tribes continued all throughout the 19th century. In 1846, 1,000 Choctaw were removed from Mississippi. By 1930, only 1,665 Choctaw Natives were left in Mississippi in total. Nearly 15,000 Choctaw made the move to Indian Territory and then to Oklahoma. 2,500 died along the Trail of Tears. Joseph Cobb (1849) described Choctaws as having no virtue, nobility, or any redeeming qualities. In some respect, he felt that Blacks, especially Native Africans, were more interesting and admirable; completely superior to the Red man in every way. The Tribes he knew best– Choctaw and Chicksaw, were beneath contempt.

9. Historical Content

The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) which followed the American Civil War was intended to reunite the Southern and Northern states. It provided the South with ways in which White and Black citizens could exist in a non-slavery society as mandated by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Blacks were granted citizenship rights in the South, sparking resentment among the White population.

The White supremacist Ku Klux Klan (KKK or The Klan) was formed in 1866 in an attempt to return power to the White population and restore the South back to its ante-bellum (pre-Civil War) status. The Klan sported white robes, masks and conical hats designed to mask their identities. Their terror ranged from threats, burnings of homes, violent attacks and murder of African American citizens. White southerners succeeded in reestablishing white supremacy by the end of Reconstruction. They feared that their social status was threatened and needed protection. Black people were "getting out of place", and lynching became the expression of White American fear of Black economic and social advancement. White supremacists believed that Blacks could only be governed by fear, and lynching was seen as the most effective means of control. Between 1882 and 1968, Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings in the United States, with 539 victims. Many of these lynchings took place in smaller towns and isolated communities in the South, where poverty, illiteracy and a lack of community recreation existed. During World War I, many Blacks left the South for new job opportunities in the North and military service overseas. Returning Black veteran soldiers did not want to go back to their second-class status in the United States, which elevated tensions and led to many lynchings. In earlier years (1890s), burning, torture and dismemberment were common methods of punishment. A second Klan existed in the early-to-mid 1920s and operated under the same codes and practices, burning Latin crosses to intimidate and drive away "outsiders" such as Blacks. This group advocated Americanism through discrimination including racism, anti-catholicism and anti-semitism.

After Reconstruction, the Southern states passed a body of anti-Black laws, known as the Jim Crow Laws (1877-1960s). "Jim Crow" is a term that originates from a minstrel performer in the 1830s, Thomas Rice, who performed in blackface as a shabby character named Jim Crow. These laws enforced segregation of Blacks from Whites with a "separate but equal" mandate, though equality was questionable as facilities for Blacks were always inferior. Segregation was enforced in many areas of life, including but not limited to schools, medical facilities, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, public transportation and especially employment. Blacks were forced into menial jobs such as plantation workers and domestic help, though an optimistic view was held by certain Black leaders that accommodation would lead to eventual acceptance. During World War II, African American civil rights leaders persuaded the government to set up all-Black combat units as a test to show that Black soldiers could perform tasks as well as White soldiers. In 1944, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) won court cases that challenged segregation, and the Democratic party, which had dominated the South since the end of Reconstruction came under growing pressure from African American citizens to support civil rights. In the 1950s, the NAACP continued to fight segregation in the courts, specifically in transportation on busses or trains, and a series of Supreme Court rulings gradually addressed segregation on all public transportation.

On May 17th, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, that stated laws mandating segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. The White Citizens Council was formed in Mississippi to prevent implementation of integration, and the movement quickly spread across the South. The Council consisted of bankers, doctors, lawyers, plantation owners, legislators, preachers, teachers and merchants. The Council organized boycotts and protests, held meetings opposing school integration, refused to serve Black people in stores and pressured employers to fire their African American workers. Their newspaper, *The Citizens' Council*, was designed to rouse the White population over the premise that their children were to share classrooms with Black children. Mississippi court judge, Thomas Pickens Brady wrote a widely-read novel titled *Black Monday*, which served as a guideline for the Council's movement. At the height of the Council in 1957 its membership reached 250,000. It would be more than ten years for desegregation to occur in Mississippi and the rest of the South.

Figure 10. Ku Klux Klan Ritual/Initiation Ceremony, 1954

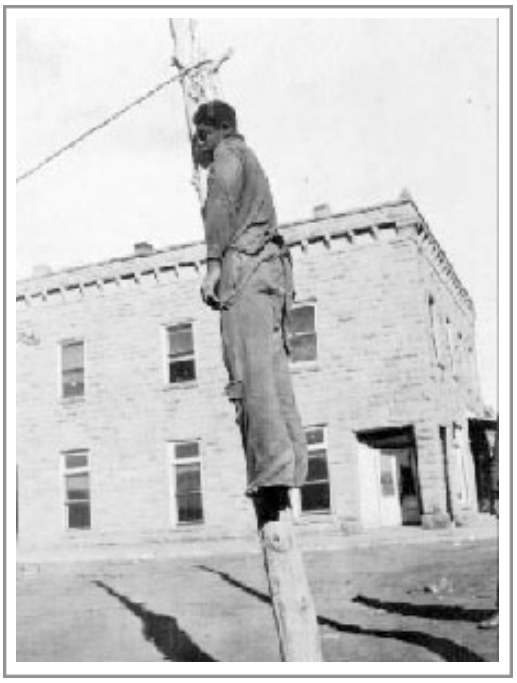

Figure 11. Brutal lynching of an African American citizen

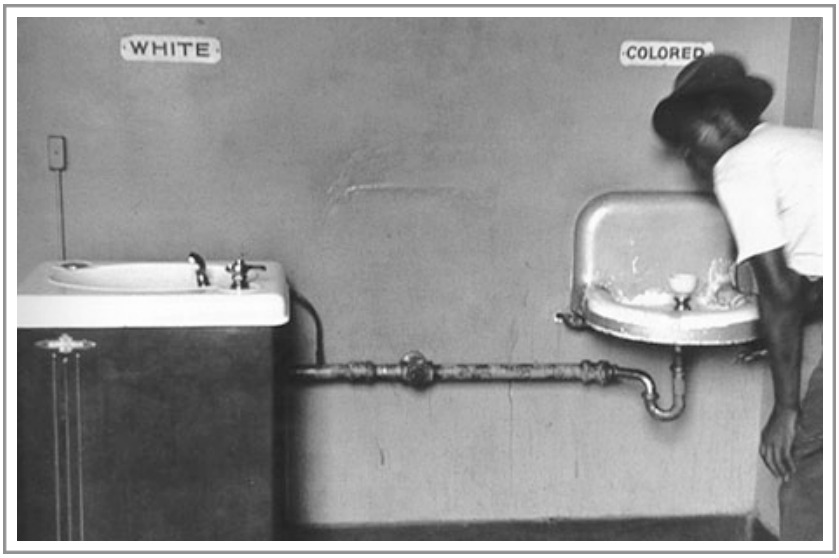

Figure 12. An African American gentleman taking a drink from a segregated "Coloured" water fountain; enforced by the Jim Crow "separate but equal" mandate

10. Dramaturge's Notes

The Unanswerable Question

"...I was waiting for something like if you ask a question you wait for someone to answer, but you ask the wrong question or you ask the wrong person and the answer don't come...And then...you get the make-believe answer..."
- Val Xavier, Act 1 Scene 3[xii]

Within *Orpheus Descending* exists many themes that question what it is to be "accepted". This question is almost unanswerable. We know what it is to be alienated; society determines an unspoken criteria that we must follow or thus be shunned. Is the answer then based on how we conform to these unspoken rules? This question is examined in *Orpheus Descending* as the status of the "outsider" is presented in the play through many facets. The historical and political undertones of repudiation are brought forth in the play with the white supremacist "Mystic Crew" as Black integration in the 1950s threatened the White population of the South. This resulted in extreme terror instilled upon African American individuals. The ultimate driving force of such ill-reception was the fear of the unknown; a departure from familiar customs that challenged a structural and linear way of existence.

Surfacing from this theme, Tennessee Williams presents a selection of characters estranged from Two River County; in particular Val, whose fugitive lifestyle reflects Williams' personal "fear of the unknown". As a homosexual in the twentieth-century, Williams existed as an outsider of his own mind. A search for personal understanding was the result of an unstable domestic life and internal battles streaming from a stringent puritanical upbringing to the burden of an "abominable secret" [xiii] of homosexuality. The setting of the Torrance Mercantile is a synthesis of both of these aspects: a hellish atmosphere that represents Williams' internal struggle and desires for liberation through personal acceptance. As Val, Williams presents us with this insoluble question of what it means to be completely, unconditionally accepted to which Lady provides the "make believe" answer of "love". Love in this sense takes on shallow qualities; an encasing under which lies a desire for complete comprehension of self. Throughout his life, Williams pursued many "transient loves" in search for "lasting companionship" [xiv] and an understanding of self he could not obtain on his own. Williams' only consummated sexual affair with a woman was with one he called "Sally" in 1937.[xv] Sally supplied Williams with a sense of caring and intimacy he lacked in his life. Like Lady's make believe answer, she provided Williams with temporary "love" that was soon to end following false proclamations that she was pregnant with his child. It is not by coincidence that this is reflected in Lady's conceiving children by both David and Val. The failure of both pregnancies metaphorically alludes to Williams' inability to apprehend a purpose for his own existence.

Orpheus Descending is a play that has paved the way for many in the search for the answer to acceptance. Canadian playwright John Herbert, the "pioneer" of gay drama[xvi] wrote *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1965) at a time when homosexuality was considered illegal in Canada. Though he displayed a more overt lifestyle than Williams, Herbert too faced the status of an outsider and was arrested in 1946 for "gross indecency".[xvii] *Fortune and Men's Eyes* is set in a penitentiary, and is culturally representative of the oppression many homosexual individuals felt at this time, similar to Williams' personal entrapment reflected in the "hell" of the Torrance Mercantile.[xviii] Herbert uses characters that would have been comparably ill-received at the time of its creation –a drag-queen, and those of homo and ambiguous sexuality– to question acceptance in a Canadian demographic. Though written in 1965, Herbert challenges present-day conventions as it would be about thirty-five years between the legalization of homosexuality in Canada (1968), and welcoming same-sex couples in the institution of marriage (2005).[xix]

Perhaps what Williams has suggested, to playwrights like Herbert and readers alike, is that complete acceptance, personal or societal does not yet exist, rather takes the form of different levels of tolerance. Each level brings us continually closer to comprehension, yet a totality of understanding one another has not yet come to be. Through Lady, Williams notes that "corruption" is not the answer.[xx] We are not yet condemned to a life of total isolation, but must attempt to solve the "unanswerable". Perhaps Williams is proposing that in order to do so, we too must engage in a transitory lifestyle like Val to search for a time and place when tolerance can turn into full appreciation of self and another.

"To know me is not to love me. At best, it is to tolerate me."
-Tennessee Williams[xxi]

Figure 13. *Orpheus Descending* Collage. Prepared by Erica Charles, dramaturge

11. Discussion Questions

1. The Characters

a) Which characters would be considered the "outsiders" of the play?

b) Williams wrote in his introduction to the play, that *Orpheus Descending* is about "unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people".[xxii] Williams wrote that some of the characters simply accept prescribed answers, but not the four main characters—Val, Lady, Carol, and Vee. They continue to ask questions. What might those questions be, and what answers, if any, do these characters find?

2. The Plot

a) Music plays a very important role in this play. What is its significance to the story?

b) What does Val's guitar, which he considers his "life's companion", represent?

c) What motif does Val's snakeskin jacket represent in the play? At the end when Carol takes it?

3. The Playwright: Tennessee Williams

a) Tennessee Williams mentions that the major themes in all his writings are centered on a sense of loneliness that he faced all of his life. In *Orpheus Descending*, which character(s) can be considered lonely?

b) Have you ever felt lonely or misunderstood? Why? What did it feel like?

4. Production History

a) If the play were to be called *Figures in Flame* (one of the early original titles that Tennessee Williams was considering) which character do you think best fits this description and why?

5. Faith, Myth and Spirituality

a) Considering the myth of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, why would Williams name the play *Orpheus Descending*?

b) In the play, which character would be Orpheus and why? Which character would then be Eurydice?

c) What are some elements that make up a Greek play? Can you find any of those in *Orpheus Descending*?

d) Williams uses many Christian references in the play. What is he trying to say about Two River County and its people?

e) In viewing the play from a Christian standpoint, Val's character can be considered similar to a Christ-like figure. What does his arrival bring to the townspeople of Two River County? How does he change their lives? Whose lives are the most affected? Why?

f) What significance does the character of Aunt Conjure have in the play versus the Christian attitudes of the townspeople?

6. Historical Content/The "Outsider"

a) In Act 1 Scene 1, Carol mentions that she protested against the wrongful conviction of a man named Willie McGee for having "improper relations" with a white woman.[xxiii] This was a true story and McGee was killed, despite the fact that there wasn't enough sufficient evidence against him. McGee claimed that their "relations" were consensual.[xxiv] Why would Williams mention this particular case in the play? How many people are wrongfully convicted of crimes today?

b) If the Willie McGee case is just one example of the race/class divisions of that time period in the United States, what do you think were the sentiments of most Southern people at that time? How do those sentiments transcend into the play?

c) What questions does Williams pose to his audience concerning issues of race, class and status? Have you ever been isolated because you didn't fit in?

d) There are many instances when gossip is used in this play. It is used in the beginning to provide exposition for the audience and it is also used in a negative way to hurt other characters. Have you ever been the subject of unwanted gossip? How did it make you feel?

e) Have you ever gossiped about someone and it led to a negative result? How did it make you feel?

f) Who fits into the social norms and expectations of Two River County and who doesn't? How does this separate the characters?

g) Lady is of Italian descent and not a native to Two River County. How would her heritage categorize her status in the county? Why isn't she accepted amongst the townspeople?

7. You Be the Playwright- Envision the Future

a) Consider a different ending to the play. Say Lady successfully escapes Two River County with Val. How would their future be different? Would Lady and Val still be together or would Val have fled leaving Lady alone with their baby?

b) If you had to rewrite the ending to the play, what would *you* change? Would you keep it the same? Now take it further… If you had to comment on where each character would be five years from now, where would they be? What future would you have envisioned for them?

Figure 14. Denise Crosby, Claudia Mason and Gale Harold in Theater/Theater's production of *Orpheus Descending* (2010)

Figure 15. Val and Lady. Brad Baker Graphic Designs and Theatrical Artwork

12. List of Terms[xxv]

Boll Weevil

Noun

1. A snout beetle (*Anthonomus grandis*) that attacks the bolls of cotton.
2. A Southern Democrat with conservative views who often votes with the Republicans as part of a Southern or conservative power bloc (Informal).

Bootleg

Noun

1. Alcoholic liquor unlawfully made, sold, or transported, without registration or payment of taxes.
2. Something, as a recording, made, reproduced or sold illegally or without authorization.

Bootlegger

Noun

Illegal liquor dealer.

Calliope

Noun

Also called a **steam organ**: a musical instrument of a set of harsh-sounding steam whistles that are activated by a keyboard.

Dago

Noun

Slang: A disparaging and offensive term for a person of Italian or sometimes Spanish descent.

Textual Reference:

Lady, Act 1 Scene 2: "*We had fifteen little white arbours with tables in them and they were covered with—grapevines and—we sold* **Dago** *red wine an' bootleg whiskey and beer.*" [xxvi]

Frigidaire

Trademark

A brand of electric refrigerator.

This particular brand became so well known in the refrigeration field in the early twentieth-century, that many Americans called any refrigerator, a "**Frigidaire**".[xxvii]

Hoosegow

Noun
Slang: A jail.

Textual Reference:
Val, Act 1 Scene 2: "*Mizz Talbott took me in and give me a cot in the* **hoosegow** *and said if I hung around till you got back that you might give me a job in the store to help out since your husband was tooken sick.*"[xxviii]

Lynching

Noun from *Verb* **lynch**.
To put to death, especially by hanging, by mob action and without legal authority.

Pellagra

Noun
A disease caused by a deficiency of niacin in the diet**,** characterized by skin changes, severe nerve dysfunction, mental symptoms, and diarrhea.

Prohibition

Noun
The legal prohibiting of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic drinks for common consumption.

Seagram('s)

The **Seagram Company Ltd.** was a large corporation headquartered in Montréal, Québec, Canada which was the largest distiller of alcoholic beverages in the world. "Seagram's Seven Crown", or "Segram's Seven" is a blend of Canadian whiskey produced by Diageo under the Seagram name.[xxix]

Textual Reference:
Lady, Act 2 Scene 3: "*She asked if Ruby Lightfoot had delivered a case of* **Seagram's**." [xxx]

Wop

Noun
Slang: A disparaging and offensive term for an Italian or a person of Italian descent.

Textual Reference:
Beulah, Act 1 Scene 1: "*Lady's father was a* **Wop** *from the old country. When prohibition come, The* **Wop** *took to bootleggin' like a duck to water.*"[xxxi]

13. List of Figures

Cover: *Orpheus Descending* (2011). Brock University Department of Dramatic Arts Production Poster. Designed by Michael Greves. http://www.brocku.ca/humanities/departments-and-centres/dramatic-arts/events

Figure 1: "A Great Black and White Desert Snake Eating". Photo Copyright: Enrique Ramos Lopez. http://www.123rf.com/photo_4966220_a-great-black-and-white-desert-snake-eating.html

Figure 2: Val and Lady in the alcove. From *Orpheus Descending*. Photo Copyright: Melissa Shakun Scene Design. http://www.melissashakun.com/scene_design.php

Figure 3: Tennessee Williams. "The New York Times": *Times Topic* image. http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/w/tennessee_williams/index.html

Figure 4: Williams accepts the "Drama Critics Award from Howard Burns for the best play of 1954". Leverich, Tom. *The Unknown Tennessee Williams.* New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1995.

Figure 5: Tennessee Williams. *Glasgay!* promotional image. *http://www.list.co.uk/article/12990-glasgay-tennessee-williams/*

Figure 6: *The Fugitive Kind* Screenshot. "Influences Only". *http://influencesonly.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/i-mad-as-hell-and-im-not-going-to-take-it-any-more/600full-the-fugitive-kind-screenshot/*

Figure 7: Image of Orpheus and Eurydice in mythology. http://www.fanpop.com/spots/greek-mythology/images/3205190/title/orpheus-eurydice-photo

Figure 8: Opera Atelier's production of Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (*Orpheus and Eurydice*). Photo Copyright: Bruce Zinger, 2007. http://www.operaatelier.com/education/chats.htm

Figure 9: The Seal of the Choctaw Nation. https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/michael/www/choctaw/

Figure 10: Ku Klux Klan Ritual/Initiation Ceremony, 1954. http://www.redlance.de/MLKing/Stories/KuKluxKlan.htm

Figure 11: Brutal lynching of an African American Citizen. "Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia". Ferris State University. http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what/

Figure 12: African American drinking from a segregated "Coloured" water fountain. "Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia". Ferris State University. http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/what/

Figure 13: *Orpheus Descending* Collage. Prepared by Erica Charles from:

-"Black and White Guitar Strobist". Photo Copyright: Momento Creative, Simon Smith. *http://www.flickr.com/photos/momentocreative/3902815061/*

-Kratzenstein-Stub, G. 1793-1860: "Orpheus and Eurydice". Photo Copyright: Maicarförlag-GML. http://englishihonorsmythology.wikispaces.com/Orpheus

Figure 14: Denise Crosby, Claudia Mason and Gale Harold in Theater/Theater's production of *Orpheus Descending,* 2010. Photo Copyright: Robert E. Beckwith. http://blogging.la/2010/01/20/orpheus-descends-upon-los-angeles/ http://www.playbill.com/news/article/135702-Harold-and-Crosby-to-Lead-Orpheus-Descending-in-Los-Angeles

Figure 15: Val and Lady. Brad Baker Graphic Designs and Theatrical Artwork. Collin Theatre Centre. http://www.collintheatrecenter.com/Faculty/BradB/PersonalWeb/Text/GraphicDesigns.htm

14. Endnotes and Bibliography

Endnotes

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