

THE JADED GARDEN:  
A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF  
NOSTALGIC FEMALE CHARACTERS  
BY PAI HSIEN-YUNG AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study consist of a comparative analysis of the nostalgic female characters in Pai Hsien-yung's two short stories: "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," and "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," and Tennessee Williams's two plays: *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Beginning with a brief discussion of the socio-historical background of Pai's Republican China and Williams's American South, a general analysis of previous scholarship on Pai and Williams's works follows. The analysis of the selected works focuses on the stylistic and symbolic features in Pai and Williams's characterizations, such as Pai's use of stream-of-consciousness, reference to the *k'un* opera *Peony Pavilion*, elaboration over descriptive details of the setting, symbolic use of clothing and accessories, and Williams's symbolic use of music genres: "Blues Piano" and the "Varsouviana Polka," and his use of rhythm and other poetic elements in his characters' speech, in the style of "personal lyricism."

My study is based on a close-reading analysis of the selected works by Pai and Williams. Their humanistic approach to their respective declining aristocratic cultures and their sympathy for the nostalgic female characters' tragedies will be more apparent when the study focuses mostly on the texts themselves. Their similar belief in the universal values, such as compassion, sacrifice, and courage, has made their works comparable. In the discussion of themes, the idea of the humanistic role of literature articulated by William Faulkner in his Nobel Prize Speech is also used to connect Pai and Williams's sympathetic approach to their characters.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gardens have frequently been used a metaphor for love and romance in Chinese literature, from the “spring-filled” garden in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ming Dynasty drama *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) or the Great Prospect Garden (大觀園) to the renowned vernacular novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), gardens in Chinese literature have witnessed various kinds of love stories.<sup>1</sup> Pai Hsien-yung (白先勇), a major figure in twentieth century Chinese fiction, brings a new perspective to this traditional metaphor, taking it beyond stories of romance and relating it to the decline of Republican elite culture after the Chinese Civil War in the 1940’s. His short story “Wandering in the Garden, Waking from a Dream” (遊園驚夢) takes place in a luxurious mansion in Taipei.<sup>2</sup> The graciously decaying front garden of the mansion suggests the gradual decay of Republican Chinese elite culture in Taiwan, while also creating the illusion of a past glory for those walking through the garden to reach a banquet in the mansion. The garden in this short story forms the basis of an especially important metaphor for the psychological conflict of the protagonist, Madame Ch’ien (錢夫人), because it reminds her of her past glory days in Nan-ching (南京), where she was both a famous opera singer and the wife of a notable general in the Nationalist army. Madame Ch’ien became famous

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<sup>1</sup> *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) is a classic in traditional Chinese theatre written by Tang Hsien-tzu in the Ming dynasty. The story basically centers on the power of love and how it can transcend life and death. For the English translation of this play, please see Cyril Birch’s *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇, “Wondering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” 遊園驚夢 was first published in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol. 30 in 1966 and later collected in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erya chubanshe 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp 205-240.

in Nanjing due to her talent for performing the *k'un* opera aria “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” from *The Peony Pavilion*.<sup>3</sup> The sentimental and magnificent notion of love, as expressed in this aria, carried into Madame Ch’ien’s life in Nanjing where she once experienced an erotic encounter with a young officer, mirroring the experience of the heroine of the original *The Peony Pavilion* who dreams about her lover in a garden.<sup>4</sup> Gardens, therefore, become significant symbols for Madame Ch’ien’s memories of love and allude to the concept of youthful passion as portrayed in traditional Chinese literature.

Madame Ch’ien’s stage name when she was an opera singer in Nan-ching, Lan T’ien-yu (藍田玉), contains the Chinese character for jade (*yu* 玉), which is also a traditional Chinese symbol for exceptional female beauty. However, in English the word “jade” can have a very different connotation when it is used as an adjective, “jaded.” It refers to either faded glory and beauty or a disreputable woman. The traditional use of the garden in Chinese literature as a symbol for love and romance is subverted when juxtaposed with the word “jaded,” forming a new metaphor, the “jaded garden.” The jaded garden, therefore, brings to our attention nostalgic women’s sense of loss in remembering their love affairs from the past. In Pai’s short story, the concept of the “jaded garden” can also be used to point out the irony of Madame Ch’ien’s situation as part of an enduring exile in Taiwan and as a middle-aged woman who is troubled by an

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<sup>3</sup> *K'un* opera (崑曲) is an elegant form of traditional Chinese theatre. Many Ming and Ch’ing dynasty plays are performed in this style.

<sup>4</sup> See “Scene Ten: The Interrupted Dream” in T’ang Hsien-tsu’s *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*, trans. Cyril Birch, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

The concept of a “jaded garden” may at first seem very Chinese in nature since jade is often used to allude to traditional Chinese concepts of beauty or romantic love. However, Madame Ch’ien is not the only one troubled by the notion of lost love and haunted by melancholic nostalgia for past glory. In Tennessee Williams’s early plays, the protagonist Amanda Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie* and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* are also troubled by their failed relationships and often dwell in memories of the past.<sup>5</sup> The sentimental farewell to a decaying aristocratic culture as expressed through the agony of their characters is a common trope in some of Pai and Williams’s works. Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, narrate the tragic fates of Southern belles by relating their nostalgic sentiments over their past affairs with the decaying aristocratic culture to which they are devoted. The belles are unable to adapt to a changing social order that is less favorable to Southerners. The “jaded garden” can thus be seen as a universal metaphor for the nostalgia experienced by women in both the postbellum United States and Taiwan; the distress expressed by all those women over unfavorable social environments and their inability to emotionally recover from failed relationships is related to the decaying elite culture of their recent past.

Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams are two of the most sensitive and compassionate writers among their contemporaries. Their major works often portray the tragic lives of the nostalgic inheritors of a decaying culture that cannot be returned to its

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<sup>5</sup> Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, New York: New Directions, 1949. *A Streetcar Named Desire*, New York: Signet, 1951.

former glory. *Taipei People* (臺北人) is Pai Hsien-yung's best-known work.<sup>6</sup> It is a collection of fourteen short stories about the difficulties and nostalgia of Mainland Chinese exiles from different social strata, genders, and occupations in postbellum Taiwan. Much of their fame, wealth, and dreams have "gone with the wind", disappearing along with the Nationalist's dreams of victory in the civil war. These exiles, largely try unsuccessfully to maintain a lifestyle in Taiwan that is comparable to the one they enjoyed on Mainland China. Another collection of Pai's short stories, *New Yorkers*, is of a similar context but is concerned with Chinese exiles in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Tennessee Williams major plays, including *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which describe the decline of traditional Southern families and especially the Southern belles in the postbellum days, are contextually similar to *Taipei People* and *New Yorkers*. Pai and Williams share a similar background with the nostalgic characters of their stories making them sympathetic towards those characters. However, in their mature works, they still manage to restrain their personal attachment and sympathy from overwhelming the characterizations.

Pai Hsien-yung comes from an upper class family background. His father, Pai Chung-hsi (白崇禧), served as a Major General in the Nationalist army and worked together with Chang Kai-shek in the Northern Expedition and the War of Resistance

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<sup>6</sup> *Taipei People* 臺北人 was first published by Ch'en Chung Publishing 晨鐘出版社 in Taiwan 1971 and later published by Erya chubanshe 爾雅出版社 in Taipei, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> *New Yorkers* (紐約客) is the title of for Pai's collection of short stories about Chinese exiles in the United States. Stories from this collection have not been published under this name but they can be found in a recently published collection *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, that contains both the *New Yorker* stories and other early stories by the same writer.



Against Japan. The young Pai Hsien-yung was often surrounded by women, such as nannies, sisters, aunts, and family friends, and his early creative writing, therefore, focused on describing these familiar women. For example, his first short story “Madame Ch’in” (金大奶奶) is about the tragic consequences of a rich man’s abandonment of his first wife.<sup>8</sup> Another successful early story “Jade Love” (玉卿嫂) narrates a young nanny’s experiences working in a big household and how she suffers a failed love affair with a younger man.<sup>9</sup> Considering the subjects of his early writings, women who are familiar from his household and social stratum have obviously influenced Pai Hsien-yung. His homosexual preference in his personal love life may have helped him in developing a Platonic observation of the women. Pai Hsien-yung’s early stories demonstrate a close connection to his personal upbringing but in the later *Taipei People* collection he articulates his memories and observations of Chinese exiles in Taiwan in a detached and objective way, which gives the major characters in his works a sovereign existence.

Tennessee Williams himself and his literary writings are very much attached to the unique heritage of the American South. Although his family settled in St. Louis when he was a teenager, he preferred to identify himself with the Deep South heritage of his grandparents’ and parents’ generations. Many of his writings are inspired by his memories of his early childhood in the Mississippi Delta. His Southern identity was also

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<sup>8</sup> “Madame Ch’ing” 金大奶奶 first appeared in *Literary Journal* 文學雜誌 vol. 5.1 in 1958 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch’en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp. 31-44.

<sup>9</sup> “Jade Love” 玉卿嫂 first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol.1. in 1960 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch’en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp. 91-138.

very influential on his adult life, motivating him to return to New Orleans in the early phase of his career as a writer. Like Pai Hsien-yung, he developed his thorough understanding of Southern belles through a personal attachment to the South and through his intimate friendship with Carson McCullers, a prominent writer of fiction from the postbellum South, and Tallulah Bankhead, a celebrated actress from the South who once played Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In addition, his grandfather Dakin, his mother Edwina Williams and his sister Rose were models of Southern manners, gentility, and integrity for the young Tennessee Williams.<sup>10</sup> As a result of all these connections and influences, the spirit of the South always dominated his literary writing.

The focus of this paper will be on the nostalgia in Pai and Williams's works, especially on women who are obsessed with memories of the past and their faded glory. Although these characters come from different parts of the world and are representatives of two different cultures, they are nonetheless united by their attitudes toward lost traditions, the sympathy their creators show them, the common postbellum settings for their tragedies, and finally, the decaying elite cultures of Williams's American South and Pai's Republican China respectively. Pai and Williams have created many memorable characters but due to the space limitation of this research, I will focus only on four unique characters that I feel best represent the literary style of the two writers. The first two characters are Madame Ch'ien from "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," Li

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<sup>10</sup> See Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt's *Tennessee Williams and the South*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002, for more information about Williams's personal attachments to the South.

T'ung (李彤) from "A Celestial in Mundane Exile"<sup>11</sup> (謫仙記) by Pai Hsien-yung, and for Tennessee Williams, Amanda Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie* and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" is often considered Pai's best work due to its vivid portrayal of the Republican Chinese upper class transplanted to Taiwan and to the story's complex illustration of the heroine's problematic psyche. "A Celestial in Mundane Exile" did not receive as much attention as the popular *Taipei People* collection but my research will definitely be enhanced by the inclusion of this wonderful piece from the *New Yorker* collection. The story is particularly interesting in that Pai's vision of Chinese exiles is not limited to the Taiwanese context. "A Celestial in Mundane Exile's" portrayal of the degeneration of its heroine, Li Tung, is allegorically tied to the fall of China during and after the civil war. She is once referred to in the story as "China" when others relate her and her friends to the powerful nations at the time. Li Tung's character is much more powerful and persuasive in stimulating resonance among readers than another important piece from the same collection, "Death in Chicago" (芝加哥之死). These two classic examples of Pai's female character can be compared with Tennessee Williams's unique characterization of Southern belles in his early plays.

The success of Tennessee Williams's early plays lies not just in his artistic imagination but also in his personal ties with his characters. The characterizations of memorable Southern figures, such as Laura Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie* and Big Daddy from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, are based on the artist's memories of his beloved

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<sup>11</sup> "A Celestial in Mundane Exile" 謫仙記 first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol.25 in 1965 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp 91-138.

sister Rose and grandfather Dakin. Based on these memories, Williams is able to assert his personal sentiments through the agony of his characters. There are also personal ties between Williams and the two female characters selected for this research. Amanda Wingfield bears a very close resemblance to Williams's mother Edwina, though the fictional character in *The Glass Menagerie* is based upon the subjective memory of the narrator Tom Wingfield and he calls the play "a memory play." Blanche DuBois does not resemble a particular family member or friend of Williams's, but her passion for literature, her flamboyant but fragile personality and her sensitivity towards all things are characteristic of the writer himself. Most importantly, Amanda and Blanche are remarkable Southern belles, differing in age and social role, but both facing similar life challenges related to their obsession with the elite culture of the antebellum South. These two women, then, are transformed into icons and spokespersons for Williams's attachment to the South.

Before beginning a close reading of the selected texts, it is necessary first to explore the socio-historical background of the stories under examination. Although the stories are set mainly in postbellum Taiwan and the United States, the nostalgic minds of the heroines are firmly rooted in the traditions and glories of their antebellum pasts. In order better to understand this paper's analysis of the struggles the heroines experience when attempting to reconcile the conflict between their illusions of the past and the reality of the present, it is first necessary to examine their antebellum heritage and lifestyles of their respective cultures. Rather than focusing on the history of the Chinese and American civil wars, I will emphasize how Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams

developed their ideas about aristocratic culture in China and the United States. Pai's childhood in Mainland China, especially in the cities of Shanghai and Nan-ching, had an immense on his portrayals of the Republican Chinese aristocratic culture and its subsequent decline. Similarly, Williams's depictions of the American South are heavily influenced by his childhood spent in the Mississippi Delta and in St. Louis. Thus, the decline of the aristocratic cultures in both Republican China and the American South will be discussed in relation to the personal experiences of the two writers' and how these experiences influenced the manner in which they describe the decline in their works. I will also discuss descriptions of the declining American South found in other prominent Southern literature, including *Gone with the Wind*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*; the approaches used by the authors of these works will be compared to Williams's approach. The first chapter will consist of a discussion of how the historical backgrounds and social environments of both Pai's Republican China and Williams's American South influenced their respective characterizations of nostalgic heroines in the selected stories.

Although Pai and Williams take a similar approach to characterizing nostalgic women, and both have similar humanistic concerns, one very obvious difference between them is that Pai writes fiction and Williams writes plays. Pai employs specific elements of fiction, such as the mode of narration and other experimental fiction writing techniques, to build up the nostalgic atmosphere of his exile stories; Williams draws upon certain features of the theatre to exemplify the tension within his characters' psychological conflicts. While the two writers construct stories using different literary media, their creative writing styles can still be compared because they have similar

literary preferences and both are intent on envisioning nostalgic women in their works. They also both use music to symbolize the trouble psyches of their nostalgic women character.

In Pai's "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," he applies specific opera arias from the *k'un* opera *Peony Pavilion* in the stream-of-consciousness style of narration of the protagonist Madame Ch'ien's frustrated mind. Madame Ch'ien's recollections of her favorite opera arias demonstrate her attachment to the past, as they remind her of both her joyful past life in Nan-ching that her failed love affair with a young military officer. Acting as the crucial stimulus of her mental breakdown in the stream-of-consciousness narration, the allusion to the opera arias brings the story to its climax and elevates its aesthetic sophistication, by connecting the lyrical element of the opera arias to Madame Ch'ien's mental frustration over the contrast between the past and the present. Pai was the first to employ the stream-of-consciousness narration in modern Chinese fiction. He uses Western modernist literary technique, alongside an allusion to traditional Chinese opera, successfully demonstrating how elements from traditional Chinese literature could be integrated with Western modernist literary techniques. The stream-of-consciousness narration and the allusions to *k'un* opera will be examined in detail in the third chapter of this paper.

Music is also an important element in Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In a manner similar to Pai's reference to *k'un* opera, Williams uses "Blues Piano" and Polish Polka, to highlight Blanche DuBois' mental struggle with the conflict between her new life in New Orleans and her past memories of her hometown, Laurel. These two genres of music are essential for highlighting Blanche's troubled mindset, because the

“Blues Piano” music embodies Blanche’s sense of alienation in New Orleans, and the Polish Polka tunes, or the “Varsouviana Polka” as it is referred to in the play, reminds her of her painful past, including the loss of her family estate, her ex-husband’s suicide, and her subsequent promiscuity, which ruined her reputation. Music is used to emphasize specific moments in the play where Blanche is faced with difficulties; these two pieces, in particular, are important symbols for her gradual decent to a tragic downfall. Thus, the importance of the specific genre of music in Williams’s plays will be discussed and the chapter will finish with a comparison of Pai and Williams’ literary styles.

The fourth chapter will examine the characterization of the four aforementioned nostalgic women. These characters all belong to the once great but now declining elite cultures of their respective countries. They embrace traditional ideals and manners, they once experienced love, but they cannot reconcile illusion with reality and are consequently doomed to failure in the present. Madame Ch’ien and Amanda Wingfield are middle-aged women who fantasize constantly about their past love affairs. Their inability to accept their present lowered standards of living and social standings causes them to compulsively lose themselves in their illusions of the past. Similarly, Li T’ung and Blanche DuBois are troubled over failed relationships even though they are still in their prime. Their preference for a luxurious lifestyle has been compromised by the breakdown of traditionally rich families in the postbellum era. Most importantly, they are fragile and unable to face challenges in life because they are unwilling to let go of their pride for and belief in this traditional cultural heritage.

Pai and Williams’s successful characterizations of nostalgic women are the result of the symbolic details they give their characters. Under the influence of the eighteenth

century Chinese novel, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Pai employs a traditionally influenced descriptive writing style to highlight the symbolic meanings of specific pieces of clothing in the stories, as well as to ensure his heroines stand out. For example, Madame Ch'ien's silk *ch'i-p'ao*, a Mandarin gown, and Li T'ung's diamond-studded spider hairpin are two major symbols of their status as ex-aristocrats and of their mental struggles to balance their illusions of the past with the reality of the present. Tennessee Williams's use of "personal lyricism" when writing his characters' lines is similar in nature to Pai's use of the descriptive details of his characters' clothing. "Personal lyricism"<sup>12</sup> is one of Williams's literary innovations, and it takes the characters' speeches and dialogues to a symbolic level. He applies poetic elements, such as alliteration, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and assonance in the nostalgic heroines' words to emphasize their aristocratic background and their frustrations in dealing with past memories. This literary style also enhances the dramatic effect of their speeches and to create climaxes at crucial moments in the plays. Since the symbolism behind the clothing and speech has such an important role in the characterizations of the nostalgic women, the fourth chapter will be devoted to a close-reading analysis and comparison of these characters' symbolic clothing and style of speech.

Chapter five will be devoted to a discussion of the major themes in the four work selected of this paper. Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams both wrote extensively about the decline of traditional, aristocratic culture and the subsequent struggles of the individual with nostalgia. Although the theme of nostalgia spans across their major works and connects the tragedies of the female protagonists with their respective social and historical background, the most important universal theme among the selected works

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter four for further discussion on this literary style.



is the importance of love and sympathy. The four nostalgic female characters are obviously troubled by their nostalgic sense of belonging to the old order, but the ultimate reason for their troubles is their unfulfilled desire for true love. Pai and Williams both use this emphasis on love, in various ways, to create sympathy for these tragic characters. For example, the traditional Chinese concept of *ch'ing* (or love), the prominent theme in *Peony Pavilion*, is used in Pai's "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" to emphasize Madame Ch'ien's grief over her failed past love relationship.<sup>13</sup> Williams elaborates on a similar notion of love when describing the origin of Amanda Wingfield's nostalgia in *The Glass Menagerie*, even though his concept of love here does not necessarily carry the same connotation as the traditional Chinese concept of *ch'ing* as Pai's does.

The strong emphasis on love in all of these works is demonstrated by the sympathetic approach Pai and Williams take when describing their nostalgic female characters. Because their works focus on the individual experiences than on socio-historical settings, the intent of the writers in creating these characters should be considered when analyzing the theme. Besides narrating stories about the tragedies that followed the decline of their respective aristocratic cultures, Pai and Williams also wish to remind readers of the sympathy and compassion that the nostalgic heroines deserve. This desire can be compared to William Faulkner's desire for humanistic concerns to play a role in literature, as noted in his Nobel Prize speech. Pai and Williams's sympathetic approach to characterizing their nostalgic heroines aims to make sense of the tragedies, from specific moments in history, by returning to the universal humanistic value of love. Therefore, the concept of love and the writers' sympathetic approaches to

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<sup>13</sup> See page 5 of chapter 5 for further explanation.

the nostalgic female characters are the essential and universal elements in Pai and Williams's works, and it is these elements that make their stories comparable.

To conclude this paper, I will re-address the similarities between Pai and Williams' works and in their humanistic and sympathetic attitudes towards their nostalgic female characters, in order to demonstrate the need for a comparison of their writings. Specific examples from the selected texts will also be used to demonstrate the two writers' concern for the emotional well being of humanity.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PAI HSIEN-YUNG'S REPUBLICAN CHINA AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S AMERICAN SOUTH**

The American Old South is often imagined as the land of cavaliers and gentlemen suitors vying for the attention of Southern belles, all of them living in huge, private plantations having constant parties, balls, and surrounded by busy black servants. The language, heritage, and traditional way of life for the elites of the old American South may be quite different from those elites of Republican Chinese, but the society, luxuries and high standards of living both groups enjoyed are comparable. The lifestyle of the Republican Chinese elite involved the enjoyment of magnificent mansions with cultural influences from the East and the West (due to the presence of foreign concessions), constant banquets attended by well-dressed guests and elegant performances of traditional opera. The splendors enjoyed by members of antebellum elite culture in both the American South and Republican China were inevitably disturbed by the chaos and trauma caused by their respective civil wars.

The nostalgia felt by former elites living in postbellum worlds dominates the psyches of both Pai and Williams's characters who rely on the preservation of their memories of heavily romanticized past glory. Thus, Pai and Williams's portrayals of antebellum elite culture through the use of nostalgic characters are layered with subjectivity and mental confusion between illusion and reality. Since the socio-historical background of the selected characters play an important role in how Pai and Williams capture the decay elite cultures. This it is first necessary to describe the aristocratic way

of life of the antebellum era, and then look at how this way of life has is imagined memories of the characters. Pai and Williams were both members of the elite cultures they describe; their attachment to their heritage is integral to the construction of their stories. I will first discuss the backgrounds of the two writers and then consider on the influence the specific socio-historical background had on the creation of their nostalgic characters.

Pai Hsien-yung was born in 1937, the same year that the Japanese officially declared war on China. Since his father was a Major General in the Nationalist Army and there was constant warfare in China at the time as a child, Pai frequently moved between different parts of Mainland China. He was born in the city of Nan-ning (南寧) and, later the same year, moved to Kuei-lin (桂林) in Kuang-hsi (廣西) province<sup>14</sup>. At age seven, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Since Pai's family had taken refuge in Ch'ung-ch'ing (重慶), the wartime capital in Szechuan (四川), Pai had to be quarantined. However, even when he was physically isolated in a small cabin up the hill from the garden of his family's mansion, the sick and lonely child was still very curious about the happenings in the household. In his prose piece "Suddenly Turn Around," (驀然回首) Pai recalls his childhood experience in Ch'ung-ch'ing as follows:

One springtime evening, hundreds of flowers bloomed in the garden. Father and mother gave a banquet in the garden. Guests gathered in a crowd and cheerful laughter permeated the place. I was in a small cabin up the mountain slope. I quietly lifted up the curtains and caught a glimpse of the great thousands of worlds, filled with

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<sup>14</sup> See Wang Chin-min 王晉民's *Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* 白先勇傳. Hong Kong: Hua-han wen-hua 華漢文化, 2000. pp. 1-3. (my translation).

extravagance. My brothers, sisters, and cousins also gathered among the crowd and were all cheerful. In an instant, the grief and indignation from a feeling of abandonment rushed to my heart and I couldn't help from crying bitterly.<sup>15</sup>

Those lonely years in Ch'ung-ch'ing may have been devastating for the young Pai Hsien-yung but they also nurtured his sensitive observations of social gatherings among elites in Republican China.

Ch'ung-ch'ing did not really inspire Pai Hsien-yung to construct many stories about the city's specifics, but other places on the Mainland where the young Pai Hsien-yung resided, such as Nan-ching (南京) and Shanghai (上海), are fictionalized in stories about the decaying Republican elite culture. Between the years of 1946 to 1948 when Pai and his family took refuge in Nan-ching and later in Shanghai, these Republican Chinese urban centers really opened his eyes to the glamour and extravagance of the rich and famous of elite Republican China.

The history of Nan-ching stretches from the early imperial period to the modern era. It has been through cycles of glory and decline throughout the history of China. It was the capital of various ancient kingdoms and dynasties, such as the Wu Kingdom in the Three Kingdoms period (222-280 ACE), the Southern Tang dynasty (937-975 ACE), and the early Ming dynasty (1368-1421 ACE). The city's rich history and cultural atmosphere are influential in different ways to the setting and background of Pai's short

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<sup>15</sup> Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇, "Suddenly Look Back," 驀然回首

“一個春天的傍晚，園中百花怒放，父母在園中設宴，一時賓客雲集，笑語四溢。我在山坡上的小屋裡，悄悄掀開窗簾，窺見園中大千世界，一片繁華，自己的哥姊，堂表弟兄，也穿插其間，個個喜氣洋洋。一霎時，一陣被人摒棄，為世所遺的悲憤兜上心頭，禁不住痛哭起來。” in *Suddenly Look Back* 驀然回首. Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. p. 67. (my translation).

story collection *Taipei People*. This collection begins with a Tang dynasty poem “Black Coat Lane” (烏衣巷) by Liu Yu-hsi (劉禹錫).

At the “Red Black” Bridge the wild grasses flower,  
At the mouth of the “Black Coat” Lane set the slanting sun.  
Of old times swallows few before the halls of Wang and Hsieh  
Now they enter the houses of the common people.<sup>16</sup>

It depicts the decline of the later Tang dynasty as symbolized by the swallows’ migration from the halls of the rich and famous Wang and Hsieh clans to the houses of ordinary people.<sup>17</sup> The places mentioned in poems, such as “Black Coat Lane” and “Bridge of the Vermilion Bird,” (朱雀橋) are in the area of Nan-ching’s Chin-huai River (秦淮河). For readers who are conscious of the poem’s geographical and historical references, this opening not only highlights *Taipei People*’s overall theme of nostalgia the mainland, but it also alludes to Nan-ching’s unique status as symbol of the nation’s rise and fall from the imperial period to modern times. As both symbol of imperial glories and capital of the Republican government (1928-37), Nan-ching assumes a figurative role in Pai Hsien-yung’s short stories.

Nan-ching’s historic vicissitudes left a deep impression on Pai Hsien-yung.<sup>18</sup> The Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum (中山陵) in Nan-ching nurtured the young Pai Hsien-yung’s consciousness of China’s history. This historic site appears in the last story of *Taipei*

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<sup>16</sup> Liu Yu-hsi’s “Black Coat Lane” in Soame Jenyns’ translation in *A Further Selection from the 300 poems of the T’ang Dynasty*. London: J. Murray, 1944. p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., “朱雀橋邊野草花，烏衣巷口夕陽斜。舊時王謝堂前燕，飛入尋常百姓家,” p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> See “Chapter 4: Nan-ching Period” 第四章：南京時期 in Wang Chin-min 王晉民’s *Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* 白先勇傳. pp. 59-70.

*People*, “State Funeral,” (國葬)<sup>19</sup> to signify the dignity of a Nationalist Army general in the fallen capital.

Besides the historical references, the romantic implication of Nan-ching’s beautiful Ch’in-huai River also inspired Pai to make it the native home of Madame Ch’ien (錢夫人), the heroine of “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream.” (遊園驚夢) Night markets, restaurants, and opera houses populated the Ch’in-huai River district, and in the Republican period, the area was also famous for opera singers and high class prostitutes, who were patronized by social elites, high-ranking government officials and generals. Madame Ch’ien herself is an opera singer based in that area of Nan-ching and her fame rests on her talent for performing “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream,” a scene from the *k’un* opera *Peony Pavilion*. After being patronized by a high Nationalist Army general Ch’ien P’eng-chih (錢鵬志), she becomes part of Nan-ching’s elites society and indulges in luxury and dissipation. She is highly respected by both the wives of other generals and fellow opera singers from the same opera house to which she once belonged. Most importantly, her “once in a lifetime” love affair with a younger officer also occurs while she is in Nan-ching. Therefore, Nan-ching plays a significant role in her memories.

The romantic atmosphere of the Chin-huai River district does not just nurture many scholar-beauty<sup>20</sup> love stories; it also contributes to Madame Ch’ien’s sense of loss

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<sup>19</sup> Pai Hsien-yung, “State Funeral” (國葬) was first published in the journal *Modern Literature*, vol. 43. in 1971 and later collected in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erh-ya Ch’u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 265-278.

<sup>20</sup> 才子佳人 *ts’ai-tzu chia-jen*; a phrase in Chinese that describes a typical romance story between talented scholars and beautiful ladies

over her despairing memory of the affair with the young officer. Pai Hsien-yung's personal image of the Chin-huai River district and his familiarity with traditional Chinese poetry and scholar-beauty literature enable him to construct stories such as "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," with this inseparable and memorable setting.

Wang Chin-min points out a subtle reference to Nan-ching in "The Eternal Snow Beauty," (永遠的尹雪艷)<sup>21</sup> a short story from the *Taipei People* collection. It is the only satirical piece in the collection. Instead of having a nostalgic heroine, the protagonist Yin Hsueh-yen (尹雪艷) surveys the guests at her mansion coldly. To her, they represent the former elite, now living in Taipei, who continue to indulge in luxury and dissipation without giving much thought to their country's marginal existence. This story's connection with the city of Nan-ching, as Wang Chin-min suggests,<sup>22</sup> is based on a connection with the Tang dynasty poet Tu Mu (杜牧)'s poem "A Mooring on the Ch'in-huai River." (泊秦淮) In the poem, Tu Mu criticizes the disregard of elites and high officials for the country's diminishing status by comparing them with the singsong girls in the Ch'in-huai River district:

Mist veils the cold stream, and moonlight the sand,  
As I moor in the shadow of a river-tavern,  
Where girls, with no thought of a perished kingdom,

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<sup>21</sup> Pai Hsien-yung, "The Eternal Snow Beauty" (永遠的尹雪艷) was first published in the journal *Modern Literature*, vol. 24, in 1965 and later collected in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 1-22.

<sup>22</sup> See Wang Chin-min 王晉民's *Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* 白先勇傳. p. 61.



Gaily echo *A Song of Courtyard Flowers*.<sup>23</sup>

In “The Eternal Snow Beauty,” Pai Hsien-yung uses the protagonist’s indifferent attitude towards the guests at her mansion to expose similar sentiments about the ignorance of some ex-elites with regard to their country’s well-being. Therefore, the city of Nan-ching is truly influential in forming the fictional landscape of Pai’s Republican China; using references to Nan-ching in classical Chinese poems, Pai connects the city’s symbolic stature to the themes of his stories.

Shanghai (上海) is another Republican Chinese urban center that had a great influence on Pai’s short stories. While Nan-ching is often considered the nurturing ground for Pai’s historical consciousness, Shanghai is definitely the inspiration for Pai’s portrayal of Republican Chinese cosmopolitan culture. Although Pai only lived in Shanghai between 1946-48, the city’s extravagance and flourishing urban environment really opened his eyes at an impressionable time of his life. He moved to Shanghai right after the War of Resistance against the Japanese had ended, when the city was just recovering from the war. Because of his prestigious family background, Pai was able to experience first-hand of the grand and luxurious side of Shanghai. In a short piece of prose writing, “Childhood in Shanghai,” (上海童年)<sup>24</sup> Pai describes Shanghai as “a world of sensuality. It is like a gigantic and unparalleled kaleidoscope. When you casually turn it around, it shows a great variety of things.”<sup>25</sup> Shanghai amazed the young

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<sup>23</sup> Tu Mu’s “A Mooring on the Ch’in-huai River,” trans. Witter Bynner, in *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology Being Three Hundred Poems of the T’ang Dynasty 618-906*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945. p. 176.

<sup>24</sup> See Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇’s “Childhood in Shanghai” 上海童年 in *Remembering My Past 昔我往矣*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 2003. pp. 65-68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., “戰後的上海是個花花世界，像隻巨大無比的萬花筒，隨便轉一下，花樣百出。”

Pai Hsien-yung with its lavish skyscrapers, decorative department stores, and fancy theatres. The city's adoption of Western bourgeois lifestyles and consumer culture allowed Pai to observe the uniquely Shanghainese version of "East meets West." The luxurious elite lifestyle behind the city's façade of glamour is also vividly evoked in the memories of the Chinese exiles in Pai's short stories.

Pai's obsession with theatre, especially the traditional *k'un* opera style, can also be traced back to his childhood in Shanghai. In the flourishing cosmopolitan culture in Shanghai at the time, it was easy for members of the elite access to first class entertainment. Pai once saw Mei Lan-fang (梅蘭芳)'s performance of *k'un* opera with his family in Shanghai. He describes the occasion in his prose piece "My Journey Through *K'un* Opera" (我的崑曲之旅)<sup>26</sup> as follows:

Since then *k'un* opera and I, especially *Peony Pavilion*,  
have formed an indissoluble bond. When I was young, I  
did not really understand the play, but in the aria "Ts'ao  
Lo-p'ao" [皂羅袍] from the scene "Wandering in Garden,"  
the exquisite and charming section and the deeply moving  
melodies are profoundly engraved in my memories. As a  
result, many years after, when I hear Pandean pipe, vertical  
end-blown flute, *kuan*, and horizontal flute effortlessly

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<sup>26</sup> See Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇's "My Journey Through *K'un* Opera" 我的崑曲之旅 in *Remembering My Past* 昔我往矣. pp. 54-64. (my translation).

strike up this tune, I cannot keep my heart from palpitating  
with eagerness.<sup>27</sup>

Pai's obsession with *k'un* opera and *Peony Pavilion* had a long-lasting influence on his writings and career. His first-hand experience with *Peony Pavilion* as performed by one of China's best opera artists, Mei Lan-fang, in the *k'un* opera style allowed him to restructure his memories of this wonderful experience who characterizing Madame Ch'ien in "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream." The success of this short story and his passion for *k'un* opera also motivated him in recent years to produce an adapted version of *Peony Pavilion*. While *Peony Pavilion* itself need not evoke postwar Shanghai, the city's lavish cosmopolitan culture made the memorable experience of being a spectator possible for the young Pai Hsien-yung.

Many images of Republican Chinese elite culture in Pai's short stories are based on his observation of postwar Shanghai. Several important female characters in his short stories come from Shanghai, such as Yin Hsueh-yen from "The Eternal Snow Beauty," Taipan Chin (金大班) from "The Last Night of Taipan Chin," (金大班的最後一夜)<sup>28</sup> and Li T'ung (李彤) from "A Celestial in Mundane Exile." (謫仙記)<sup>29</sup> The three women's geographical origins are inseparable from their characters because Shanghai

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,

“從此我便與崑曲，尤其是《牡丹亭》結下不解之緣。小時候並不懂戲，可是〈遊園〉中〈皂羅袍〉那一段婉麗嫵媚，一唱三嘆的曲調，卻深深印在我的記憶中，以致多年後，一聽到這段音樂的笙簫管笛悠然揚起就不禁怦然心動。” p. 55. (my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Pai Hsien-yung, "The Last Night of Taipan Chin" (金大班的最後一夜) was first published in the journal *Modern Literature*, vol. 34. in 1968 and later collected in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 123-42.

<sup>29</sup> Pai Hsien-yung, "A Celestial in Mundane Exile" 謫仙記 first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol.25. in 1965 and later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yong-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp. 91-138.

represents the most glorious times of their lives. Yin Hsueh-yen is a rather ironic example in this case because, unlike other characters in *Taipei People*, she isn't nostalgic for her past life on the mainland. However, her attractiveness comes from her ageless beauty, her elegant white *ch'i-p'ao*, and the lavish banquets she holds at her mansion, which remind others their glorious pasts in Shanghai. Taipan Chin belongs among the nostalgic characters in *Taipei People*. She constantly reminisces about her splendid past in Shanghai, and although she is one of the few who have the courage to move on with the limited lifestyle of Taiwan, Shanghai retains a unique position in her mind.

Yin Hsueh-yen and Taipan Chin both come from a part of Shanghai where social elites and the rich and famous gathered – the Paramount Ballroom (百樂門).

Built in 1933 by a group of Chinese bankers, the Paramount Ballroom was considered the finest ballroom in Asia by many who visited it during the 1930s. Originally designed for an elite clientele of Chinese and foreigners, the Paramount ballroom included two dance floors as well as a lounge, a bar, and two private banquet halls.<sup>30</sup>

The Paramount Ballroom is, thus, a landmark of the luxurious lifestyles of Shanghai's elites in the thirties and forties. The personalities and lifestyles associated with the Paramount Ballroom may not be particularly virtuous or admirable but it was an icon of the cosmopolitan culture of Shanghai in the twenties and thirties. Moreover, Yin Hsueh-

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew Field, "China on Camera: The Paramount Ballroom, Shanghai," Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, <http://history.arts.unsw.edu.au/afield/Web%20Pages/China%20Films/Paramount.htm>.

yen and Taipan Chin's personifications of elegant gestures from this notable place enhance the image of Shanghai in *Taipei People*.

Although The Paramount Ballroom is not a place where ten-year-old Pai Hsien-yung would have spent much time, it would not have been unfamiliar to him or to others who lived in Shanghai in the thirties and forties. By the time Pai's family moved to Shanghai, he had partially recovered from tuberculosis and could occasionally visit different parts of the city. Wang Chin-min has noted an important incident that was very influential on Pai's later characterization of ex-elites from Shanghai in Taiwan.<sup>31</sup> On an outing to the Shanghai Great World Amusement Park with his family, he saw a young, heavily made up and gorgeously dressed girl, hiding in the shadows of the stairs. His friends told him that she was a low-class prostitute and openly showed their disdain. The young Pai Hsien-yung, however, did not understand what the word prostitute meant, and his senses were captured by the girl's frightened look. Her facial expressions made a deep impression on him and greatly influenced his attitude towards weak and marginalized groups in society. As quoted in his biography, Pai describes the situation:

I think it's easy for one to ridicule others. I think it is not a very good mentality, always thinking of us as being better than others. ... When I see one-person ridicule another, my heart become very uncomfortable ... This impression is very profound. At that time, people all around seemed to be whispering to each other, using a despising attitude to talk about that girl. ... Shanghai can be said to be a place

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<sup>31</sup> See "Section 4: International Hotel" 四·國際飯店 in "Chapter 5: Shanghai Period" 第五章：上海時期 in Wang Chin-min 王晉民's *Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* 白先勇傳. pp. 75-77.

where heaven and hell are combined. It has its extravagant side but we can also see its dark side. Actually, many big cities are like this, a magnificent place with great varieties.

It can also be said to be a good source for fiction writing.<sup>32</sup>

The extravagant atmosphere of postwar Shanghai inspired Pai to write remarkable stories about Chinese exile's memories of Shanghai. Thus, Pai's personal experiences living in different Mainland Chinese urban centers before the Communist takeover opened his eyes to the glamorous cosmopolitan elite culture of Republican China, as well as to the contrast between the elite lifestyle and that of less privileged social groups. The young Pai Hsien-yung's observations in Shanghai nurtured his compassionate attitude towards the nostalgic Chinese exiles found in his short stories. Taipan Chin, for example, is one of the few less favorable characters in *Taipei People*. Her vulgar personality, rude attitude towards people of lower status and her excessive materialistic concerns can be quite disgraceful but Pai treats her with tolerance, understanding, and sympathy.

Tennessee Williams's knowledge and personal experience in the American South also played a decisive role in his writing. There are various ways of defining the geography of the American South but the one used here defines the South as the territories that belonged to the Confederate States of America prior to the civil war. These territories share a unique cultural heritage and are constantly referred to in

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<sup>32</sup> Pai, Hsien-yung.

“我覺得人很容易嘲笑別人，我覺得人有一種不大好的心理，總是覺得自己高人一等 ...

但當我看到有人嘲笑別人的時候，我心裡就很不舒服 ...

這個印象很深，當時周圍的人好像竊竊私語，以瞧不起的神態去講那個女孩子 ...

上海可以說是一個天堂與地獄合起來的地方，有它繁華大氣派的一面，而我們也看到它有陰暗的一面。實際上許多大城市都是如此，是個多采多姿的地方。也可以說是個寫小說的好材料。” in Wang Chin-min 王晉民's *Biography of Pai Hsien-yung* 白先勇傳. pp. 75-76. (my translation).

Williams's plays. They include the states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas.<sup>33</sup>

Ever since the birth of America as a nation, the South has been a fascinating subject for writing about the American experience. Writers such as Margaret Mitchell, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, and historian W.J. Cash, have produced works that exemplify the experiences of Southerners before and after the civil war and record the legends and decadence of the South for later generations. Margaret Mitchell's popular novel *Gone with the Wind* portrays the antebellum and postbellum South in a romanticized fashion and expresses nostalgia for the South's faded glory, a feeling suggested by the novel's title. Her novel was made into a very successful Hollywood adaptation with the same title, and romantic and nostalgic attitudes expressed in the novel are amplified by the film's outstanding production and by Vivien Leigh's excellent performance as the rebellious, one-of-a-kind Southern Belle, Scarlet O'Hara. Both the novel and the film's long-lasting popularity show that America yearns for an epic about the legend of the South, within which they could find a sense of belonging. Northerners have also been attracted by the story's narration of a unique region that belongs to their country. Therefore, *Gone with the Wind* is seen as a popular icon of the South and is often referred to in other literature on the South. For example, in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, the ex-Southern belle Amanda Wingfield tries to bring in more income for the family by selling subscriptions for the magazine *The Homemaker's Companion* over the telephone. She tries to attract customers by comparing the serialized

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<sup>33</sup> See "Problems of Studying the South" in I.A. Newby's *The South: a History*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978. pp. 6-7.

fiction in the magazine with to *Gone with the Wind*.<sup>34</sup> Although she fails to sell magazines, the scene demonstrates the novel's far-reaching influence and popularity in American society.

William Faulkner is regarded as one of the most influential writers in twentieth century America. Both academics and the public favor his work because of its innovative writing style, for example, the use of stream-of-consciousness writing in *The Sound and the Fury*, which offsets an authentic image of the South. Most of Faulkner's writings concentrate on the conflict between Southern traditions and modernity, a conflict that is often heightened by reference to the events of the civil war. Faulkner's passion for the South may be compared to that of other prominent Southern writers such as Tennessee Williams, but his images of the South are somewhat different; most of his stories are situated in a fictional Yoknapatawpha County, whose geography is based upon Faulkner's native state of Mississippi, and serves as the setting for *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Absalom! Absalom!* Here, Faulkner's vision of the South is layered with nostalgia for the South's antebellum decadence in postbelum times.

Like other literary accounts of the South in the twentieth century, the South of Faulkner's fiction is remembered as a land of cavaliers and belles that has degenerated with the decline of the huge plantations and families that owned them. The Southerners' now suffer from a false hope of reviving their golden days. *The Sound and the Fury* recounts the downfall of the Compson family.<sup>35</sup> It begins with the family's retarded son Benjy's fragmented account of his family's history, which effectively suggests the

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<sup>34</sup> See scene three of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Direction, 1945. pp. 19-20.

<sup>35</sup> William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage International, 1984.



inevitable decline of the family. None of the Compson sons, Quentin, Jason, or Benjy, is able to live up to the reputation established by their father, General Compson, a civil war hero. The family tragedy centers on Caddy, the eldest child, a charmingly independent and self-determined Southern Belle. She seems to be the only child with the ability to lead the family out of their decline, but her rebellious personality eventually takes her away from them. Caddy's upbringing reveals various problems within the household, such as the parents' ineffectiveness, the ignorance of the children's real needs, and the family's nostalgia for old Southern culture. In the aftermath of the civil war many previously well-established Southern families fall apart; the Compson's decline results in financial ruin and they gradually lose the respect of the other townspeople.

*The Sound and the Fury* successfully portrays the problems and challenges faced by people living in the postbellum South. The portrayal is enhanced by Faulkner's handling of time. The four chapters of the novel are purposely structured in a non-chronological order, particularly in the Benjy chapter, in which events are arranged out of sequence. This lack of logical order suggests that Benjy is mentally challenged, and also that the passing of time is the greatest disaster for the postbellum South.

This concept of time, which is linked to the decline of the South, is also a major theme in *The Glass Menagerie*. The narrator, Tom, refers to time as "the longest distance between two places."<sup>36</sup> Time has separated the Wingfield family from its past glories, as it has done for the Compson family. Therefore, both Faulkner and Williams associate the sorrow of the decline of the Old South with the passing of time. The passing of time is inevitable, and the damage wrought by time is inseparable from the Southerners'

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<sup>36</sup> See scene seven of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. p. 96.

memories of the antebellum South. As a result, many characters in both Faulkner and Williams's works have become prisoners in time.

Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell have all portrayed the Southerners' struggle in postbellum times, but one also cannot disregard W.J. Cash's contributions to defining the Southern character. Cash was both a writer and journalist in the 1920-30's and is best known for his book on the history, society, and identity of the South, titled *The Mind of the South*.<sup>37</sup> Cash's way of defining the South is quite different from that of Williams and Faulkner. While Williams prefers to illustrate the South through his characters' nostalgic memories and Faulkner creates his own image of the South using the fictional setting of Yoknapatawpha County, Cash prefers to focus on the essence, not the origins, of Southern distinctiveness.

There are two main themes in Cash's analyses of the South: the unity of Southern minds and the continuity of Southern history. The unity of white Southern minds comes from the collective memories Southerners have of their region's unique antebellum culture and common values. Their traditional heritage is often remembered as prosperity, order, and an elegantly pleasurable lifestyle. Because the antebellum Southern society was structured around plantation-based families, those memories are of a patriarchal family structure and a close network of relations between families. A great deal of literature about the South has provided representative portrayals of such Southern families, including *Gone with the Wind*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Cash extends the patriarchal structure of the antebellum South to his idea of "man at the center," which describes the basic characteristics of a Southern man as being

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<sup>37</sup> W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941.

obsessed with individualism, violence, “cardboard medievalism,” the code of chivalry, hedonism, and a romanticized vision of native place.<sup>38</sup>

In order to fuel enthusiasm for their own heritage, Southerners tend to rely on the cotton boom years in the early nineteenth century to create a mythological past for themselves. Most importantly, this mentality was carried into the postbellum period when the South suffered heavily from the chaos and destruction that followed after the civil war. In Williams’s fictional accounts of the postbellum South, characters that are committed to their origins, like Amanda Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie* and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, cling to this inherited romantic vision of the South.

This long-lasting romantic vision of the South also helps to explain Cash’s idea of the continuity of Southern history. The South, in this case, is “characterized by white supremacy, class hierarchy, plantation economy, and a political system that functioned in the interest of the planter class especially and white people generally.”<sup>39</sup> A romanticized mentality, essential to the pride Southerners have for their native land, originated from the elite status and dominance their antebellum ancestors enjoyed. Therefore, Southern identity also rests upon a feeling of distinctiveness from the Northern states, the Yankees. According to Cash’s concept of the continuity of Southern history, the fundamental characteristics of the South emerged in the antebellum period and continued to dominate white Southerners’ minds in the postbellum period. In the antebellum period, Southerners established themselves as very different from Northerners in terms of social customs, beliefs, and values. Even in the postbellum period, when the South’s economic

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<sup>38</sup> See book one chapter II “Of the Man at the Center” in W.J. Cash’s *Mind of the South*. pp. 29-58.

<sup>39</sup> I. A. Newby’s “The Southern Identity” in *The South: a History*. p. 30.

privileges and social institutions were in ruin, white Southerners continued to hold onto their antebellum identity because the civil war actually accelerated their sense of difference from and hatred for the North. Cash notes that one of the reasons that Southern identity was unshaken by the civil war was its “frontier mentality,”<sup>40</sup> which originated from the eagerness of the early colonizers to exploit the natural resources of the new world. This mentality was important to Southerners because it became a source of wealth for many plantation families. Therefore, while the Yankees tried to transform the South through their victory in the civil war, the essentials of a Southern mentality were preserved by white Southerners’ determined attitudes and faith in their own traditions and ancestry.

Although Cash’s analysis of the American South is valuable, it is also important to note the obvious subjectivities in his writing. First of all, he maintains a somewhat romantic and overtly sympathetic view on the South. Similar to Faulkner, his writing is dominated by his passion for and sense of belonging to the South. His analysis of the South focuses mainly on the whites; therefore, when he says class distinctions were almost nonexistent in the South, he is only referring to the white population in the region. Moreover, he has a racist attitude towards blacks and a correspondingly negative view of the North’s humanitarian goal of liberating the slaves in the civil war.

Cash’s affiliation with the South is thus different from that of Tennessee Williams’s, who strongly believed in human equality and did not share his ancestors’ racist attitudes towards blacks. He maintained a love-hate relationship with his native home and characterized it with a mixture of nostalgic sentiments and criticisms. For example, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Belle Reve, the DuBois family’s ancestral

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<sup>40</sup> See book two, chapter I in W. J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South*. p. 103.

plantation in the South, is obviously gorgeous and wonderful in Blanche's mind but that is only because Belle Reve represents a beautiful personal dream and reminds her of her glorious days as a Southern belle. However, Belle Reve's glorious days have already passed and it has become financial burden to Blanche in the present. Through Blanche's romanticized memory of the past and of Belle Reve, Williams highlights the sharp contrast between antebellum and postbellum South without taking on the burden of explaining the politics of the civil war. The immediate outcome of the civil war, the carpetbagger government, and the slavery problem are essential to the backdrop of the South in Tennessee Williams's works, but his nostalgic characters are much more concerned with the decline of the elite cultures to which they once belonged.

The traditional and elegant South, as remembered by the many nostalgic characters in Tennessee Williams's works, comes from the writer's background and knowledge of his native home. Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911 and lived in several cities in Mississippi with the maternal side of his family until age seven.<sup>41</sup> He often referred to these first seven years as the happiest moments of his life, and they nurtured his personal attachment to the South. As a committed Southerner, Williams was also heavily influenced by his maternal family's established position in the Episcopal Church in Columbus. His grandfather, Reverend Dakin, was a model Southern gentleman for the young Williams, but his religious services at the church were much less inspiring. Although his family was not as wealthy as the plantation families in the antebellum South, Williams's mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, had lived the lifestyle of a Southern Belle. With refined manners and elegant spoken language, his mother was,

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<sup>41</sup> See Tennessee Williams's autobiography: *Memoirs*, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1975.

for Williams, the model of a Southern Belle.<sup>42</sup> Although her relationship with her son changed drastically after moving to St. Louis, Edwina's image as a Southern Belle remained very influential to Tennessee Williams's upbringing as a Southerner. Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is modeled after her. Wingfield's upbringing as a Southern Belle with "seventeen gentlemen callers back in Blue Mountain" resembles Williams's mother's upbringing. Williams describes his ancestral influence, as "roughly ... a combination of Puritan and Cavalier strains in my blood which may be accountable for the conflicting impulses I often represent in the people I write about."<sup>43</sup>

Williams's father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, was born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was a true Southerner by origin, but Tennessee Williams preferred to remember him as a shoe salesman who spent most of his time away from the family. His reputation among his children was negative because of his excessive drinking and his decision to move the entire family to St. Louis. The move took place in 1918 and Williams often referred to it as tragic. The family, then, suffered from poverty and was forced constantly to move from one small apartment to another because they could not afford the rent. Recalling his childhood in St. Louis, Williams has said:

If we walked far enough west we came into a region of fine residences set in beautiful lawns. But where we lived, to which we must always return, were ugly rows of apartment buildings the color of dried blood and mustard. If I had been born to this situation I might not have resented it

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<sup>42</sup> See "A Dark, Wide World You Can Breathe In" in Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt's *Tennessee Williams's and the South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002. p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> "Facts about Me" in *Where I Live: Selected Essays*, Ed. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods, New York: New Directions, 1978. p. 58.

deeply. But it was forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood.<sup>44</sup>

Besides leaving a sad mark on his memory, this kind of gloomy looking apartment building also becomes a major setting in *The Glass Menagerie*, where it symbolizes both Tom Wingfield and Tennessee Williams's troubled childhoods and stimulates their urge to escape from such a horrible place. Williams's schoolmates in St. Louis also ridiculed his Southern accent and manners, which caused him to feel embarrassed about his Southern identity, something that he was once proud. Therefore, his memory of St. Louis is often a mixture of loneliness and melancholy.

*The Glass Menagerie* is one of his most autobiographical plays. Williams fictionalizes many of his childhood experiences in St. Louis in this play, an absent father, a talkative ex-Southern Belle, an annoying but sympathetic mother, and most importantly, the shy and introverted sister whom the narrator, Tom, cares the most. The character of Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is modeled after Williams's own sister Rose, who was Williams's most intimate playmate and schoolmate throughout his childhood. They shared good times in Mississippi and bad times in St. Louis. Their mutual support of one another gave Tennessee Williams much of the spiritual strength required to endure the family's difficult life there. As they grew into adulthood, however, Rose's mental illness began to worry him a great deal. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia when Williams was in college in the mid-twenties and spent most of her adult life in mental hospitals.<sup>45</sup> Williams felt an immense sense of guilt over his sister's tragedy partly because he had been away from his family since college. He felt he should

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> See Williams's *Memoir*, New York: Double Day & Company, 1975. pp. 124-26.

have spent more time with his ill sister and that he should have prevented his parents from allowing her to go through prefrontal lobotomy treatments that left her mentally disabled for the rest of her life.<sup>46</sup> The guilt he felt about his sister is reflected in the characterization of Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, Laura is shy and crippled, living a secluded life in the shadow of her mother. Rose Williams continued to influence Tennessee's other writing and she was often the subject of his poems, including "Of Roses"<sup>47</sup> and "Valediction."<sup>48</sup> Creative writing became a way for the young Tennessee Williams to express his discontent with his life in St. Louis, his love for and guilt about his sister Rose, and most importantly, his profound attachment to and passion for his native South.

The portrayals of the South in Tennessee Williams's work are somewhat different from those in works by other Southern writers. For example, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* includes both an antebellum and a postbellum setting to narrate her characters' experiences before and after the civil war. The O'Hara family is an essential part of the elite culture of Georgia and the antebellum aristocratic lifestyle described in the novel is derived from their first-hand experiences. Although William Faulkner also writes about the decline of elite lifestyles and the status of plantation families in *The Sound and the Fury*, his South is somewhat different from Mitchell's because it is set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner's passion for the South inspired him to create the Yoknapatawpha County, a place that is very authentic in its Southern

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<sup>46</sup> For further information on Rose Williams's mental illness, see Tennessee Williams's *Memoirs*. pp. 116-27.

<sup>47</sup> Tennessee Williams's "Of Roses" in *The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams*, Ed. David Roessel and Nicholas Moschovakis, New York: New Directions, 2002. pp. 217.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.



characteristics but that still belongs only to his fantasies. The South as portrayed in Tennessee Williams's plays exists on a very different level from the South as portrayed in the writings of Mitchell and Faulkner. Williams's South is revived through the memories of his Southern characters and appears on stage only when those characters experience moments of nostalgia and make passionate speeches about their pasts. His plays about the South are set completely in the postbellum period while the devastating impact of the civil war on the South remains in the background.

Considering Williams's personal upbringing and some of the autobiographical elements in his plays, it should not be considered unusual that he chose to create the South only through his characters' memories. By the time Williams was writing his plays, the prosperous and aristocratic South had already been lost and, for his generation of Southerners, was nothing more than a memory. This generation could learn about the South from the older generations and could visit places with remaining Southern culture but it was impossible for them to get any first-hand experience of what it meant to be a traditional Southern cavalier or a Southern Belle. Williams, therefore, wrote about ex-Southern elites living in his own time, and the antebellum aristocratic South served a symbolic role, suggesting the Southern characters' nostalgic memories of their glorious past.

*The Glass Menagerie* takes place in a humble St. Louis apartment building. References to the South are made through Amanda Wingfield's passionate speeches about her past days at Blue Mountain, where she was a Southern belle with seventeen suitors. The South is also indirectly suggested by the presence of the father's portrait on the wall. The father abandoned the family when the children were young and is

described as “a telephone man who fell in love with long distance.”<sup>49</sup> He is not depicted as a Southern gentleman but his failure to fulfill his role as patriarch further relates the Wingfield family’s tragedies to the decline of the South. Because patriarchal family structures are an essential element of traditional Southern society, the father is always expected to take on the responsibility of looking after the family’s well-being. However, the father in *The Glass Menagerie* is absent from the very beginning of the play, making the Wingfield a displaced Southern family. The play, however, is not just about a Southern family’s difficult life in a Middle-American city during the Great Depression. The conflicts in the play center not only on Amanda’s nostalgic past memories but also upon her deluded hopes for her children, and Tom and Laura’s escapism. Nonetheless, the missing father is crucial to the family’s tragedy and to the notion of the decline of the Southern family in the play. The play is not set in antebellum times and does not literally involve the civil war. It does not even involve the decline of plantation households in postbellum times. Instead, the downfall of a Southern family in *The Glass Menagerie* is exemplified through the father’s absence, the mother’s nostalgic memories, the son’s discontent with limitations set by his family and by society, the daughter’s escapism, and, finally, through the conflict of the family’s Southern identity with a world that no longer belongs to them.

Williams’s depiction of the decline of the South in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is quite different from that in *The Glass Menagerie*. *Streetcar* is less family oriented and focuses more on the struggles of one individual to reconcile her Southern identity with the postbellum world. Blanche DuBois is all-alone in this battle. After experiencing financial problems and a failed marriage, she is forced to move in with her sister Stella

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<sup>49</sup> See scene one in *The Glass Menagerie*. p. 5.

and her brother-in-law Stanley, and must cope with their way of life. Blanche's sister Stella, who grew up with her on a huge plantation, should have been able to understand her difficulties and spiritually accompany her through the difficult loss of their family estate and subsequent move to a less-welcoming environment in New Orleans. However, Stella prefers to listen to her husband and not to believe Blanche in times of conflict. In this case, the traditional Southern family has disintegrated with the loss of the family estate, Belle Reve. The character of Stanley also plays an important role in deconstructing the South. His Polish origins and his unwillingness to accept the Southern way of life are especially troublesome for Blanche, who is a committed defender of her heritage. Stanley's cruel attitude and beastly behavior push her towards insanity. Blanche's strength and meaning in life rely heavily on her identity as a Southern belle, but this identity is incompatible with the postbellum New Orleans where she lives. Her fantasized memories of the past make her incapable of escaping the problems in her present downtrodden life. Williams depicts the decline of the South through Blanche's lonesome journey in postbellum New Orleans, where her sensitive and gentle character, her long poetic speeches, and her materialistic desires have no place.

Besides using Blanche's downfall to symbolize the decay of Southern elite culture in general, many of Blanche's Southern characteristics also reflect Williams's own attachment to the South. The Mississippi Delta is essentially important to the South portrayed in Williams's works. Many of his plays about the South, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Orpheus Descending*, are set in the Delta. The region had been a landmark of the Deep South because of its rich soil and blooming cotton plantations, which made it very prosperous in antebellum times. As the

antebellum Southern elites relied heavily on an agrarian economy, the Delta's fertile land was closely connected with their wealth. This also helps to explain the typical Southerner's attachment to the land in general. For example, Big Daddy, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, is most concerned with the prospect of his plantation because he believes that all he has earned has come from his land.

I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it turns out that I am and you ain't ... I was the overseer on the old Straw and Ochello plantation. I quit school at ten and went to work and work like a nigger in the fields! ... I did all that myself with no goddam help from you, and now you think you're just about to take over. ... you are not just about to take over a God damn thing.<sup>50</sup>

Besides resisting the greed of certain family members over his property, Big Daddy's speech here also illustrates the importance of land to Southern elites. In *Streetcar*, the loss of Belle Reve is a crucial turning point in Blanche's life because it signifies the end of her life as a Southern elite.

Williams often described the depiction of the South in his plays as being about a world that no longer exists. Southerners in his plays are often underprivileged individuals in the postbellum world, struggling to survive in a society that does not belong to them and has no sympathy for their Southern upbringing. They also represent the South's decadence in different ways. Their distinctiveness comes not just from their uniquely Southern characteristics; pride and strength in maintaining their Southern identity also makes them remarkable, even for readers without Southern origins. Amanda

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<sup>50</sup> *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. New York: Signet, 1983. p. 58.

Wingfield is nevertheless distressed by nostalgia for her past life as a Southern Belle and her wish for Laura to become a sociable Southern lady will obviously not be fulfilled. However, Amanda's strength in keeping the Wingfield family together, in caring for her children through hard times, and saving her family from poverty are all admirable. Blanche DuBois is not as capable as Amanda to maintain the family and is overwhelmed by her own romantic fantasies, but her gentleness, poetic speeches, and sensitivity are undeniable. Even when she seems to be lying to others about her troubled past, she is lying to herself because the truth is incomprehensible for her. Therefore, the ex-Southern Belles in Williams's plays can be both strong and weak; their true-heartedness and commitment to their Southern identities make their shortcomings sympathetic.

The strength and sympathetic aspects of the Southern Belles in Williams's plays were inspired by Williams's intimate friendship with remarkable Southern ladies, such as Carson McCullers and Tallulah Bankhead. Carson McCullers was an important Southern writer in Williams's time. Similar to Williams's, his fiction often discusses the spiritual isolation experienced by the outcasts and misfits of the South. Her mother's family once owned a huge plantation in Georgia and she was brought up like a Southern Belle until high school, when the money set aside for her education was lost.<sup>51</sup> Her friendship with Williams began in the early 1940s when they were still in the early phase of their careers as writers. Her Southern origin and sensitivity to vulnerable people became a great comfort for Williams.

From the moment of our first meeting, Carson, with her  
phenomenal understanding of another vulnerable being, felt

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<sup>51</sup> See Virginia Spencer Carr's *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.

nothing for me but that affectionate compassion that I  
needed so much and that she can give so freely, more freely  
than anyone else I know in the world of letters.<sup>52</sup>

Their friendship was not just a comforting factor for Williams's lonely Southern consciousness. McCullers' determination to write about her own heritage motivated Williams to dedicate his writings to the South. Her strength in overcoming physical illnesses throughout her life also demonstrated the possible strength that an ex-Southern Belle could demonstrate in overcoming challenges in life. The Southern Belles in Williams's plays may not be as courageous as McCullers, but McCullers nevertheless was one source of inspiration for them.

Tallulah Bankhead was a very different Southern woman who was a good friend of Tennessee Williams. She was a popular actress in both films and on stage, and once played Blanche in the 1956 production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* but her friendship with Williams began much earlier, when Williams was residing in New Orleans in the mid-1940's. Their mutual understanding came from shared Southern origins. Williams greatly admired Bankhead for being a survivor of the decaying Southern aristocracy and for her truthful expression of feelings. Her self-determination and flamboyant personality also influenced Williams's characterization of Blanche DuBois. Williams recalls that when he first heard Bankhead speaks, her voice echoed "the fantastic crossbreeding of a moth and tiger,"<sup>53</sup> an impression that was later recreated in Blanche's character. She is a delicate and frail moth, who can destroy herself by flying towards the light, but still has

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, Tennessee. "Biography of Carson McCullers" in *Where I Live: Selected Essays*. p. 134.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, Tennessee. "T. Williams's View of T. Bankhead" in *Where I Live: Selected Essays*. p. 150.

the wit of a tigress when her back is against the wall. Although Bankhead's performance as Blanche did not receive many positive reviews, Williams thought she was the actress who truly personified the legend of the South.

Tallulah played Blanche ... with that Tiger-Moth quality of the lady and star who had haunted the sky-lit workroom in which I had caught Blanche DuBois in the paper facsimile of a jungle trap. ... And now I want to tell you something about Tallulah that I think I may convince you that the legend of the Southern ladies is not a myth.<sup>54</sup>

Williams believed that Tallulah's remarkable performance had given life to Blanche's character and exemplified her Southern qualities. While the Southern characters in Williams's plays are generally based on actual experiences and real people, the South portrayed in both *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* is mythic and originates from the nostalgic fantasies of ex-Southern Belles. Amanda Wingfield's recollection of the past centers on her days as a Southern Belle in Blue Mountain. There are several communities and mountain ranges named Blue Mountain in the states of Georgia, Mississippi, and Arkansas, but Blue Mountain also refers to a fairy tale where an Irishman saves an enchanted princess.<sup>55</sup> While audiences cannot be certain whether Amanda's Blue Mountain tale is true or just fantasy, the different connotations suggest that the images of the South in Amanda's mind are more idealized than reliable. *Streetcar* also has a mythical presence. Blanche's memories of Belle Reve are layered with subjectivity, romanticization, and lies, which the uncompromising Stanley

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>55</sup> "The Blue Mountains," ed. Andrew Lang in *Yellow Fairy Book*. New York: Dover, 1966. pp. 256-64.

constantly challenges. Most importantly, the name of her family plantation, Belle Reve, is from French, meaning a “beautiful dream”. The decline of the South in *Streetcar* are symbolically suggested by the loss of Belle Reve and the fading of Blanche’s beautiful dream of being a popular and prestigious Southern Belle.

The historical and social backgrounds of Pai Hsien-yung’s Republican China and Tennessee Williams’s American South are essential to a proper analysis of the problematic psyches of the nostalgic characters in their works. The nostalgia and past memories of such characters are the main triggers of their emotional collapse. These past memories are rooted in the social atmosphere of their native homes and in the decaying elite cultures to which they once belonged. Therefore, an understanding of the antebellum elite culture of Pai’s Republican China and Williams’s South is necessary to understand the basis of the mental struggle of the nostalgic characters. In this chapter, I have mainly focused on locations in Republican China and the American South, including Nan-ch’ing, Shanghai, the Mississippi Delta, and New Orleans. These are all places that have had direct or obvious influences on the selected stories and plays for this essay. The stories are fictional, but the people and issues narrated in them are truehearted representations of two distinctive elite cultures in decay.



## CHAPTER TWO:

### CRITICAL RECEPTIONS OF PAI AND WILLIAMS'S WORKS

In 1986, Pai Hsien-yung wrote a prose piece, "Life is like a Play – Tennessee Williams's *Memoir*," (人生如戲 – 田納西·威廉斯懺悔錄)<sup>56</sup> in a Taiwan newspaper, the *United Daily News* (聯合報). This article commemorates Tennessee Williams's achievements in theatre and addresses Williams's his statements about his homosexuality in his autobiography, *Memoirs*. Pai's writing about Williams's relationship with his lover Frank Merlo is sentimental, which also highlights the obvious parallel between himself and Williams; both had a memorable homosexual relationship that heavily influenced their lives. Pai Hsien-yung is one of the very few homosexual Chinese writers to publicly reveal his sexuality. His intimate relationship with his homosexual lover, Wang Kuo-hsiang (王國祥), was made public through his prose piece "Trees are Still the Same," (樹猶如此)<sup>57</sup> which is written after Wang's death and describes their long-term relationship in a very touching and emotional manner. Pai and Williams's homosexual identities provide an obvious connection between them, but for the purpose of this paper, which aims to analyze and compare the nostalgic women characters in their works, there is a far more important and similarity.

The writings of both Pai and Williams were heavily influenced by their familiarity with and knowledge of elite social groups. I believe this knowledge had a greater

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<sup>56</sup> "Jen-sheng ju-hsi – T'ien-na-hsi Wei-lien-ssu ch'an-hui-lu" (Life is like a Play – Tennessee Williams's *Memoir*) was later collected in *Ti-liu-chih shou-chih* 第六隻手指 (The Sixth Finger), Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pan-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 65-82.

<sup>57</sup> "Shu-yu-ju-tz'u" 樹猶如此 (Trees are Still the Same) in *Shu-yu-ju-tz'u* 樹猶如此 (Trees are Still the Same), Taipei: Lien-ho Wen-hsueh Ch'u-pan-she 聯合文學出版社, 2002. pp. 13-31.

influence on their characterization of nostalgic women than their shared sexual preference.<sup>58</sup> The depiction of fading elite cultures and nostalgic women in their works best represent their achievements in their literary careers. Therefore, this paper will focus on these characterizations and on how Pai and Williams's similar social backgrounds influenced them. The fact that they are both homosexual, however, will not be ignored.

In the article "Life is like a Play," Pai reflects on Williams's sense of guilt over his relationship with Frank Merlo and discusses his understanding and appreciation for Williams's creative works. Pai begins his tribute to Williams by discussing the success of Williams's early plays in the United States. His knowledge of the critical reception and production history of Williams's plays demonstrate his familiarity with Williams's works. Pai also admires Williams for maintaining his dignity as an independent writer and for his persistence in his creative writings, which in his later years were consistently denigrated by negative reviews from critics and audiences. Williams's lifelong dedication to theatre, from script writing to his personal involvement in the actual theatrical productions, is also praised by Pai.

Pai discusses his general feelings about the overall portrayal of the decline of the Old South in Williams's major plays. He thinks that Amanda Wingfield is one of the most successful characters in Williams's plays because Williams was able to project the lively image of his own talkative and nostalgic mother, Edwina Williams, onto the play's

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<sup>58</sup> Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams are two of the very few homosexual writers of their generation that have come out. For Pai's works about homosexuality, please refer to the short stories "Dreams of the Moon" 月夢, "A Sky Full of Bright, Twinkling Stars" 滿天裡亮晶晶的星星, and the novel *Crystal Boy* 孽子. Homosexuality is not a major issue in the selected works for this paper, but his other plays, such as *Cat on the Hot Tin Roof* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, contains more homosexual identity issues.

nostalgic Southern belle.<sup>59</sup> He agrees with Williams that all of Williams's plays are elegies for the decaying culture of the American South. He also notes that the notion of hopeless despair and the constant nostalgia for faded glory, from the melancholic atmosphere of Anton Chekhov's plays, are also present in Williams's works.<sup>60</sup> While Chekhov was marking the fall of Russian aristocratic culture in the end of the Czarist era, Williams was commemorating the decline of the Old South in the postbellum era. Pai's discovery of a resonance between Williams and Chekhov's works emerges from the direction his own writings about pre-1949 Republican China took; for all three, the notion of a nostalgic farewell to a decaying elite culture dominates the author's works. The works of these three writers often touch on the experience of people in times of major social transformation. This historical context triggered the authors' sympathies for fallen elites who live in an age that no longer belongs to them. The creative responses of Chekhov, Williams, and Pai to the coming of the modern era in the twentieth century are layered with compassion, sympathy, and nostalgia. Therefore, Williams's works about the decline of the Old South especially caught Pai's attention because he could recognize himself and his experience therein.

Two tragic heroines from Williams's works, Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Laura Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie*, deeply impressed Pai. Pai sees Blanche's unique character as a combination of the personalities of Williams himself and of his sister Rose. Blanche inherited Rose's elegance, gentleness, and

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<sup>59</sup> "Jen-sheng ju-hsi – T'ien-na-hsi Wei-lien-ssu ch'an-hui-lu" (Life is like a Play – Tennessee Williams's *Memoir*) was later collected in *Ti-liu-chih shou-chih* 第六隻手指 (The Sixth Finger). p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

sensitivity but she also reflects Tennessee Williams's struggle between flesh and soul.<sup>61</sup> Since many of Blanche's character traits come from Williams's own family, Pai believes that Williams was, then, able to express his most personal sentiments through Blanche's character and to create such a stirring effect from Blanche's innermost wailing.<sup>62</sup> Pai's brief analysis of Blanche's character demonstrates his appreciation for Williams's works in a number of ways. First of all, he focuses on the sensitive and vulnerable side of Blanche and relates that to her tragedy. His obvious sympathy for Blanche also demonstrates concern for the spiritual well being of humanity in general because Blanche's troubles remain on a psychological level. Most importantly, Pai's sympathy for Blanche originates from his overall humanistic approach to interpreting the play *Streetcar*, which also explains his own approach to characterizing nostalgic figures in his writing. Thus, Pai's analysis of Blanche demonstrates how he and Williams both share the same kind of sympathy and compassion for the nostalgic figures from their respective cultures.

In the article "Life is like a Play," Pai also includes his reactions to Williams's first successful play *The Glass Menagerie*. Pai believes that much of *The Glass Menagerie*'s success comes from its autobiographical nature. The Wingfield family in the play very much resembles Tennessee Williams's own childhood experiences in St. Louis. Pai states that he was deeply moved by Williams's characterization of Amanda

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.: "而她所患的靈與肉的分裂症卻是威廉斯的" (my translation: but her pathological division between soul and flesh actually belongs to Williams.) p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.: "難怪白蘭芝從靈魂深處發出來的求援的哀號如此震撼人心" (my translation: no wonder Blanche's wailing for help from the bottom of her heart has such a great impact) p. 75.

and Laura Wingfield.<sup>63</sup> Because Williams projects his sentiments towards his own mother and sister onto these two characters, their tragedies are vividly and touchingly portrayed in the play.

Pai's reaction to and appreciation for *The Glass Menagerie* actually highlights another similarity between himself and Williams. Laura Wingfield's character originates from and is heavily influenced by Williams's guilt at not spending enough time with his beloved, mentally unstable sister Rose. Pai's elder sister Pai Hsien-ming (白先明) also went through a similar experience to Rose's. Hsien-ming was diagnosed with schizophrenia during a stay in the United States in the 1950's, and she never fully recovered her mental health. In a prose piece titled "The Sixth Finger," (第六隻手指)<sup>64</sup> Pai Hsien-yung commemorates the death of Pai Hsien-ming in 1982 and narrates his close relationship with her through a emotional description of their childhood. He describes Hsien-ming as a very optimistic and benevolent person. She was a positive influence on Pai and always kept him company when he suffered from Tuberculosis at a young age. In this way, Pai Hsien-yung is quite similar to Williams because they both went through hard times in their childhoods and their sisters were their spiritual supports throughout these difficulties.

Similar to Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*, Pai Hsien-yung also expresses his feelings of pity for his mentally ill sister Hsien-ming in an early short story,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Pai Hsien-yung's 第六隻手指 – 紀念三姐先明以及我們的童年 (The Sixth Finger – to Commemorate Third Sister Hsien-ming and our childhood) in *Ti-liu-chih shou-chih* 第六隻手指 (The Sixth Finger). pp. 3-28.

“Let’s Go See the Chrysanthemums.” (我們看菊花去)<sup>65</sup> One of the important features in Pai’s early short stories is their autobiographical element. His early short stories are often narrated from a first person point of view, which reflects his own perspective and adapts a persona that represents the young Pai Hsien-yung. The short story “Jade Love” (玉卿嫂)<sup>66</sup> best demonstrates this aspect of Pai’s early short stories. It tells the story of a young nanny’s experiences working in a big household and how she suffers a failed love affair with a younger man. The narrator of this story, Jung Ko-erh (容哥兒), obviously resembles Pai Hsien-yung himself at a young age. In an interview, Pai Hsien-yung states that the character Yu Ching-hsiao (玉卿嫂) was not actually from his household but that he created her from his friend’s descriptions of their nannies.

The short story “Let’s Go See the Chrysanthemums” has a more obvious autobiographical nature. The story is basically about a young man’s pain and emotional struggles upon sending his elder sister to a mental institution. It is narrated in first person and the narrator strongly resembles Pai Hsien-yung himself. The story’s depiction of the mentally ill elder sister is very similar to Pai’s description of his own sister, Pai Hsien-ming, in the non-fiction “The Sixth Finger.” The sisters in both the short story and in the prose piece are innocent, naïve, benevolent, and have a close relationship with their younger brothers. When C. T. Hsia discusses the main features of Pai’s early short stories in an article “On Pai Hsien-yung,” he points out that the same autobiographical

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<sup>65</sup> “Let’s Go See the Chrysanthemums” 我們看菊花去 first appeared in *Literature Magazine* 文學雜誌 vol. 5 in 1959 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen*. pp. 45-74.

<sup>66</sup> “Jade Love” first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol.1. in 1960 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch’en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp. 91-138.

elements in Pai's early stories are found in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. The mentally ill elder sister in Pai's short story "Let's Go See the Chrysanthemums" may have been inspired by Laura Wingfield's character in *The Glass Menagerie*. Hsia explains that, among the many Western authors he admired, Pai seems to favor Williams's works because the two writers are both interested in and compassionate towards weak and underprivileged individuals.<sup>67</sup> Although Pai has not confirmed that *The Glass Menagerie* was a direct influence on his short story, I believe the similarities between these two works originate from Pai and Williams's feelings of sympathy for their own sisters and their common tendency to show concern for weak individuals in their works.

In his analysis of Pai Hsien-yung's works, C. T. Hsia notes that his short stories can be categorized into two groups: the early ones written in the late 1950's when he was still studying at the National Taiwan University (國立臺灣大學) and the later mature ones written in the early 1960's after he arrived in the United States to study at the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop Program, which were later collected in *Taipei People* and *New Yorker*. Hsia describes Pai's mature stories as "all ironic and compassionate studies of Chinese men and women living in exile from the mainland."<sup>68</sup> He believes that there is a triple scheme of time and space in Pai's fictional world, which is comprised of Mainland China, Taiwan, and the United States.<sup>69</sup> Using the mature short

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<sup>67</sup> C.T. Hsia's "Pai Hsien-yung lun" 白先勇論 (On Pai Hsien-yung) in *Hsien-tai Wen-hsieh* 現代文學 (Modern Literature), No. 39 (Dec. 1969). p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> C.T. Hsia's "Obsession with China (II): Three Taiwan Writers." in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. p. 580.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 583.

story "A Winter Night" (冬夜)<sup>70</sup> as an example, Hsia feels that this story "registers a sense of the psychological desertion of Taiwan by young and old alike – the young, like Yu's son, planning to go to America and the old not averse to the idea even while dreaming or talking about their past on the mainland."<sup>71</sup> Hsia's idea of the "triple scheme of time and space" in "A Winter Night," I think, can also be used to explain the Chinese exiles' psychological landscape in Pai's mature short stories. Some of the nostalgic characters found in *Taipei People* are strongly attached to the memories of their past in Mainland China but they also look forward to opportunities to go to the United States, in order to escape the present sorrows in Taiwan; the nostalgic characters in the *New Yorker* stories have left either Mainland China or Taiwan to start a new life in the United States but their American Dreams cannot be fulfilled, due to either cultural differences or to their stubborn attachments to their memories of China and the past.

The false hopes expressed by some of the Chinese exiles in Pai's short stories are similar to those expressed by characters in Williams's plays. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Wingfield views her son's friend, Jim O'Connor, as the epitome of the perfect gentlemen, someone that well suited to their level in society. In this play, Jim personifies the American Dream: he was once a popular athlete in high school, he has goals for self-improvement and for future professional achievement, and even takes evening classes in public speaking and radio engineering. Jim's competitive and progressive characteristics

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<sup>70</sup> "A Winter Night" 冬夜 first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol. 41 and was later collected in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 241-264.

<sup>71</sup> C.T. Hsia's "Obsession with China (II): Three Taiwan Writers" in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, p. 585.



place him in the polar opposite of the play's main character Tom, who is a laid-back dreamer and self-made poet. When Amanda makes casual conversation with Tom, she always emphasizes Jim's "progressive" qualities in hopes of cultivating in Tom a desire to work. Jim, however, is not really better off than the Wingfield family. He is Tom's co-worker at the shoe warehouse, earns only twenty dollars more per month than Tom. Jim's salary is not enough to support his family in accordance with expected living standards in St. Louis at the time. Although *The Glass Menagerie* is set during the Great Depression, a time when the majority of Americans were living in poverty, Jim's inability to obtain the American Dream is symbolic not only of the devastation experienced during the Depression but also of the failure of the American Dream itself. Thus, through Williams's play, America, a place that at first appears to be a land of opportunity, brings despair and false hope. This is the case for the distressed exiles in both Pai's and Williams's works.

Pai's portrayal of pre-1949 Republican China in his mature short stories is based on the nostalgia of his parents' generation for Mainland China under Nationalist rule; it is also due to the personal resonance he felt with the Chinese literary traditions. Pai's passion for pre-1949 Republican China is comparable to what Thomas Porter calls the myth of the South as portrayed in Tennessee Williams's major plays. Referring to Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Blanche DuBois from Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Porter notes that these two characters personify the social reality behind old American ideals, such as the American Dream and the traditions of the Old South, in the twentieth century and the dramatists' sympathy for their

predicaments.<sup>72</sup> Williams's characterization of nostalgic individuals is directly influenced by the two ways he treats the myth of the South: the extension of the playwright's treatment of the myth and the relation between the playwright and the myth. "For the Southerner, the ante-bellum days represent an ideal of gracious living, an ideal that includes a code of personal honor extending into every area of his experience."<sup>73</sup> They look back to their heritage, family history, past glories, and receive them as a birthright; their personal roots in Southern traditions are also influential to their present society. Therefore, the relation of Williams's treatment of the Southern myth reflects how Southern traditions continue to influence present society. Similarly, Pai Hsien-yung's portrayal of pre-1949 Republican China in his short stories also depends upon the fact that the nostalgic characters' past memories have great influence on their present lives. The nostalgic characters' idealized images of past glories may not be reflective of the actual social reality of pre-1949 Republican China but, nevertheless, such memories determine the way the past is perceived by Chinese exiles living in either Taiwan or the United States. Therefore, Porter's idea about the myth of the South in Williams's plays is also applicable to an analysis of Pai's characters' tendency to idealize pre-1949 Republican China in his short stories.

Porter suggests a second aspect to the manner in which Williams constructs the myth of the South in his plays; this is the relationship that the playwright himself has to the myth. Porter differentiates Arthur Miller's treatment of the American Dream from

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas E. Porter's "The Passing of the Old South" in *Myth and Modern American Drama*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969. p. 154.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Williams's treatment of the Southern traditions as follows: "If Willy [Loman] does not understand his problem, the playwright does. Williams, however, writes from inside the myth."<sup>74</sup> Williams identifies himself with the American South in both his personal and creative writings. His Southern family background is also known to the public. For Porter, the fact that previous studies have suggested that Blanche's sensitive and contradictory character reflects some of Williams's own personality traits demonstrates that Williams is examining a myth that continues to influence him as well. In contrast to Williams, Pai Hsien-yung's fictional accounts of the experiences of Chinese exiles in Taiwan were written mostly about Pai's parents' or grandparents' generation. Pai's personal involvement with the idealization of pre-1949 Republican China comes from his familial roots with the Nationalist administration through his father.<sup>75</sup> His appreciation for traditional Chinese literature and historical consciousness also motivated him to associate himself with China. Although Pai does not directly write his personality into his short stories, the nostalgic characters identify with the traditions and culture of pre-1949 Republican China. Similar to Williams's personal involvement with the myth of the South in his plays, his personal attachment to China is very influential to his portrayal of the pre-1949 Republican China in his short stories.

With their similar personal attachments to their respective declining elite cultures, Pai and Williams treat the nostalgic characters in their works with dignity, compassion, and sympathy. Their similar humanistic attitude towards marginalized figures originates from their own identification with their respective personal heritages. Some critics argue,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>75</sup> Pai's father Pai Chong-hsi (白崇禧) was a major military general under Nationalist government under Chang Kai-shek (蔣介石).

however, that the nostalgic characters are not portrayed in a sympathetic manner and that their individual tragedies are only caused only by their own faults and their inability to adapt to present society. In his analysis of Pai's selected short stories from *Taipei People*, Yen Yuan-shu states that Pai is a satirical writer with strong spatial and social consciousness.<sup>76</sup> Through his analyses of the short stories "The Eternal Snow Beauty," (永遠的尹雪艷) "The Last Night of Taipan Chin" (金大班的最後一夜), and "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," (遊園驚夢) he believes that Pai uses the female protagonists in the stories to criticize the corrupt and oblivious upper-class society in Taipei. Like Yen, it is clear that the obvious ironic tone of "The Eternal Snow Beauty," can easily lead a reader to question the "eternal" features of the protagonist Yin Hsueh-yen (尹雪艷), as well as the writer's decision of characterize the protagonist in such a unique manner. Yin's popularity among elderly visitors to her mansion is also symbolic of the visitors' nostalgia for the glamour and glory of pre-1949 Shanghai. Therefore, I Yen Yuan-shu is clearly right in saying that Pai's way of characterizing Yin Hsueh-yen may result from his discontent with some of the nostalgic members of upper-class society in Taipei at the time. I disagree, however, that this interpretation is applicable in the analysis of the protagonist, Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人), from "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream."

First of all, the setting of Yin Hsueh-yen's mansion cannot be directly compared to the setting of Madame Tou (竇夫人)'s banquet in "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream." The surreal features of Yin Hsueh-yen's mansion are specifically

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<sup>76</sup> Yen, Yüan-shu 顏元叔. "Pai Hsien-yung te yü -yen" 白先勇的語言 (The Language of Pai Hsien-yung) in *Hsien-tai Wen-hsueh* (Modern Literature), No. 39 (Dec. 1969): 137.

intended to stimulate the elderly visitors' desire to revive their past glories through physicality. In contrast, Madame Tou's magnificent banquet triggers memories of the past, but only for Madame Ch'ien who recalls her wealth and fame back in Nan-ching (南京) and her one-time affair with a young officer. Madame Ch'ien's recollection, unlike the active attempts to regain the past by the elderly characters in "The Eternal Snow Beauty," remains on a spiritual level. There are certainly some guests with unlikable characteristics at Madame Tou's banquet but the focus is on how they act as a whole to unintentionally recreate a situation similar to the banquet Madame Ch'ien hosted in Nan-ching years before; this collective act makes it impossible for Madame Ch'ien to avoid confronting the past. I disagree with Yen Yuan-shu that Pai is critical of the fact that Madame Ch'ien, despite her immense knowledge of the upper-class crowd at the banquet, fails to criticize their corrupt behavior. Yen Yuan-shu also states that General Yu (余參軍長)'s vulgar performance of *Eight Great Hammers* (八大鎚)<sup>77</sup> is an example of Pai criticizing the inferior artistic tastes of the upper-class crowd. My interpretation differs from Yen: this incident further demonstrates the divide that separates Madame Ch'ien and the crowd: the crowd can easily be excited by vulgar art but Madame Ch'ien prefers elegant *k'un* opera arias, like those from *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭). If, as Yen Yuan-shu suggests, Pai truly intended this scene to be a critique of upper-class society, the dramatic buildup of Madame Ch'ien's emotional crisis would then be less effective.

In a manner similar to Yen Yuan-shu's approach to Pai's works, the critic Leonard Berkman also examines Blanche's character from *A Streetcar Named Desire*

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<sup>77</sup> A traditional Chinese play, with a martial art theme, usually performed in the Beijing opera style.

from a rather unsympathetic point of view. He believes that Blanche should be regarded as responsible for her own tragic downfall in the play; although Stanley, Stella, and Mitch's misunderstandings of Blanche contribute to her downfall, it is Blanche's fragile sensitivity and unwillingness to face the truth of her declining life that destroy her. Relating his analysis to T. S. Eliot's idea that "human kind cannot bear very much reality,"<sup>78</sup> Berman explains that the issue of reality is central to the tragic irony of Blanche's character. Blanche is unable to confront reality, which makes her a rather unsympathetic character. While I agree that there are obvious weaknesses in Blanche's character that contributed to her tragic downfall, external problems, such as Stanley's cruelty and Stella's inability to understand her, are also crucial to Blanche's downfall. Blanche's obsession with Southern traditions and the aristocratic lifestyle made her unable to adapt to the inferior living environment and society of postbellum New Orleans. Moreover, Blanche may have embodied too many Southern qualities, which make her an inevitable outcast in the postbellum world, but Williams purposely characterized Blanche in this way. Blanche is a well-developed character on her own, but she is also a representative of the decay of Southern elite culture as a whole. Her Southern background, therefore, is essential to the play's effective portrayal of a disappearing world.

Blanche's conflict with Stanley is another major issue in the play. Following the loss of her family estate, Belle Reve, Blanche is forced to rely on her sister Stella to survive, but Stella's husband Stanley treats Blanche with heartless cruelty. He is impatient with her Southern manners, consistently calls into questions the reasons for the

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<sup>78</sup> Leonard Berkman's "The Tragic Downfall of Blanche Dubois" in *Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*, Ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988, p. 38.

loss of Belle Reve, and finally, he rapes her. The conflict between Blanche and Stanley eventually pushes her to realize the truth about her degraded life and takes the story to its climax. Interestingly, the confrontations with Stanley reverse the standard role of the traditional South, transforming it into the “intruder” in postbellum society. The institutions and traditions of the antebellum South that were once the cornerstones of Deep South cities like the New Orleans were irrevocably altered in postbellum times. Stanley, with his Polish ancestry, represents the new, industrial, and progressive America that has replaced the traditional role of antebellum Southern elites. Consequently, people who still identify with the antebellum South become “intruders” in mainstream society and are perceived in a manner similar to how Stanley views Blanche’s arrival: an intrusion in his home.

Given the deep historical significance embodied in the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, Berkman’s criticism that Williams lacks historical consciousness seems flawed because I believe Blanche’s character is rooted in the history of the American Civil War and its consequences, including the decline of the Old South. It corresponds to more of the American Civil War’s aftermath, rather than that of the Second World War that Berkman suggests. Berkman argues “how could any contemporary, intelligent playwright be thought, in the aftermath of the war [WWII] to accept such evidence of sensitivity and of education as an interest in poetry and an aversion to vulgarity as his basis of distinguishing the marks of civilization from the marks of savagery?”<sup>79</sup> I think the most important dividing line between Blanche and Stanley is that they belong to different worlds. Blanche’s poetic speeches, her preference for vanity and other qualities befitting a Southern Belle annoy Stanley precisely because Stanley cannot comprehend

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

the Southern lifestyle and system of value. Thus, Blanche's tragic downfall is the result of her difference from Stanley, her unfulfilled desire for love, and the inability of others to understand her faults and weaknesses. I believe Williams characterizes Blanche in this sympathetic way in order to bring out a sense of grief for the decline of the South but not, as Berkman suggests, to "generate intense self-pity among all those spectators who have thought of themselves as fragile, gifted, and rejected."<sup>80</sup>

In recent decades, literary critics from Mainland China have expressed a profound interest in Pai Hsien-yung's works. Elements of traditional Chinese culture and the association with the pre-1949 Republican China in Pai's works have created resonance among Mainland Chinese critics. Their approach to Pai's works is usually a continuation of worthy predecessors from Taiwan and the United States, which focuses mainly on the traditional Chinese and Western influences on Pai's works and the association of Pai's short stories with Western modernism. Between 2004 and 2005, about twenty articles were published in Mainland China analyzing Pai's works. Most of these are short pieces, about four to six pages, and they discuss a number of popular issues in Pai's works, such as the comparison between Pai and other "modern" writers like Anton Chekhov,<sup>81</sup> Yu Ta-

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> See Wang Ju-ho 王汝合's "從過去的美塑像與為未來的美塑像 – 白先勇的《遊園驚夢》與契訶夫的《三姊妹》的'時間'主題比較分析" (Presenting the Beauty of the Past and That of the Future: A Comparative Study of the Motif of Time in Pai Hsien-yung's "Garden Party" [Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream] and Chekhov's "Three Sisters") in *Chinese Literature* 華文文學 62 (2004): 17-20.



fu (郁達夫),<sup>82</sup> and Su T'ung (蘇童),<sup>83</sup> or the connection between Pai's works and certain aspects of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Critic Chang Tu (章渡) has suggested an interesting comparison between Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams.<sup>84</sup> In her work, she briefly introduces several obvious similarities between the two writers, including the nostalgic sentiments they express towards the decay of Republican China or the American South, their common concern for the spiritual well-being of the weak and marginalized groups in society, their homosexuality, and the similarities between Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and Pai's "Let's Go See the Chrysanthemums" that C. T. Hsia had previously noted. Chang's analysis of the two writers is based on Pai's prose piece on Williams, "Life is like a Play – Tennessee Williams's *Memoirs*" that was discussed in detail earlier in this chapter. She also elaborates on C. T. Hsia's idea of the young man archetype in Pai's early short stories. Due to the brevity of the article, Chang's analysis of Pai and Williams is brief and only provides an overview of possible common ground for a comparison of the two writers; it does not examine the depth of the two writers' works. Chang's discussion of Tennessee Williams is also very limited and essentially rephrases much of what Pai says about Williams in his article. Therefore, Chang's article successfully pointed out some general commonalities between Pai and Williams but a further comparison of specific

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<sup>82</sup> See Sung Kuei-hua 宋桂花's "異鄉的沉淪 – 對比郁達夫《沉淪》與白先勇《芝加哥之死》的死亡敘事" (Sinking on a foreign land – Comparing the narration of death in Yu Ta-fu's "Sinking" and Pai Hsien-yung's "Death in Chicago") in *Forum for Chinese Literature of the World* 世界華文論壇 2 (2004): 45-48.

<sup>83</sup> See Yu Ch'un-ling and Ts'ung K'un-ch'ih 俞春玲, 叢坤赤's 論白先勇, 蘇童的女性世界 (On Pai Hsien-yung and Su T'ung's world of the female) in *Mien-yang Normal College Journal* 綿陽師範學院學報 332 (2004): 68-70.

<sup>84</sup> See Chang Tu 章渡's 白先勇與田納西 威廉斯 (Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams) in *Forum for Chinese Literature of the World* 世界華文論壇 2 (2004): 48-50.

features in their works and an in-depth examination of their respective backgrounds are also necessary.

Despite the limitations of Chang Tu's brief introduction to Pai and Williams, her analysis remained close to the two writers' original ideas for their works. Comparatively, other Mainland Chinese critics prefer to focus only on the ideological influences in Pai's exile stories and they disregard Pai's original humanistic concerns. Ts'ao Ch'ien (曹謙)'s analysis of Pai's *New Yorker* <sup>85</sup> is an obvious example of how the critic can twist Pai's original ideas to suit the critic's needs, in this case, to appropriate Pai's writing and force it to conform to a certain ideology, such as modernism. Ts'ao's argument is focused on the corrupt features of Western-influenced modern society and how these features lead to the tragedies of various characters in *New Yorker*. He first uses T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" to define "modernity" from a Western perspective. In the early twentieth century, many intellectuals in Europe were dispirited in the face of the traumatic outcomes of various wars and they suffered from disillusionment with humanistic ideals.<sup>86</sup> Within the context of the "modern phenomenon" of vanishing dreams and ideals, Ts'ao locates the depressing environment with the Western settings of Pai's "Death in Chicago" (芝加哥之死) and "Going up a Skyscraper." (上摩天樓去) There are a good number of references to Western literature in "Death in Chicago" because the protagonist Wu Hanhun (吳漢魂) is a Ph.D student in English literature. Pai also uses T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" to demonstrate Wu's pessimism towards life,

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<sup>85</sup> See Ts'ao Ch'ien 曹謙's "Ts'ung *Niu-yueh K'o k'an* Pai Hsien-yung ssu-hsiang chung te hsien-tai chu-yi t'e-cheng" 從《紐約客》看白先勇思想意識中的現代主義特徵 (Looking at the special characteristics of modernism in Pai Hsien-yung's ideology from *New Yorker*) in *Chiang-huai Forum* 江淮論壇 1(2005): pp. 123-27.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

and to show his frustration over his indulgence in English literature and his uncertainty about his future following graduation. “The Waste Land” is used here by Pai to illustrate Wu’s rejection of reality and his inability to adapt to the lively environment in Chicago. Thus, the Chicago described in this story is in opposition to the way in which Wu subjectively conceives it. Therefore, Ts’ao’s idea about how Chicago represents a “modern society” that leads Wu towards despair and self-destruction seems incorrect.<sup>87</sup>

Ts’ao also notes the allusion to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in final scene of “Death in Chicago,” relating it to Wu’s suicide at the end of the story. Right before Wu commits suicide in Lake Michigan, he recalls the following line from *Macbeth*: “It is a tale / Told by an idiot, / Full of Sound and Fury / Signifying Nothing.”<sup>88</sup> Ts’ao believes that the allusion to *Macbeth* is Wu’s final reaction to the depressing environment of Chicago.<sup>89</sup> While I agree that Chicago is especially depressing for Wu, I again feel that Wu’s view does not represent the real Chicago nor Pai’s own view of the city. Ts’ao’s main argument that “modern society” causes the tragedies experienced by various characters in *New Yorker* is thus not applicable to Wu’s pessimistic view of the city of Chicago. With the reference to *Macbeth*, I think Pai is expressing that this kind of pessimistic worldview is not exclusive to “modern society;” it is universal and transcends time and space. The allusion is not just essential to the interpretation of Wu’s complex mindset; it also illustrates how Pai utilizes the Shakespearean concept of the meaninglessness of

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>88</sup> Pai, Hsien-yung. “Death in Chicago” 芝加哥之死 in *Lonely Seventeen*: “生命是癡人編成的故事，充滿聲音與憤怒，裡面卻是虛無一片。” p. 247.

<sup>89</sup> Ts’ao, Ch’ien 曹謙’s “Ts’ung *Niu-yueh* K’o k’an Pai Hsien-yung ssu-hsiang chung te hsien-tai chu-yi t’e-cheng” 從《紐約客》看白先勇思想意識中的現代主義特徵. p. 124.

existence to explain his character's problems. Pai's overall worldview may not be as bleak as that of Wu's but the notion of despair is inevitable when narrating the experiences of some Chinese exiles in the United States.

Another critic Susan McFadden has, in her studies on the Western influences on Pai Hsien-yung, contributed an insightful interpretation of Wu's suicide.<sup>90</sup> She suggests, "the success or failure of the allusive method is highly dependent upon the natural association which a reader will make."<sup>91</sup> While the story is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, the purpose of this allusion is to draw the readers into Wu's complex consciousness. In this case, Pai has successfully illustrated Wu's frustrated mindset and pessimism through this allusion to *Macbeth*, which, again, does not represent the writer's own worldview. The same allusion to *Macbeth* is also used in the title of William Faulkner's famous novel *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner's vision of life in the antebellum South is a "a tale told by an idiot [Benjy], full of Sound and Fury, signifying nothing," which parallels Pai's depiction of Chinese exiles in the United States who had had much better lives in China, in the past. The different interpretations of the quote from *Macbeth* seem to support the universality of the Shakespearean idea of the meaninglessness of existence and refute Ts'ao's idea that the sorrows of the protagonists in *New Yorker* are somehow the products of "modern society."

McFadden further discusses the connection between Pai Hsien-yung and William Faulkner by comparing Pai's manipulation of time and memory in "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" to the Benjy chapter in Faulkner's *The Sound and the*

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<sup>90</sup> Susan McFadden's "Tradition and Talent: Western Influence in the Works of Pai Hsien-yung" in *Tamkang Review* 9, 3 (1979): 315-44.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

*Fury*. Both works use a “stream-of-consciousness” technique to present how the past and the present are being manipulated simultaneously between memory and the lived experience.<sup>92</sup> Given the emphasis on the role of memory in human existence in Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, it can also be added to this comparison. The play is defined as a “memory play” by the narrator and its entire storytelling process relies on the narrator and on Tom, the protagonist, who recollect and manipulate his past memories when he was still living in the St. Louis apartment with his mother and sister. Pai and Faulkner uses a similar technique to manipulate time and memory in his works, as the important Pai’s portrayal of pre-1949 Mainland China and Faulkner’s portrayal of antebellum American South are based on their characters’ past memories. Moreover, the essential conflict in Pai, Faulkner, and Williams’s works are all tragic consequences of the passing of time. When the society progresses towards a new era, people who are obsessed and attached to the old order will find their present reality unfavorable; their nostalgia for past glories will then be the main obstacle that obstructs their attempts to fit into society. While this phenomenon is not exclusive to the modern era, the tragedies of such nostalgic characters are not exclusive to “modern society” either.

Ts’ao’s analysis of the character Li T’ung (李彤) from Pai’s short story “A Celestial in Mundane Exile” (謫仙記) is also problematic due to his misunderstanding of Pai’s symbolic implications in his portrayal of the United States. Ts’ao thinks that Li T’ung is the most “Americanized” young women in *New Yorker* and apparently has completely adapted to Western modern society. He describes Li T’ung as having a “physical appearance [that] completely matches with the “modern” standard of beauty ...

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

she completely follows the Western lifestyle and way of handling affairs ... she believes in and practices hedonism and handles gender relations with a frivolous attitude.”<sup>93</sup> I think Ts’ao’s description of Li T’ung has only touched on the superficial characteristics of this tragic heroine. She does appear to be independent and quite well adapted to American society but her confidence and supercilious character are just masks to hide her loneliness at living in a foreign land. Moreover, her sense of despair comes from the loss of contact with the motherland, China. Li’s parents in China both passed away in an accident, and thus she is unable to go home after her studies in America. Pai Hsien-yung does not directly show Li T’ung’s discontent with her stay in America; he suggests it through her frivolous behavior and her indulgence in materialistic desires. Pai has clearly created Li T’ung in part to symbolize China as a way to point out the fate of the nation during and after the civil war. When Li T’ung and her three other female friends leave China for the United States in 1946, they jokingly call themselves the Big Four of the postwar world: China, America, Great Britain, and Russia. Li T’ung is the one to represent China.<sup>94</sup> Pai does not see Li T’ung as an obvious symbol of China because the story and experiences in the United States are more about the individual than the nation, but her tragedy does contain allusions to the decline of Republican Chinese elite culture and to the experience of Chinese exiles in the United States after the Chinese civil war.

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<sup>93</sup> Ts’ao Ch’ien 曹謙’s “Ts’ung *Niu-yueh K’o k’an* Pai Hsien-yung ssu-hsiang chung te hsien-tai chu-yi t’-cheng” 從《紐約客》看白先勇思想意識中的現代主義特徵:

“李彤是《謫仙記》中一群年親女性中最美國化的一個：她的外型完全符合現代審美標準 ... 她完全是按照西方的生活方式處事和生活的 ... 她是享樂主義的身體力行者，在兩性關係上也顯得十分輕浮。” p. 125.

<sup>94</sup> See Pai Hsien-yung’s “Li Tung: a Chinese Girl in New York” [A Celestial in Mundane Exile] 謫仙記, Trans. C. T. Hsia and Pai Hsien-yung, in *Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories*. Ed. C.T. Hsia. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971. p. 221.

Similar to Leonard Berkman's unsympathetic interpretation of Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Ts'ao connects Li T'ung's downfall to the corrupt characteristics of "modern, Western society," in which "people disbelieve in true emotions but recognize the existence of desire."<sup>95</sup> However, Ts'ao's analysis is contrary to Pai's characterization of Li T'ung. Compared to other characters in the story, Li T'ung is most troubled by her emotions and roots in China. Just like Blanche, she is spiritually attached to her motherland, China, and yearns for true love in her new living environment in the United States. Li's tragic downfall begins when she loses hope of ever returning to China. Her parents' deaths prevent her from returning home in the first place and the victory of the Chinese Communist in the civil war makes her status as a social elite very unfavorable at home. It is when her Chinese identity is out of place in her present lifestyle in the United States and her subtextual sense of belonging to China cannot be fulfilled that her life in the United States takes a turn for the worse. Li begins to indulge in flirtations with various men, alcohol, gambling, and other materialistic pastimes. Therefore, Ts'ao's idea, which Li T'ung's tragedy is a portrayal of materialistic modern society's ruthless cruelty towards humanity and disastrous consequences of material wealth on the human spirit, is untenable. Pai, in Ts'ao's words, "destroys the most glorious thing in the story in front of our eyes in a merciless exposure of and profound reflection on the dangers of modern society."<sup>96</sup> Ts'ao's idea here is very much apart from

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<sup>95</sup> Ts'ao, Ch'ien 曹謙's "Ts'ung *Niu-yueh K'o k'an* Pai Hsien-yung ssu-hsiang chung te hsien-tai chu-yi t'e-cheng" 從《紐約客》看白先勇思想意識中的現代主義特徵:  
"在現代社會裡, 人們不願意相信能夠把握住真情, 倒願意認可慾望的存在." p. 125.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.,  
"李彤的悲劇是物慾橫流的現代社會對人性的無情殘害的寫照, 是物質財富對人類精神異化的惡果。白先勇在小說裡對把美好的事物毀滅了給我們看, 表達了他對現代社會弊端的無情揭露和深沉的思考." p. 125.

Pai's original humanistic characterization of Li T'ung and is an example of how a critic's fascination with a certain ideology, such as modernism, or a certain social phenomenon, such as "modern society" can negatively obstruct his or her analysis of a writer's work that has both specific cultural implications and universal messages about humanity.

Given the popularity of Pai and Williams's works, there has been a significant amount of research and analysis of the two writers' works. Their works have attracted the attentions of scholars and critics of different nationalities and backgrounds because their works are outstanding representatives of their respective literary traditions and they demonstrate their respective nation's unique experiences in the twentieth century. Besides Chang Tu's brief article on Pai and Williams, all of the secondary sources I have examined in this chapter focus on either Pai or Williams. Issues that most critics found interesting include the various influences on the two writers' works, the nature of the nostalgic characters' tragedies, the debate on the sympathetic side of tragic heroines, and the portrayal of decaying elite culture. Although they all have different opinions and approaches to the two writers works, many have pointed out important aspects that are specific to certain elements of the works, specific ideas in their analysis can also be used to pinpoint similarities between the two writers. For example, C. T. Hsia's discussion of Pai's obsession with China points out the significance of the native land in Pai's exile stories; similarly, Thomas Porter's discussion of the myth of the South in Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* also relates Williams's passion for the South to his portrayal of the declining Southern elite culture. In addition, the parallel between Leonard Berkman's unsympathetic approach to Blanche DuBois from *Streetcar* and Yen Yuan-shu's criticism



of Madame Ch'ien's lack of social consciousness in "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" points out the consequences when the critic shifts his focus from within the text to the social or historical background of the stories. Although this paper will continue to employ a close-reading approach in analyzing the selected works of Pai and Williams, the significance and techniques previous critical analysis should also be kept in mind.

### CHAPTER THREE: PAI HSIEN-YUNG AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S MUSICAL JOURNEY TO THE HUMAN PSYCHE

Realism, in its various genres, is often associated with the dawn of modern literature. Some notable realist fiction writers include Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, James Joyce, and Lu Shun (魯迅), and some notable realist playwrights include Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and Anton Chekhov. Realist writers aim to represent “complex characters with mixed motives who are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience.”<sup>97</sup> Besides employing realistic elements in the direct portrayal of real-life experiences, Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams have gone beyond the limits of realism and employed various literary styles and innovations to highlight the messages about humanity contained in their works.

Nurtured in both traditional Chinese and modern Western literature, Pai Hsien-yung's literary style is unique among other modern Chinese writers. He utilizes the narration and scenic dialogues from traditional Chinese vernacular fiction, especially in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), to shape his stories about Chinese exiles in the twentieth century in an authentic way. In addition to his traditional forms, Pai experiments with the stream-of-consciousness, a Western modernist literary technique. In his most successful short story, “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream,” (遊園驚夢) this technique allows him to explore extensively the troubled psyche of the nostalgic heroine Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人). Tennessee Williams also has a profound

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<sup>97</sup> M. H. Abrams' “Novel” in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999. p. 192.

interest in exploring the complex psychology of his female characters. Instead of using the “stream-of-consciousness” technique, which is firmly rooted in the fiction genre, Williams employs several symbolic pieces of music to represent the troubled mindset of Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Williams’s use of music in these two plays can actually be compared to Pai’s treatment of Madame Ch’ien in the short story. The melodies and lyrics of the *k’un* (崑) drama *Peony Pavilion* are crucial to Madame Ch’ien’s recollection of past memories and they function to bring the story to its climax. Although Pai and Williams are writing in different genres for different kinds of readers and audiences, their methods for exploring the psychology behind the decaying elite cultures in their respective worlds are similar. They are united by some important stylistic similarities.

Pai Hsien-yung was the first Chinese writer to experiment with the “stream-of-consciousness” style of fiction writing. Besides the enormous influence of traditional Chinese literature, Pai was also heavily influenced by Western literature, especially that of the modernist school. In 1959, when he was still an undergraduate in the foreign language department of the National Taiwan University (國立臺灣大學), he founded a literary journal called *Modern Literature* (現代文學) with the goal of introducing Western literature to Taiwanese students. The journal also provided Chinese translations of Western literature and was a venue for the works young Taiwanese writers, like Pai Hsien-yung himself or Wang Wen-hsing (王文興), Chen Jo-hsi (陳若曦), and Ou-yang

Tzu (歐陽子).<sup>98</sup> This journal featured a major Western writer in each issue, and included a brief introduction to the writer, selected translated works, and some analysis of them. An examination of the writers chosen by the journal reveals Pai's tastes in Western literature. In the first eleven issues, during which time Pai was the journal's main editor, three Western writers who are pioneers in the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in fiction writing were featured: James Joyce in volume two, Virginia Woolf in volume six, and William Faulkner in volume eleven. The analyses of each writer do not suggest a direct influence on Pai's own experiments with stream-of-consciousness, but they clearly demonstrate his appreciation for their artistry.

Pai first began exploring the stream-of-consciousness technique in an early short story titled "Hong Kong 1960."<sup>99</sup> It depicts the civil restiveness of Hong Kong society in the early 1960s as viewed through the unstable consciousness of the female protagonist Yu Li-ch'ing (余麗卿). Pai uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to highlight the chaos of the city as refracted through the mind of the protagonist –the main subject of the story is Hong Kong itself. This first attempt at using stream-of-consciousness failed to achieve the potentials inherent in the technique. The story's weak plot does not fully integrate Yu Li-ch'ing's fragmented mindset with the instability of Hong Kong society in the 1960s, nor does it provide sufficient context for this complex social background. Most importantly, the stream-of-consciousness technique does not fit comfortably into

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<sup>98</sup> See Pai Hsien-yung's "Hsien-tai wen-hsueh te hui-ku yu ch'ien-chan" (*Modern Literature's Review and Prospect*) 現代文學的回顧與前瞻 in *Ti-liu-chih shou-chih* 第六隻手指 (The Sixth Finger), Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pan-she 爾雅出版社, 2002. pp. 239-59, for more information on this journal's mission and Pai's involvement in it.

<sup>99</sup> "Hong Kong 1969" 香港- 一九六零 first appeared in *Modern Literature* 現代文學 vol. 21 in 1964 and was later collected in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲, Taipei: Yung-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003, pp. 263-71.

Yu Li-ch'ing's fragmented interior monologue, leaving the impression that Pai self-consciously imposed this style upon her and failed to make it feel natural and fitting for her character. Therefore, "Hong Kong 1960" can be used to demonstrate Pai's early unsuccessful experiment with the stream-of-consciousness techniques, and it is in sharp contrast to his next use of this technique in the later short story, "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream."

The story is about Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人), a former *k'un* opera singer and ex-socialite of pre-1949 Nan-ching (南京). At a banquet hosted by her god-sister, Madame Tou (竇夫人), in Taipei, she encounters some old acquaintances and is forced to confront the reality that her current life in Taiwan pales in comparison to her past one. She realizes that her passion for love and sexual fulfillment can only be realized by her memory and illusions of the past – a fact that leaves her desolated and melancholy. The banquet reminds her of her past glories as the wife of a prominent general of the Nationalist army because she had hosted a very similar banquet at her own mansion in Nan-ching. At the banquet in Nan-ching, she witnessed her younger sister Red-red Rose (月月紅) flirting with her lover Tseng Yen-ch'ing (鄭彥青) and stealing him away from her. An almost identical incident happens at Madame Tou's banquet in Taipei when Madame Tou's lover, Colonel Ch'eng (程參謀), is stolen away by her younger sister Chiang Pi-yueh (蔣碧月), nicknamed Heavenly Pepper (天辣椒). In terms of Madame Ch'ien's character development, the parallel plot structure concerning the past and present affairs helps to build the tension that eventually leads to Madame Ch'ien's nervous breakdown, in which Pai uses stream-of-consciousness to demonstrate her troubled state of mind.

Another parallel structure in “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” that builds to the story’s climax is effected through allusions to *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) in Madame Ch’ien’s stream of recollections.<sup>100</sup> The title of the story itself refers to scene ten of *Peony Pavilion*, “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream.” In this scene the drama’s heroine, Tu Li-niang (杜麗娘) [“Bridal Du” in Cyril Birch’s translation], visits a garden and, amazed by the blooming flowers, falls into a deep sleep. In her dream she encounters a lover who helps her experience love and sexual awakening, and when she wakes she is lovesick. The first connection that can be made between Madame Ch’ien and Tu Li-niang is Madame Ch’ien’s fame for singing arias from this scene. At her banquet in Nan-ching, she had been asked to perform the arias “*Ts’ao Lo-p’ao*” (皂羅袍), or “Black Silk Robe,” and “*Shan P’o-yang*” (山坡羊), or “Sheep on the Mountain Slope”. At first, she was accompanied by her lover Tseng Yen-ch’ing but later on, as she again performed the aria for her guests, she caught sight of Red-red Rose flirting with Tseng Yen-ch’ing.<sup>101</sup> Madame Ch’ien recognized this moment as the beginning of the end of her affair with Tseng Yen-ch’ing; she is older and a married woman and, therefore, cannot fight for him with her younger sister. Consequently, she lost her voice while singing the last few lines of “*Shan P’o-yang*” and ended it choked with mental agony. The allusion to scene ten of *Peony Pavilion* is ironic because in her garden, Tu Li-niang discovers love but Madame Ch’ien discovers only heartbreak in hers. For readers who

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<sup>100</sup> *Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) is a classic in traditional Chinese theatre written by Tang Hsien-tzu in the Ming dynasty. The story basically centers on the power of love and how it can transcend life and death. For the English translation of this play, please see Cyril Birch’s *Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

<sup>101</sup> See “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” 遊園驚夢 in *Taipei People* 臺北人. Taipei: Erh-ya chubanshe 爾雅出版社, 2002. p.235.

are familiar with the specific scene from *Peony Pavilion*, it is easy to understand why Madame Ch'ien has difficulty performing it for the guests at her banquet.

Close examination of allusions to arias in “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” indicates that Pai intends Madame Ch'ien's nervous breakdown to mirror the plot of scene ten from *Peony Pavilion*. At the banquet held by Madame Tou in Taipei, Madame Tou's younger sister Chiang Pi-yueh announces that Mrs. Hsu (徐太太) will perform the first half of the scene “Wandering in the Garden” for the guests and Madame Ch'ien will perform the second half, “Waking from a Dream.”<sup>102</sup> When Mrs. Hsu performs the first half for the guests, the lines she sings remind Madame Ch'ien of the scene in *Peony Pavilion* and also of her old days in Nan-ching. The short story here alludes to the scene's most famous aria “*Ts'ao Lo-p'ao*,” which is sung by Tu Li-niang as she enters the garden and is struck by the beauty of the colorful flowers.

See how deepest purple, brightest scarlet

Open their beauty only to dry well crumbling

“Bright the morn, lovely the scene,”

listless and lost the heart.<sup>103</sup>

The springtime atmosphere evoked by the aria matches Madame Ch'ien's reveries, of her love affair with Tseng Yen-ch'ing and how her younger sister Red-red rose stole him right in front of her eyes. Moreover, Tu Li-niang's laments that her father's restrictions prevent her from exploring the garden, thus wasting her youth and halting her search for a

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>103</sup> T'ang Hsien-tzu's “Scene Ten: The Interrupted Dream” in *Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*. Second edition. trans. Cyril Birch. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002: “原来姹紫嫣紅開遍，似這般都付與斷井頽垣。良辰美景奈何天，賞心樂事誰家院！” p. 44.

lover: "I was a pretty child, and so / of equal eminence must the family be / truly immortals, no less / to receive me in marriage. / But for what grand alliance / is this springtime of my youth / so cast away?"<sup>104</sup> In this case, Tu Li-niang's unfulfilled love desire expressed in the aria "*Shan P'o-yang*" parallels Madame Ch'ien's lost love. When at the later banquet held in Taipei, Madame Ch'ien catches sight of Chiang Pi-yueh making intimate gestures to Madame Tou's lover, Colonel Ch'eng, the moment seems almost identical to what happened to her at her own banquet in Nan-ching. The shock of memory causes her eyesight to blur and her mind to become very unstable. It is at this moment, then, that Pai Hsien-yung leads Madame Ch'ien, the frustrated woman, into a stream-of-consciousness narrative technique.

There are a number of reasons why Pai uses stream-of-consciousness to describe Madame Ch'ien's troubled state of mind. First, this method is one of the most direct ways to allow readers to get into the character's mind without any interference from the author or narrator. It is "a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without narrator's intervention, the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings and random associations."<sup>105</sup> Since the short story focuses heavily on the mental development of the protagonist, it is entirely suitable to use stream-of-consciousness to elaborate the rush of memory experienced by Madame Ch'ien, her sense of alienation among the rich and famous guests at Madame Tou's banquet, her self-made illusions, her dizziness from alcohol, and the disturbing sight of Chiang Pi-

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>105</sup> M. H. Abrams' "Stream of Consciousness" in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. p. 299.



yueh and Colonel Ch'eng's affair, all of which unfold simultaneously and uncontrollably in her mind.

Secondly, Madame Ch'ien's chaotic state of mind at the time of her breakdowns is layered with different moments from the past and the present, as well as with her own personal reflections on the play *Peony Pavilion*. When Mrs. Hsu is singing "Wandering in a Garden" at Madame Tou's banquet, Madame Ch'ien's mind jumps rapidly through her memories of the past: from the comments the flute master Wu Sheng-hao (吳聲豪) once made about her singing back in Nan-ching, to when Red-red Rose forced her to drink excessively at her own banquet, to the time a blind woman (*shih-niang* 師娘) foretold that she would never fulfill her desire for love in this lifetime, to her memories of Tseng Yen-ch'ing's handsome body, and finally to her memories of being addressed by the title she retained back in Nan-ching: Mrs. Ch'ien, His Excellency General Ch'ien P'eng-chih's lady (錢鵬志夫人). Madame Ch'ien's fragmented memories are successfully conveyed through the use of stream-of-consciousness, which here also conveys the roots to her nostalgic thoughts.

In the beginning of the story, the luxurious setting of Madame Tou's banquet very much reminds Madame Ch'ien of her past as a General's lady in Nan-ching. Although Madame Ch'ien feels alienated among other Mainland Chinese exiles, who have adapted well to the society and lifestyle in Taiwan, this sense of alienation is not yet the major reason for her nervous breakdown, which comes when she fails to perform "Waking from a Dream" for Madame Tou's guests. What bothers her the most is her tragic fate in the affair with her husband's officer Tseng Yen-ch'ing. One possible explanation for her sorrow finds expression in the words of the blind woman, which are part of Madame

Ch'ien's recollection as she listens to Madame Hsu sings "*Ts'ao Lo-p'ao*:" "Hadn't the blind woman, our shih-niang, said, Worldly glory, wealth, position – Bluefield Jade, only it's a pity you've got one bone that's not quite right. Oh, my retribution. Isn't he the retribution in your Sister's fate? Understand? Sis, it's your retribution."<sup>106</sup> (231/368)

Thus, to Madame Ch'ien it seems she is destined to always be loveless and unloved. She is unhappy with her marriage to General Ch'ien P'eng-chih because they do not share a great love. General Ch'ien is a much older man who can provide Madame Ch'ien with fame, wealth, and luxury but not love, the most essential thing in a marriage. Faced with such a lack of passion in her marriage, Madame Ch'ien begins an affair with Tseng Yen-ch'ing. This affair provides her with the liveliest moments of her life because it is the only time when her desire for love and sex are simultaneously fulfilled. The end of the affair, however, permanently wounds Madame Ch'ien because Tseng Yen-ch'ing betrays her and leaves her for her younger sister Red-red Rose. From that moment on, no matter how she tries, she cannot suppress her sorrows over the failed affair, and her desire for love and sexual fulfillment remain unattainable. Madame Ch'ien is haunted by her memories of the past.

When at Madame Tou's banquet Madame Ch'ien's mind begins to unhinge, her suppressed desires rise up from her unconscious and begin to influence her random recollection of the past. Pai Hsien-yung's decision to use stream-of-consciousness to narrate these recollections, therefore, fully brings out the past's significance to her present discontent with her downgraded life in Taiwan. Madame Ch'ien is one of Pai

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<sup>106</sup> References to "Yu-yuan ch'ing-meng" 遊園驚夢 / "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," translated by Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin. *Taipei-Jen* 臺北人 / *Taipei People: Chinese-English Bilingual Edition*. Taipei / Hong Kong: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社 / The Chinese University Press, 2002 / 2002. pp. 205-40 / 327-84.

Hsien-yung's most remarkable nostalgic characters. The short story's earlier descriptions of the grand setting at Madame Tou's banquet very much resemble Madame Ch'ien's lifestyle back in Nan-ching and they provide an explanation for Madame Ch'ien's strong feelings of nostalgia. This, however, may also mislead readers into thinking that Madame Ch'ien is similar in character to the elderly guests at Yin Hsueh-yen (尹雪艷)'s mansion in Pai's short story "Eternal Snow Beauty." (永遠的尹雪艷) In "Eternal Snow Beauty," the characters are, more than anything else, nostalgic for their affluent lifestyles in Mainland China. Madame Ch'ien is different because she values true love over materialistic comfort; her sincere faith in love makes her much more sympathetic than many of the other Chinese exiles in Pai Hsien-yung's short stories. Pai's use of stream-of-consciousness is an important factor in generating sympathy for Madame Ch'ien; it demonstrates, in a rather natural manner, her true feelings and grief over lost love. Although the literary technique of stream-of-consciousness is highly technical and takes the story beyond the realistic mode, it helps to distance the narrator from interfering with Madame Ch'ien truthful expression of her mental struggles at Madame Tou's banquet.

Madame Ch'ien's ultimate grief is that she has only experienced true love once, during her affair with Tseng Yen-ch'ing. The sentence that signifies Madame Ch'ien's grief: "I've only lived once" (234-35/372-74) appears repeatedly in the stream-of-consciousness narration. The vitality of the affair with Tseng Yen-ch'ing fulfilled Madame Ch'ien's yearning for both love and sexual desire, which also shows that the affair was both spiritual and physical. While the first half of the stream-of-consciousness narration highlights Madame Ch'ien's dissatisfaction with her marriage and the tragic

fate in her love life, the second half elaborates on her sexual desires, desires that Tseng Yen-ch'ing once fulfilled.

Pai Hsien-yung constructs the second half of the stream-of-consciousness narration with further allusion to *Peony Pavilion*, more color imagery, and abstract symbolism, which all function to strengthen the tension eventually leading to the story's climax. Following on the passage where Madame Ch'ien remembers the blind woman *Shih-niang*'s warnings, her consciousness drowns once again in the lyrics of the aria "*Shan P'o-yang*" from scene ten of *Peony Pavilion*. In the earlier reference to the aria, "*Ts'ao Lo-p'ao*," it is obvious that Madame Ch'ien recalls this aria because when Mrs. Hsu sings it at Madame Tou's banquet, it reminds her of a situation at her own banquet back in Nan-ching. However, it is unclear whether the allusion to "*Shan P'o-yang*" is triggered by the present situation at Madame Tou's banquet or whether it is just from Madame Ch'ien's recollection of the past. This is because Madame Ch'ien's interior monologue leads right into the lyrics without mentioning a specific incident from the past or the present. The connection between the *k'un* opera aria and the short story comes from the parallel of development of the story told by the aria and of Pai's short story itself. Tu Li-niang, in the aria "*Shan P'o-yang*," relates her youth to the garden's spring-filled beauty and sighs regretfully over her unfulfilled passion for love. As her mind lingers with discontent, she falls asleep in the garden and dreams about a romantic and sexual encounter with a young scholar Liu Meng-mei (柳夢梅).

In the short story, this aria triggers Madame Ch'ien's memory of her own sexual encounter with Tseng Yen-ch'ing. Pai Hsien-yung uses a horseback-riding scene to illustrate Madame Ch'ien one and only fulfilling sexual experience. The language of this

passage may seem subtle and indirect but the vividly described action of riding horses, the color imagery, makes the sexual implications clear. Madame Ch'ien's recollection of this sexual encounter begins with a physical description of Tseng Yen-ch'ing's sexually appealing figure: "in his tight-fitting breeches his long slender legs looked muscular, trim, like a pair of fire-tongs clasp[ing] the horse." (233/372) The sexual encounter is metaphorically suggested by the act of lovers' horseback riding through the forest.

His white horse galloped through the birch groves like a  
hare darting about among stalks of wheat. The sun beat  
down on the horses' backs sending up steaming white  
smoke. One white. One black. The two horses were  
sweating. His body was stained with the odor of horse  
sweat pungent to the nostrils. His eyebrows turned dark  
green, his eyes smoldered like two balls of dark fire, beads  
of sweat came running down his forehead to his flushed  
cheeks. The sun, I cried, the sun glares: I can't open my  
eyes. (233-34/372)

This scene's hot and steamy atmosphere obviously alludes to the single sexual encounter between Madame Ch'ien and Tseng Yen-ch'ing. The intense act of horseback riding described here can be related to Madame Ch'ien's utmost feelings about this incident, which are sensual, romantic, and passionate. The sense of pure love in this scene also enhances its parallels with the aria "*Shan T'ao-hung*," (山桃紅) which follows "*Shan P'o-yang*" and initiates the second half of the scene, in which Tu Li-niang meets and makes love with her lover Liu Meng-mei in a dream. Although the aria "*Shan T'ao-*

*hung*” is not specifically mentioned in the short story and its lyrics are not quoted, readers familiar with this *Peony Pavilion* can easily make the connection between the aria and the lovemaking scene in the short story because the stream-of-consciousness narration of Madame Ch’ien’s memories of her affair with Tseng Yen-ch’ing closely follows the plot development in the opera. The explicit description of Madame Ch’ien’s sexual experience using the metaphor of horseback riding also resembles the subtly indirect-references to lovemaking in scene ten. Therefore, the allusion to *Peony Pavilion* has an immense influence over Madame Ch’ien’s recollection of past memories and enhances the stream-of-consciousness narration in the short story. Since *Peony Pavilion* symbolizes both Madame Ch’ien’s past glories in Nan-ching as famous opera singer and her one and only experience of love, this opera is a crucial element in her consciousness and dominates her random recitation of past memories as her mind becomes unhinged at Madame Tou’s banquet. Considering the author’s own appreciation of traditional Chinese literature, the allusions to *Peony Pavilion* elevate the levels of aesthetics and nostalgia in the short story: Pai Hsien-yung embeds these pieces of elegant *k’un* opera into the sorrows of his modern heroine, Madame Ch’ien, to pay tribute to bygone *k’un* opera culture in China. With the allusion to *Peony Pavilion*, this short story is not just about the nostalgia experienced by Chinese elites in Taiwan; it is also a sentimental farewell to the disappearing elegance of traditional Chinese performing arts.

Besides the allusions to *Peony Pavilion*, color imagery is also important in the stream-of-consciousness narration of Madame Ch’ien’s memories of her affair with Tseng Yen-ch’ing. In the scene where Madame Ch’ien and Tseng Yen-ch’ing are riding horses in the forest, the color white is used repeatedly to refer the birch trees, the horse,

and the naked human bodies, suggesting that Madame Ch'ien thinks of this sexual encounter as a pure and innocent proclamation of love. The color red is used to signify the heat and sweat from lovemaking and the lovers' passions for each other. However, there is also an irony in the use of the color red because it is present in a very different way, in a furiously burning fire, which is described in the scene when Madame Ch'ien witnesses the flirtatious behavior between Tseng Yen-ch'ing and Red-red Rose at her banquet in Nan-ching: "Fiercely the ball of red flame shot up again, burned till those loftily-raised eyebrows glistened dark green with sweat." (232/370) In this case, the color red bears two different meanings: it symbolizes both Madame Ch'ien's original passion for love and her later despair over how Red-red Rose has stolen Tseng Yen-ch'ing from her. Similarly, there is also a contrast in the use of white in the stream-of-consciousness narration. In Madame Ch'ien's recollection of her sexual encounter with Tseng Yen-ch'ing, the color white represents the purity and innocence her passion for love. Conversely, white is also used to describe General Ch'ien P'eng-chih's aging body: "His hair tangled like a patch of withered white straw, his eyes sunk into two dark holes, he stretched out his black, bony hand from under the white sheet: Take care of yourself, Fifth." (233/372) This description of General Ch'ien's aging body implies that Madame Ch'ien's marriage will not fulfill her youthful passion, and the use of the color white, again, gives an ironic twist to the color imagery. In one sense, white symbolizes both Madame Ch'ien's one-time fulfilling experience of love in her affair with Tseng Yen-ch'ing but it also symbolizes her unsatisfying marriage to a much older man, General Ch'ien P'eng-chih.

The stream-of-consciousness narration in this short story ends with Madame Ch'ien's realization that her sexual desires can only be fulfilled in a dream. Right before she reminds herself of this painful truth, a few lines from *Peony Pavilion* occupy her chaotic mind and further demonstrate the parallel between the opera and the short story. In the opera, Tu Li-niang laments over her unfulfilled passion for love and her wasted youth: "Lingering / Where to reveal my true desires! / Suffering / This wasting, / Where but to Heaven shall my lament be made!"<sup>107</sup> These lines correspond to Madame Ch'ien's recollection of the intimacy between Tseng Yen-ch'ing and Red-red Rose at her banquet in Nan-ching and propel her towards the climax of her nervous breakdown. She recalls

right at that moment, this life so ill-fulfilled – she sits down  
beside him right at that moment, all red and gold, at that  
moment, the two wine-red faces slowly closing in on each  
other, right at that moment, I see their eyes: her eyes, his  
eyes. It's over, I know, right at that moment, except I sue  
to Heaven – (Master Wu, my voice.) It's over, my throat,  
feel my throat, is it quivering? It's over, is it quivering?  
Heaven – (Master Wu, I can't sing any more.) Heaven –  
it's over, worldly glory, wealth, position – but I only lived  
once – Retribution, Retribution, Retribution, - Heaven –  
(Master Wu, my voice.) – right at that moment, right at that  
moment, it's gone – Heaven – oh, Heaven – (235/374)

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<sup>107</sup> T'ang Hsien-tsu's "Scene Ten: The Interrupted Dream" in *Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting*. Second edition. trans. Cyril Birch. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. p. 47.



Right at this critical moment, Madame Ch'ien's mental turbulence is awakened by Chiang Pi-yueh's request for her to perform the second half of the opera aria for the guests at Madame Tou's banquet. Similar to what happens at her own banquet in Nanching, Madame Ch'ien is unable to perform the arias from "Waking from a Dream" and remains in desolate silence while the guests cheer for another opera performance by General Yu (余參軍長). Given the complexity of Madame Ch'ien's mental state during this incident, the stream-of-consciousness narration gives the readers a first-hand chance to experience exactly what Madame Ch'ien is thinking. It also beautifully merges her random flashbacks with the corresponding music and lyrics from *Peony Pavilion* to create a memorable climax for the short story. Therefore, Pai Hsien-yung's use of stream-of-consciousness here successfully captures the short story's overall theme of love and disillusionment, allowing readers to explore Madame Ch'ien's troubled psyche on a deeper level.

While the music and lyrics from *Peony Pavilion* are important triggers of Madame Ch'ien's mental instability in the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," the music in Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is also essential to understanding the nostalgic heroine Blanche DuBois' gradual descent into madness. Williams uses two important genres of music, Blues Piano and Polish Polka, to highlight the different stages in Blanche's psychological collapse. The play begins with Blues Piano playing in the background right before Blanche arrives at her sister Stella's apartment in a building named Elysian Fields. In the exposition for scene one, Williams describes New Orleans' cityscape and atmosphere in detail. He also makes a special note on the background music, "Blues Piano" that "expresses the spirit of the life which goes

on here.”<sup>108</sup> He has not specified whether “Blues Piano” has a specific tune, but it seems to be from the genre of Blues music that originated in New Orleans. Elia Kazan, the director of both the 1951 theatrical production and the film version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, notes that

Blues is an expression of the loneliness and rejection, the exclusion and isolation of the Negro and their (opposite) longing for love and connection. Blanche too is “looking for a home,” abandoned, friendless. “I don’t know where I’m going, but I’m going.” Thus Blues Piano catches the soul of Blanche, the miserable unusual human side of the girl, which is beneath her frenetic duplicity...<sup>109</sup>

In this way, Williams’s application of “Blues Piano” establishes Blanche’s character as a lonesome outsider in New Orleans and foreshadows her sense of helpless alienation among other characters, such as Stella, Stanley, Eunice, and Mitch, in this cosmopolitan city. “Blues Piano” reappears in scene five when Blanche tries to seduce the young newspaper collector but fails. This occurs right before she confesses her past troubles to Mitch. As in the opening scene, “Blues Piano” reflects Blanche’s sense of alienation and abandonment in New Orleans. Although she still faithfully believes in her ability to charm men, she cannot even attract the attention of a newspaper boy. Thus, “Blues Piano” here reminds the audience of Blanche’s decaying status as a Southern belle living in the cosmopolitan city of New Orleans, a place where she does not belong.

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<sup>108</sup> Tennessee Williams’s “Scene One” in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Signet, 1951. p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> “Notebook for *A Streetcar Named Desire*” in *Directors on Directing: A Sourcebook of the Modern Theater*. Ed. Tody Cole and Helen Kirch Chinoy. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963. p. 371.

In the same way that “Blues Piano” reminds the audience of the painful reality behind Blanche’s situation in New Orleans, another symbolic piece of music, the “Varsouviana” Polka, highlights Blanche’s gradual progression towards insanity as the play progresses. In neither the play nor in other writings has Williams explained the origin of this music, but one can infer from its name that it refers to Polka music from Poland, because Varsouvian means “a native of Warsaw,”<sup>110</sup> the capital of Poland. Blanche would be familiar with this style of music because Polkas were popular dance music among social elites in the antebellum South; a young Blanche would have heard such music while dancing with suitors. In addition, Blanche and her ex-husband Allan dance to this music at the Moon Lake Casino right before Allan commits suicide.<sup>111</sup> This music, therefore, will remind Blanche of her tragic marriage, as well as her youthful days as a belle. The Polka is also played in the end of scene one, when Blanche first meets Stanley and he asks about her past marriage: “I’m afraid I’ll strike you as being the unrefined type. Stella’s spoke of you a good deal. You were married once, weren’t you? [*The music of the polka rises up, faint in the distance.*]”<sup>112</sup> The “Varsouviana” Polka, therefore, plays a significant role in symbolizing Blanche’s tragic marriage to the homosexual poet, Allan; it marks the initial stage of her tragic descent into insanity.

There is another reason, however, for Williams to have chosen to use Polish polka music in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stanley Kowalski’s Polish origin is often mentioned because it represents the new America that stands in sharp contrast to Blanche’s origins

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<sup>110</sup> “Varsouvian” in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 2002. p. 1303.

<sup>111</sup> See *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Signet, 1951. p. 96.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

in the Old South. Stanley consistently challenges Blanche's myth-making about the South and eventually drives her into madness. This "Varsouviana" Polka music, then, embodies the two conflicting forces in the play: on the one hand, the cheerful Polka tune represents Blanche's joyful past memories of being a Southern belle, but on the other hand, the music's Polish origin represents Stanley's disastrous influence on Blanche's mythic image of the South. In scene eight, for example, Blanche is having an unpleasant birthday dinner with Stella and Stanley; Blanche tells stories to ridicule Stanley's cruel behavior towards her and Stanley is annoyed by Blanche's pretense about her past. More importantly, Blanche is very upset that Stanley prevented Mitch, his friend and also a possible suitor for Blanche, from attending the dinner. Stanley defends his choice, saying he is doing what's best for his friend; Blanche, affronted, cannot help from referring to him as a greasy, disgusting, and vulgar Polack.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, Stanley orders Blanche get out of his household and offers her a bus ticket to Laurel, her hometown, as a birthday present: "Ticket! Back to Laurel! On the Greyhound! Tuesday! [*The Varsouviana music steals in softly and continues playing*]."<sup>114</sup> Given Stanley's role in challenging the details of Blanche's painful past, the "Varsouviana" Polka here symbolizes the elevation in the level of conflict between the two. It also signifies another important step in Blanche's tragic downfall.

Similar to the way in which the opera music from *Peony Pavilion* triggers Madame Ch'ien's memories of her failed love affair, the "Varsouviana" Polka symbolizes Blanche's romantic illusions of her past. The notes for scene nine state that

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

the “Varsouviana” Polka exists only in Blanche’s mind and that it is overheard by the audience. “The rapid, feverish polka tune, the ‘Varsouviana,’ is heard. The music is in her mind; she is drinking to escape it and the sense of disaster closing in on her, and she seems to whisper the words of the song.”<sup>115</sup> Williams structures this piece of music to be inside Blanche’s mind because this music is closely associated with her past memories. Throughout the play, she has been aware of its connection with her past memories but it is only in this scene that she openly speaks out her fear about its presence in her mind. She tells Mitch: “I forgive you because it’s such a relief to see you. You’ve stopped that polka tune that I had caught in my head. Have you ever had anything caught in your head? No, of course you haven’t, you dumb angel-puss, you’d never get anything awful caught in your head!”<sup>116</sup> The polka music is also connected to Blanche’s consumption of alcohol because she wishes to get away from the memories of her past troubles by being drunk. However, she fails to do so and this music continues to haunt her consciousness as she confesses the truth to Mitch.

Blanche has her last conversation with Mitch in scene nine, and when she reveals the secret of her troubled past to this possible suitor, he ends up rejecting her completely. Before this incident, Mitch is somewhat aware of Blanche’s past troubles in Laurel because Stanley has been giving him “friendly advice” about his sister-in-law. Consequently, Mitch fails to attend Blanche’s birthday dinner, which makes Blanche realize that if she desires a serious engagement with this man, she must not lie to him. She, then, confesses her indecent behavior to Mitch:

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Yes, a big spider! That's where I brought my victims. [*She pours herself another drink*] Yes, I had many intimacies with strangers. After the death of Allan – intimacies with strangers was all I seemed be able to fill my empty heart with. [...] I think it was panic, just panic, that drove me from one to another, hunting for some protection – here and there, in the most – unlikely places – even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy.<sup>117</sup>

Unfortunately, Blanche's sincerity does not touch Mitch. He insists that Blanche is still lying to him and refuses to marry her simply because he thinks she is not clean enough to bring home to his mother.<sup>118</sup> Although Mitch's refusal is pathetic, Blanche's situation has only been worsened because no one will step out of their comfort zone to take care for this sympathetic ex-Southern belle who yearns for understanding and love even from a stranger.

Besides marking Blanche's various steps towards madness, the "Varsouviana" Polka in the play's final scene also finalizes her tragic downfall when Stella and Stanley cold-bloodedly send her off to a mental institution. Blanche is driven completely mad after Stanley confronts her about Shep Huntleigh, her imagined millionaire suitor, and then rapes her while Stella is in the hospital delivering her baby. After this tragic incident, Stella and others see Blanche as mentally unstable, although Stella does not acknowledge the fact her husband has raped her elder sister. In the final scene, Stanley is,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 118.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

again, having a poker game with his friends; a doctor and his matron from a mental institution are sent to take Blanche away. Stella convinces Blanche that the doctor is there to bring her to meet Shep Huntleigh, who will then take her on a “vacation.”<sup>119</sup> When the doctor arrives and Blanche sees he is not Shep Huntleigh, who she is expecting, the “Varsouviana” music plays faintly in the background; it signifies Blanche’s ultimate progression to a nervous breakdown, and that she is no longer conscious of what is happening to her. When she is about to leave with the doctor, she says she has forgotten something and returns to the bedroom. Stanley and the matron, then, forcefully catch her by the arms to prevent further movement. At this crucial moment, the music of the “Varsouviana” once again haunts Blanche’s chaotic mindset and forces her to submit to the cruelty forced upon her. The music also symbolizes Blanche’s final defeat in her quest for love and recognition in the city of New Orleans. In the same way that the music can only be heard by Blanche and the audience, everyone else in the play, including Stella and Mitch who once cared for Blanche, fails to hear the truth behind Blanche’s lies, the truth that might save her from this tragic act.<sup>120</sup> In this way, the “Varsouviana” Polka music becomes a central motif illustrating Blanche’s road to madness.

Music is an important element in both Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams’s depictions of nostalgic heroines. The traditional elegance of decaying elite culture is presented in Pai’s writings through the memories the nostalgic heroines have of their favorite music from the past. For Madame Ch’ien, the *k’un* (崑) opera music from *Peony*

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-36.

<sup>120</sup> Mentally ill patrons may be better off by going to a mental institution but this is definitely not the case in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Williams has always been very critical of the mental institutions in his days because he relates his sister Rose’s tragedy to the ill treatment during her stay in an asylum.

*Pavilion* signifies her past glories as a famous opera singer in Nan-ching and reminds her of her past wealth and social status. The traditional elegance of decaying elite culture is presented in Williams's play through literal music. The "Varsouviana" Polka music is a cheerful dance tune that was popular among Southern belles in the antebellum period, and that brings back Blanche's happy memories of square dancing with her suitors back in Belle Reve.

These two pieces of music, however, mark the gradual, inevitable descent into madness for both Madame Ch'ien and for Blanche. In the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," Madame Ch'ien overhears the *k'un* opera melodies from *Peony Pavilion* and then, helplessly drowns in a psychological whirlpool of her past troubles, including her unsatisfying marriage and her unfulfilled desire for love. Pai uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to narrate this drowning. Similarly, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche fails to overcome her brother-in-law Stanley's constant challenges of her lies about her indecent past. She is a conflicted character, haunted by memories of her failed marriage to a homosexual poet and by her inability to find true love and understanding. Consequently, she gradually goes mad and the process is signified by the "Varsouviana" Polka, which symbolizes the two main disastrous influences on Blanche: her past memories of being a Southern belle and her Polish brother-in-law.

Comparing the tragic experiences of Madame Ch'ien and Blanche DuBois, Pai and Williams both use a similar aesthetic approach, which is to apply music belonging to their respective decaying elite cultures, to thoroughly explore the problematic psyches of



their nostalgic heroines. Their symbolic use of music takes their characterizations beyond the boundaries of realism and makes their characters even more remarkable.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **NOSTALGIC FEMALE CHARACTERS**

#### **IN PAI HSIEN-YUNG AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S WORKS**

“Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

Blanche DuBois, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

The major characters in the works of Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams often belong to a social class that has faded from the present. The four characters selected for this research, Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人) from “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream,” (遊園驚夢) Li T'ung (李彤) from “A Celestial in Mundane Exile,” (謫仙記) Amanda Wingfield from *The Glass Menagerie*, and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, all once belonged to elite society but, in the present world, they now suffer from loneliness, alienation and a diminished lifestyle. They neither identify with nor feel comfortable with their new position in society. Their traditional ideals and nostalgia for past antebellum era glories trap them in psychological cages that will eventually lead them all to tragedy.

Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams both have a special sympathy for characters who are victims of the ever-changing world, and whose upbringings under an old order make them unable to adapt to the present society. Pai and Williams both had strong ancestral roots in antebellum worlds, allowing them better to understand the difficulties experienced by their characters as well as the flaws that prevent them from fully adapting to present society. Moreover, the two writers share a platonic sensitivity to

and understanding of women. Although not sexually attracted to women, both have developed a unique understanding of them as a result of careful observation of the strong women that surrounded them since childhood. During his childhood in antebellum Mainland China, Pai's household was essentially entirely female because his father divided the family into two due to his position in the Republican Army: one household was composed of Pai's father and his military men, while the other was composed of women and children. This unique childhood experience opened Pai's eyes to the world of women in the Republican era. In contrast, although Williams did not have as much exposure to women of the antebellum elite of the American South, he was still very familiar with the lifestyle of Southern belles because he was brought up by two ex-Southern belles, his grandmother, Mrs. Dakin, and his mother, Edwina Williams.<sup>121</sup> Perhaps most importantly, his beloved sister Rose's gentleness as a Southern lady very much inspired his writings about Southern women, especially in *The Glass Menagerie* where, through Rose's resurrection as the character Laura Wingfield, he expresses his own feelings of guilt over his family's situation.

An obvious characteristic shared by the four characters selected for this research is their unfulfilled passion and desire for love. Their sense of alienation in the present society might have been cured by the power of love, but because others fail to understand and sympathize with their detachment from the present society, love is out of their reach. Therefore, their tragedies are not just about how they are caught between the old and the new order in society; they are about the pain of an unfulfilled desire for love and of the decline of traditional ideals.

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<sup>121</sup> See Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt's *Tennessee Williams and the South*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002. p. 8.

Another common aspect of Pai and Williams's characterization of nostalgic women can be found in their use of aesthetic language. The elite culture of pre-1949 Republican China is preserved in Pai's short stories partly through his aesthetic approach to recreating the elegant atmosphere of the social gatherings of exiled Chinese elites in Taiwan. The parties described in the short stories "The Eternal Snow Beauty" (永遠的尹雪艷) and "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" (遊園驚夢) are perfect examples of Pai's literary style. Moreover, Pai's successful characterizations depend heavily on his tailor-made, character-specific dialogues, which demonstrate to the reader the diverse backgrounds, social classes, and personalities of the characters. Among all the different Chinese exiles portrayed in *Taipei People*, Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人)'s speech stands out because her manner of speaking and her choice of words define her elite status and her reputation as a renowned *k'un* (崑) opera singer in pre-1949 Nan-ching (南京). In addition, Pai make use of the traditional technique as used in the vernacular Chinese novel *The Dream of Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), of describing every single important detail of a character's physical appearance, clothing, gestures, and so on. Besides enhancing the visualization of characters, this descriptive writing style complements the symbolic roles played by the characters. Pai, and another prominent writer Eileen Chang (張愛玲), are the only two modern Chinese writers able to replicate the elegance and artistry of *The Dream of Red Chamber* in their writings about China in the modern era. Pai's sensitivity towards his female characters also parallels *The Dream of Red Chamber*'s strong emphasis on women. Similar to his tributes to *Peony Pavilion* in the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," Pai's elaborate

characterization of nostalgic women continues in the modern era, the style of *Dream of Red Chamber* in portraying women.

Tennessee Williams's use of aesthetic language in his plays is somewhat different from Pai's in the sense that instead of using language to recreate the atmosphere of the old order, Williams' rhetoric aims to demonstrate the cultural differences between the Southern belle and the others characters, all of whom belong to the present society. Williams's use of aesthetic language is also inspired by his appreciation for modern poetry, especially that of Hart Crane, in creating a theatrical language that combines elements of poetry and conventional modern and realist dramatic dialogues. With this innovative style, named "personal lyricism," Williams inserts poetic sounds, such as alliteration, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and assonance, into the speeches made by the ex-Southern belle characters highlighting their unique Southern qualities. Amanda Wingfield, from *The Glass Menagerie*, and Blanche Dubois, from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, provide great examples of how Williams applied "personal lyricism" when writing his ex-Southern belle characters.

This chapter will consist of a close analysis of each of the four characters selected from Pai and Williams's major works, highlighting the significance of their personalities, backgrounds, physical appearances, and names. Factors leading to the tragic downfalls of these characters, including their conflicts with the present society, troubles with love relationships, and nostalgia will also be discussed and compared. In addition, the two writers' use of aesthetic language in characterizing these four nostalgic women will be examined.

Pai Hsien-yung created a number of memorable characters in the fourteen short stories that make up the collection *Taipei People* (臺北人). He depicts the lives of Mainland Chinese exiles in Taiwan after 1949 following the defeat of the Republican government, led at the time by Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), by the Chinese communists in the civil war of the late 1940s. These exiles maintained strong emotional ties with Mainland China because it was the only place they could and would consider their native home. In the short story collection *Taipei People*, Pai uses characters from various backgrounds and social strata to provide a wide perspective on the experiences of exiles in Taiwan. Madame Ch'ien (錢夫人) is the most outstanding character in *Taipei People* because her story represents the tragic fate of the Republican elite in Taiwan, a social circle that Pai was familiar with due to his family background. Although the Republican elite culture inevitably faded away after the government's defeat in the civil war, the traditions, ideals, and lifestyle its members enjoyed are revived in fiction through Madame Ch'ien's character.

Madame Ch'ien, the protagonist in the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," was once a *k'un* (崑) opera singer in the famous Ch'in-huai River (秦淮河) entertainment district in Nan-ching (南京); she is now a lonely widow living in Tai-nan (台南), the southern, rural part of Taiwan. She has several names and titles that may be confusing to first-time readers, but that are also important in that they suggest her different roles and positions in both the past and the present. The third-person omniscient narrator and most guests at Madame Tou (竇夫人)'s banquet refer to her as Madame Ch'ien because these guests are also associated with the exiled

Republican government in Taiwan, and thus, she is known to them as the wife of General Ch'ien P'eng-chi. Unlike the unfamiliar guests, Madame Tou and her younger sister, Chiang Pi-yueh (蔣碧月), call her Fifth Sister. This title suggests the significance of their *k'un* opera sisterhood back in the Nan-ching. Although they are not related by blood, this rather intimate title points to Madame Ch'ien and Madame Tou's friendship and their understandings of one other, especially in the latter part of the story when they are both betrayed by their own younger sisters. In the antebellum era, Madame Ch'ien's lover was stolen by her Seventeenth Sister Red-red Rose (月月紅) at a banquet in Nan-ching and, in the postbellum era, Madame Tou's lover is stolen by her Thirteenth Sister Chiang Pi-yueh at the banquet in Taipei (台北). The sisterly titles used in the story have put forward the love-hate relationship that exists between the exiled *k'un* opera singers in Taiwan.

As the story moves inward to focus on Madame Ch'ien's problematic mindset, her real name is revealed to the readers. Her real name is Lan T'ien-yu (藍田玉), or Bluefield Jade, and this is the name that is used the most in the stream-of-consciousness narration when she recalls the Blind Women *Shih-niang*'s comment that she is predestined to fail in love: "Worldly glory, wealth, position – Bluefield Jade, only it's a pity you've got one bone that's not quite right. Oh, my retribution. Isn't he the retribution in your Sister's fate? Understand?" (231/368)<sup>122</sup> The name Lan T'ien-yu carries a sense of traditional elegance as it seems to allude to the famous poem by the

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<sup>122</sup> References to "Yu-yuan ch'ing-meng" 遊園驚夢 / "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," translated by Pai Hsien-yung and Patia Yasin. *Taipei-Jen* 臺北人 / *Taipei People: Chinese-English Bilingual Edition*. Taipei / Hong Kong: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社 / The Chinese University Press, 2002 / 2002. pp. 205-40 / 327-84.

Tang dynasty poet Li Shang-yin, “The Ornamented Zither,” (錦瑟)<sup>123</sup> which describes the sense of loss and the lamentation over the passing of time. Considering Pai Hsien-yung’s appreciation for traditional Chinese literature, it is very likely that he would allude to Tang dynasty poetry in his work. Bluefield, translated as Indigo Mountain by James J.Y. Liu, is well known for the production of fine jade. By naming Madame Ch’ien after a place famous for fine jade, Pai associates her with a traditional kind of female elegance, since jade is also a Chinese synonym for female beauty.

According to the story, Madame Ch’ien’s beauty belongs to her youthful past in Nan-ching, a place where she could enjoy wealth, social prestige, and a fulfilling love affair with a military officer. The imagery in the first couplet of “The Ornamented Zither,” “The ornamented zither, for no reason, has fifty strings, / Each string, each bridge, recalls a youthful year”<sup>124</sup> – echoes Madame Ch’ien’s nostalgia for her youth, becoming the basis for her present melancholic mindset. The musicality of these two lines also echoes the influence of the *k’un* opera *Peony Pavilion* on the short story; music constantly reminds Madame Ch’ien not only of her prior fame and respected status as a renowned singer in Nan-ching, but also of her love affair, which mirrors the plot of the specific opera aria.<sup>125</sup>

The connection between Madame Ch’ien’s real name, Bluefield Jade, and the poem “The Ornamented Zither” is undeniable because her complex mindset and troubles with past memories can be explained through a line by line examination of this poem. In

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<sup>123</sup> “The Ornamented Zither,” trans. James J. Y. Liu in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., “錦瑟無端五十絃，一絃一柱思華年。” p. 51, line 1-2.

<sup>125</sup> See chapter three for the discussion on the connection between the opera aria and short story of “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream.”



the third line, the poem makes a reference to Chuang-tzu (莊子) – “Master Chuang was confused by his morning dream of the butterfly.”<sup>126</sup> This line can help explain Madame Ch’ien’s mental conflict between the present and illusions of past glories. Like Chuang-tzu’s confusion over his dream of the butterfly, Madame Ch’ien is caught between her dreams of the past and the reality of the present. Chuang-tzu’s allegory obviously refers to his view of life and is completely different from Madame Ch’ien’s lament over her unfulfilled desires for love. However, both Chuang-tzu and Madame Ch’ien are connected to the theme of illusion and reality. This clash inspires Chuang-tzu to understand better the mysteries of life, but it has a very different impact on Madame Ch’ien. The clash of illusion and reality brings her great sadness and despair and makes it painful for her to recollect her past memories. This is especially evident when she wakes from her dream about the past at Madame Tou’s banquet. Although Chuang-tzu and the short story “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” touch on the clash between illusion and reality in different ways, they both examine the ways in which humans can interpret life through a dream.

Madame Ch’ien’s sense of alienation and despair of life in Taiwan parallels the lament over the passing of time found in the final couplet of “The Ornamented Zither:” – “This feeling might have become a thing to be remembered, / Only, at the time you were already bewildered and lost.”<sup>127</sup> Madame Ch’ien’s past glories and her love affair in Nan-ching are definitely things to be remembered because they are the golden days of her life. However, her past memories have become an obsession and they deepen her

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<sup>126</sup> “The Ornamented Zither,” trans. James J. Y. Liu in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969: “莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶,” p. 51, line 3.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., “此情可待成追憶，只是當時已惘然。” p.51, lines 7-8.

melancholy and dissatisfaction with her lesser life in Taiwan. They remind her only of the sharp contrast between her current and past lifestyles. The most painful and significant of Madame Ch'ien's past memories is the fact that her passion for love has only ever been fulfilled once during her affair with Tseng Yen-ching; so each time she returns from her dreams and illusions of the past, she feels an even greater sense of loss and bewilderment. Thus, there are several parallels that can be drawn between Li Shang-yin's "The Ornamented Zither," and Madame Ch'ien's real name, Bluefield Jade.

Traditional Chinese literature has had a very large influence on Pai's characterizations of nostalgic women. Besides the subtle allusion to the Tang poem "The Ornamented Zither" as discussed, Pai's characterizations of women in his short stories, especially those from the upper class, echo the elegant, traditional manner of portraying women as exemplified by the Ch'ing dynasty vernacular novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢). Like Eileen Chang (張愛玲), another modern Chinese writer who was obsessed with and heavily influenced by this classic novel, Pai's detailed descriptions of the physical appearances, clothing, and manners of the major women characters closely follows the standard set by *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," Pai introduces Madame Ch'ien with a vivid description of her physical appearance, and integrates it into the elaborate setting of Madame Tou's banquet. This opening passage revives the elegant and luxurious culture of elite antebellum Republican China as it exists in post-war Taiwan.

The only furnishings in the antechamber were exquisite  
redwood chairs and side tables. On the low table to the

right stood a group of cloisonné vases; one, shaped like a fish-basket, held a few sprays of evergreen. Set in the wall over the table, was a large oval pier glass. Madame Ch'ien went up to the mirror, removing her black autumn evening coat; a maid hurried forward to take it from her. Madame Ch'ien stole a glance in the mirror and quickly smoothed a stray lock of hair at her temple. At six o'clock that evening she had gone to the Red Rose on West Gate Square to have her hair dressed, only to have the wind ruffle it as she had walked through the garden. Madame Ch'ien took a step closer to the mirror; she even felt that the color of her emerald green Hangchow silk *ch'i-p'ao* was not quite right.<sup>128</sup> She remembered that this kind of silk shimmered like sea-green jade when the light shone on it. Perhaps the antechamber was not well-lit; the material looked rather dull in the mirror. Could it really have faded? She had brought this silk with her all the way from Nanking. All these years she hadn't been able to bring herself to wear it; she had dug it out of the bottom of her trunk and had it cut just for this party. If she had known, she would have bought herself a new length of silk at the Swan. But somehow she always thought Taiwan materials coarse and

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<sup>128</sup> *Ch'i-p'ao* (旗袍) is a traditional Chinese body-hugging one-piece dress for women. It was first introduced by the Manchu in the Ch'ing dynasty and later modified to become highly popular dress among social elites in the Republican period.

flashy; they hurt your eyes, especially the silks. How could they compare with Mainland goods – so fine so soft? (207-08/330-32)

Pai's description of Madame Ch'ien's entrance here serves a significant role in creating a picture of her physical appeal and in highlighting her status as both a woman with past glories and as a lonely guest at a luxurious banquet. First of all, the exquisite red wood furniture, the cloisonné vases, and the large oval pier glass on the wall over the table confirms the luxurious setting at Madame Tou's banquet and complement the traditional Chinese sense of elegance and beauty found in the description of Madame Ch'ien's physical appearance. Madam Ch'ien's Hangchow silk *ch'i-p'ao* reminds the readers of her background in Nan-ching;<sup>129</sup> the black color of her autumn evening coat and the fading emerald green color of her *ch'i-p'ao* also suggest a melancholic sense of decay, which reflect her current status in Taiwan. In addition, these colors are in sharp contrast to the bright red dress of Madame Tou's sister Chiang Pi-yueh, a contrast that signifies the very indifferent behavior of each woman at the banquet. Madame Ch'ien acts quiet, passive, and restrained, while Chiang Pi-yueh is loud, rather vulgar, and flamboyant. More importantly, Madame Ch'ien's *ch'i-p'ao* is much longer than these of the other ladies' at the banquet, which makes her dress less fashionable. Back in Nan-ching, the fashionable *chi'i-p'ao*'s length was so long that it almost touched the lady's feet; however, *ch'i-p'ao* in present-day Taiwan is much shorter, exposing a good half of a lady's leg. Pai Hsien-yung's opening description of Madame Ch'ien's dress also demonstrates her dislike of Taiwanese fabric; she believes that it is an inferior to fine

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<sup>129</sup> Hangchow (杭州) is Che-chiang (浙江) province's capital city and is one of the most renowned and prosperous cities in China. It is also well known for its beautiful natural scenery.

Hangchow silk she brought from Nan-ching. Other guests seem to be more adaptive to the present fashions in Taiwan and are able to engage in cheerful chatter amongst one another while Madame Ch'ien feels lonely and alienated. Therefore, her growing sense of sadness and alienation begins with her dress.

Pai Hsien-yung's characterizations of nostalgic women are always enhanced by his delicate descriptions of their physical appeal. In "A Celestial in Mundane Exile" (謫仙記) from the *New Yorker* (紐約客), a collection of stories depicting the lives of post-civil war Chinese exiles in the United States, Pai illustrates the decline of Republican Chinese elite culture through his remarkable characterization of the heroine, Li T'ung (李彤). The characterization of Li T'ung is quite unlike that of Madame Ch'ien in the story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream." In the latter, Pai shares with readers Madame Ch'ien's most private recollections of the past in a stream-of-consciousness style narration. In the former, Pai does not really give Li T'ung her own voice, and she is portrayed in a very detached manner; her appearance, speeches, and actions are described only through careful observations of the narrator Ch'en Yin (陳寅).

Pai Hsien-yung introduces Li T'ung in a detached manner, as Li T'ung would appear to others. It is through the occasional recollections that Chen Yin's wife Hui-fen, shares with him about her college days, that Ch'en Yin first learns about Li T'ung, one of Hui-fen's (慧芬) best friends. Li T'ung belonged to one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Republican China; the family owned a spacious and luxurious

German-style villa in Shanghai.<sup>130</sup> Together with her three best friends who are also members of the Republican Chinese aristocracy, Li T'ung goes to study abroad at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Her outstanding physical beauty, confident sense of superiority, and aristocratic family background make her one of the most popular among the other privileged American girls at the college. Although she is always surrounded by boys, she maintains a haughty attitude towards them. She purposefully disappoints and drives her suitors away, even the ones in whom she is actually interested.<sup>131</sup> Thus, Li T'ung's indifference is one of the main qualities remembered by Hui-fen and other friends.

After the death of her parents, Li T'ung's life goes significantly downhill. Her parents had tried to flee Shanghai for Taiwan due to the Chinese Civil War, but the boat sank on the way. Li T'ung thus loses both her beloved family and their financial support. Despite her usual haughty attitude towards most things, she is shocked and emotionally shaken by this accident; she refuses to eat and has to be treated at the hospital for more than a month.<sup>132</sup> Afterwards, she becomes very quiet and distant from others. She refuses to talk about her past in China or to make any references to her family because her roots in China have been cut off by the accident. Nonetheless, she has neither forgotten her earlier days in China nor her family that loved her dearly. She represses her painful past memories, and later develops a growing sense of loneliness and alienation in New York City. Unlike Pai's other nostalgic characters, her nostalgia and even her reflections on the past are never directly mentioned in the story. These sentiments are

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<sup>130</sup> See Pai Hsien-yung's "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," 謫仙記 in *Lonely Seventeen* 寂寞的十七歲. Taipei: Taipei: Yong-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化, 2003. p. 297.

<sup>131</sup> See "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," pp. 298-99.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

layered within her obvious discontent with her present life, her distrust of people, and her promiscuous attitude towards male strangers. Her repressed nostalgia and poor prospects in life later lead her down the road of self-destruction; she drowns herself in Venice while on a vacation in Europe.

Li T'ung's unspoken nostalgia is similar to Madame Ch'ien's, from the short story "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," but these two characters are portrayed in different manners. The first obvious distinction between the characterizations of Madame Ch'ien and Li T'ung reveals how they are perceived by their story's narrator. Besides describing every single detail of Madame Ch'ien's appearance, the omniscient third-person narrator's view allows readers to explore Madame Ch'ien's troubled mindset through the use of stream-of-consciousness. Conversely, Li is kept at a distance from the reader, described only from the subjective point of view of Ch'en Yin, who is both the narrator and a character in the story. Ch'en Yin's wife, Hui-fen, had been best friends with Li T'ung since high school in China. They studied together and both graduated at McTyiere's, an aristocratic girls' school in Shanghai, and then at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Ch'en Yin believes that his wife's accounts of Li T'ung are biased because she envies Li T'ung's distinctive character and unique beauty. However, Ch'en Yin's description of Li T'ung is also layered with subjectivity because he is personally amazed by Li T'ung's stunning physical beauty and is driven to favor Li T'ung's unique character over the other Wellesley girls. His narration of the story also reveals his attraction to Li T'ung, which motivates him to examine closely her on different occasions. Therefore, his subjective attitude towards Li T'ung also confirms his admiration for her physical beauty and his understanding of Li

T'ung's difference from her friends who are also exiled Chinese elites living in the United States.

Ch'en Yin's admiration of Li T'ung causes his descriptions of the nostalgic heroine to focus very much on her physical appearance, which also symbolically suggests her personality and the reasons for her tragedy in different ways. Ch'en Yin recalls with admiration and astonishment his first impression of Li T'ung at his own wedding.

Her beauty was devastating. She literally shone in the gathering and it hurt the eye to look straight at her, as at the blinding sun that has jumped out of the sea. She had finely chiseled features and a tall, graceful figure. Her eyes, dark and flashing, were spellbinding. A riot of shining black hair, two thirds of it combed across her forehead, tumbled down on her left shoulder. On the left temple just above her ear was a hairpin, a big glistening spider made of small diamonds, its claws digging into her hair, its fat, roundish body tilted upward. She wore that day a Chinese white satin gown of silvery sheen, with a red maple leaf design. The maple leaves were each the size of a palm and flamed like balls of fire. No woman is a reliable judge of another's beauty, and I couldn't help suspecting that Hui-fen's



reluctance to praise Li T'ung's looks was a form of protest.

(299-300/223)<sup>133</sup>

The portrayal of Li T'ung's physical appearance is another example of Pai Hsien-yung's method of characterizing ex-elite women, a method that is heavily influenced by the traditional novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*: every delicate detail of the major women characters is articulated with strong imagery and extensive symbolism. Moreover, Ch'en Yin's elaborate description of Li T'ung's extraordinary beauty demonstrates how this nostalgic heroine would attract heterosexual men in general. He applies strong and even forceful adjectives, such as "devastating" and "spellbinding," to describe Li T'ung's unique beauty, which is both attractive and dangerous. Ch'en Yin compares her to "the blinding sun that has jumped out of the sea,"<sup>134</sup> to demonstrate the unattainable aspect of Li T'ung's beauty; her unique beauty makes her outstanding but it also alienates her from others and later becomes a destructive force in her tragedy. Her confident appearance and uncompromising attitude complement her unique beauty, which visually represent her personality.

Li T'ung's suicide is both shocking and mysterious to her friends. Her friends do not understand why she would travel alone to Europe and give up her life so tragically. Pai Hsien-yung has consciously hidden the reasons for Li T'ung's fatal sorrow within different symbols in the story, symbols that emphasize Li T'ung's emotional struggle through various difficult situations during her life in New York. Li T'ung has always

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<sup>133</sup> References to Pai Hsien-yung's "Che-hsien chi" 謫仙記 / "Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York," (referred here with the title preferred by the author, "A Celestial in Mundane Exile"), translated by the author and C. T. Hsia in *Chi-mo te shih-ch'i-sui* (Lonely Seventeen) 寂寞的十七歲 / *Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories*, ed. C. T. Hsia, Taipei / New York: Yong-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化/ Columbia University Press, 2003 / 2002. pp. 297-318 / 220-39.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

kept those sorrows to herself, suppressing them in ways that even her best friends do not realize. The evidence for her suppressed sorrow can be found in Ch'en Yin's detailed descriptions of her clothing, especially with the diamonded spider hairpin. Similar to the symbolic significance of Madame Ch'ien's Hangchow silk *ch'i-p'ao*, Li T'ung's diamond-studded spider hairpin is an important symbol, used throughout the story to illustrate Li T'ung's gradual descent towards tragedy. Li T'ung wears this hairpin every time she appears in the story, which makes this specific accessory almost a part of her. In Li T'ung's first appearance in the story, the narrator describes this spider hairpin as hanging from "the left temple just above her hair, a big glistening spider made of small diamonds, its claws digging into her hair, its fat, roundish body tilted upward." (300/223) The luxurious look of the sparkling diamonds on the spider hairpin confirms Li T'ung's wealthy background and complements her luxurious and outstanding outfit. When taken on a symbolic level, the spider also suggests Li T'ung indifferent attitude towards friends and others. Spiders are known for their unfriendly behavior and preference for solitude. In Li T'ung's case, she obviously has the skills to be sociable but she often prefers to be cold and reserved when in a crowd, especially after her parents' fatal accident. By associating her with the predatory nature of spiders, it does not mean that she belongs to the *femme fatale* archetype. Li T'ung is definitely unlike the *femme fatale* characters are who known for their predatory behavior with their lovers. She preys on neither her lovers nor her friends, but only on herself.

There are two main stages to Li T'ung's character development, and her parents' accident acts as the turning point between them. The first stage takes place before her parents' accident, when she is known as an intelligent and proud student at Wellesley

College. Li T'ung is well known on campus for her fashionable style and her popularity among male students. Her sense of pride drives her to turn down suitors, even when she is actually interested in them, because her need for love is already fulfilled by her parents. Although her parents are not with her in the United States, she can always be certain of their love for her, as well as their financial support. After their death, however, Li T'ung's character development moves into a second stage. The boat accident has tragic consequences in her later life, and it intensifies her growing sense of loneliness and distrust of others. More importantly, she loses her purpose for living and then begins to rely on the instant pleasure she derives from excessive drinking, gambling and casual relationships with men, which also eventually take her to a point of no return. Since she is such a reserved person who shares her inner emotions with no one, Pai Hsien-yung, again, uses the symbolic spider hairpin in a dinner scene to illustrate her lonely and helpless state of mind.

Ch'en Yin recalls a memorable dining experience he had with Li T'ung, his wife Hui-fen, and one of Li T'ung's admirers Chou Ta-ch'ing (周大慶), who was also Ch'en Yin's roommate in college. When Ch'en Yin describes Li T'ung's appearance that night, he again, makes note of the spider hairpin that "had slid down almost to the end of the flowing mane around her left shoulder, swaying there as if it were suspended from some invisible filament." (302/225) The hairpin's precarious position, hanging loose, represents how much her prospects in life have gone downhill since the last time Ch'en Yin saw her at his wedding.

At the dinner table, Li T'ung acts frivolously, speaking only topics of drinking and gambling. She despises Chou Ta-ch'ing's sincerity simply because he does not know

as much about gambling as she does. She tries to hide her desolate state of mind from her friends by drinking a great deal of strong liquor, so that she can be oblivious about everything, even herself. After dinner, Li T'ung and Chou Ta-ch'ing approach the dance floor together, but she immediately abandons her clumsy dance partner and begins to dance all by herself to the Cha Cha rhythm.

The Cha Cha rhythm became, as it were, a whirlwind of noise, blowing out her long rippling hair and the sash around her waist. The diamond spider was flung into the air, clinging tenaciously to her mane, but the purple orchid flew off the sash, swirled down to the floor, and was trodden to a pulp by her feet. She held up her head, her eyelids lowered, her brows closely knit, her long supple waist swaying urgently. She was like a cobra mesmerized by a magic flute, whirling agonizingly even to the point of allowing its body to disintegrate. (304/227)

Li T'ung's dance here is almost like a dance of death in which she tries to dance away her sorrows and loneliness with her presumptuous moves. Her dancing also foreshadows her eventual self-destruction as she indulges more and more in alcohol, gambling, and in her arrogant dancing. Chou's presence could have cracked Li T'ung's cold and detached attitude, but instead she chooses to ignore his friendly gestures and to indulge in her own dancing. Her disdain for Chou's kindness is represented when she drops the purple orchid, a gift from Chou, on the dance floor. Moreover, the spider hairpin seems to

embody her repressed sorrows, revealing her grief over her parents' accident, her distrust of men, and her sense of alienation living all by herself in the United States.

Besides the spider hairpin, Li T'ung's obsession with gambling is another way Pai Hsien-yung depicts his tragic heroine's downfall over the course of the short story. Pai also uses Li T'ung's pursuit of instant gratification to highlight the reasons for her disengagement with life and for her movement down the road to self-destruction. Mahjong used to be her and her best friends' favorite pastime at college but she loses interest in it because she needs a more thrilling game to help suppress her sorrow over her parents' accident and her uncertainty about her future in the United States. One day, she goes horse racing with the narrator Ch'en Yin, his wife Hui-fen, and her escort of the night, a man from Hong Kong called Teng Mao-ch'ang (鄧茂昌), who claims expertise in horse racing.<sup>135</sup> At the event, Li T'ung once again demonstrates her willful character by betting on horses with weird names that are least likely to win. While others are confused over her silly bets, she shows no sign of regret because her poor bets have already served their purpose: they are just a way for her to waste away her time and wealth so that she can, for the moment, forget about her longing for true love.

Li T'ung's failure to find true love is a major reason for her spiritual loneliness. On the one hand, she puts on an arrogant and indifferent attitude to drive her admirers away, but on the other hand, she yearns for true love that could fulfill her spiritual emptiness and cure her suppressed sorrows. Her desire for love is only mentioned once, very subtly through the symbolic name of a horse. In a casual conversation with Ch'en

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<sup>135</sup> See "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," pp. 306-07.

Yin, she tells him that she has won four hundred and fifty dollars on a single bet on a horse named “Gallant Knight,” and she refers to this experience as the greatest accomplishment in her whole life.<sup>136</sup> Just as the horse’s name suggests, Li T’ung often wishes for a “gallant knight” to save her from her present troubles, to sincerely love her, and to lead her towards a brighter future. However, her inevitable distrust of others and her sense of pride prevent any possible saviors from even approaching her. Her aristocratic upbringing also causes her to set high standards for suitors and leads her to think that no one could satisfy her at all. Therefore, she remains single throughout the story; she distances herself even from her best friends from college because her aristocratic pride prevents her from admitting her weaknesses and loneliness. On the road to self-destruction, she drifts between cities, finding instant pleasure from drinking, gambling, and “the kindness of strangers.”

Although Li T’ung leads herself down the road to self-destruction through her excessive drinking, gambling, and casual relationships with her suitors, she is fully aware that these instant pleasures are not reliable and will not provide her with any spiritual fulfillment at all. Williams’s Blanche DuBois, however, does not share Li T’ung’s wisdom in understanding the reality behind her predicament. These two tragic heroines, although from different countries, share a similar aristocratic background and also the sense of alienation that comes from living in a world that does not belong to them. Li T’ung’s identity and sense of belonging are closely tied to her connection with the “China” she is familiar with. Before she moved to the United States, she could take her parents’ love and the aristocratic lifestyle they provided for granted. Even when she is

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 309.

studying at Wellesley College, she still has peace of mind about her parents' spiritual and financial support for her. After her parents' accident, however, Li T'ung loses all her connections with "China" and she becomes very frustrated about her lonely future in the United States.

Blanche DuBois is also the victim of a fallen aristocratic family that belonged to the old order. Like to Li T'ung, she once lived the life of a Southern belle before the fall of her family estate, Belle Reve. When her family's fortune is significantly diminished, she can no longer be a social butterfly without worrying about family expenses and other related matters. Therefore, she looks for spiritual fulfillment in love relationships instead. Unfortunately, she marries a homosexual poet who later commits suicide upon Blanche's discovery of his sexual identity. Carrying the weight of the disappointments from her failed marriage, she looks for love in the arms of strangers but only manages to ruin her reputation. The naïve hope driving her search for love among strangers is different from Li T'ung's. Blanche sincerely believes that she can once again fulfill her desire for love just by being with men. Conversely, Li T'ung's critical attitude towards others has prevented her from being fooled by her desperate need for love, but this same attitude ensures that she will always remain mired in her predicament.

Pai Hsien-yung portrayals of his nostalgic women characters rely heavily the manner in which their stories are narrated by others. In "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," the third person omniscient narrator highlights both Madame Ch'ien's nostalgic sentiments and her sense of alienation in Taiwan through the symbolism of her clothing. Li T'ung's tragic downfall in the short story "A Celestial in Mundane Exile" is

also emphasized by the narrator Ch'en Yin's careful descriptions on her clothing at various occasions.

For Williams's nostalgic female characters, clothing is definitely an important aspect of the characterizations in that their choice of fashion supports their attachment to the old order of the antebellum South. Instead as using fictional narrators to portray his female characters, Williams's theatrical genre of writing uses aesthetic language, in both the exposition and dialogue to pin down the characters. Williams created a unique style of theatrical language, called "personal lyricism," which combines poetic elements, such as alliteration, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and assonance, with a regional vocabulary that confirms the authenticity of the characters' speech. He describes this unique theatrical language as "the outcry of prisoner to prisoner from the cell in solitary where each is confined by the duration of his life."<sup>137</sup> These prisoners are prisoners of time, and their minds are trapped inside past memories. For example, Blanche DuBois and Amanda Wingfield's difficulties in adapting to postbellum society are the result of their nostalgia for their joyful pasts as Southern belles. Since they are living in a time that does not belong to them, time becomes the greatest distance between their sense of belonging and the present society.<sup>138</sup>

He defends his use of poetic verse in the dramatic genre by saying that "a play that is more of a dramatic poem than a play is bound to rest on metaphorical ways of

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<sup>137</sup> Tennessee Williams, "Person-to-Person" in *Where I Live: Selected Essays*, Ed. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods, New York: New Directions, 1978. pp. 76.

<sup>138</sup> Tom Wingfield, a main character and the narrator of *The Glass Menagerie*, concludes the play, in scene seven, with the following comment that reflects his understanding of his family's troubles: "Time is the greatest distance between two places." p. 96.



expression.”<sup>139</sup> Since he strongly believes in the importance of theatrical performances to the success of a play, his use of “personal lyricism” can enhance the audience’s perception of the verbal aspect of the play. The lyrical language is also an essential part of the elite culture of the antebellum South because it reflects the Southern belles’ overall genteel qualities and their romantic prospects in life. Whenever Blanche DuBois or Amanda Wingfield speak of their joyful past as a Southern belle, they speak in the manner of “personal lyricism.” Their gentility and romanticism, however, do not fit into the ever-changing postbellum world. Therefore, particularly in plays that depict the decline of American Southern aristocratic culture, Williams uses “personal lyricism” as a characteristic of the ex-Southern belles’ speech to highlight the relationship between their tragic downfalls and the decline of the American South.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Williams writes some of Blanche’s major speeches about her past and her expression of anger towards Stanley using “personal lyricism.” The poetic elements of these speeches emphasize her strong emotions in accordance with the context of the situation and further reveal her uniqueness amongst the other characters. In scene four, Blanche is bewildered by Stella’s quick reconciliation with her husband Stanley after they fight on poker night. She tries to make Stella better realize Stanley’s crude and brutal character by comparing him to an ape. Her detailed description of Stanley’s animalistic behavior is filled with repetition, parallelism, and onomatopoeia, in order to express her anger in an organic way. In the beginning of the speech, she refers to

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<sup>139</sup> “A Summer of Discovery” in *Where I Live Selected Essays*, Ed. Christine R. Day and Bob Woods, New York: New Directions, 1978. p. 146.

Stanley as an animal, saying that he “eats like one, moves like one, talks like one!”<sup>140</sup>

The repetition used here shows her strong feelings about his primitive behavior. The way in which Blanche’s anger towards Stanley is verbalized also helps to further explain the conflict between them. Blanche’s concept of gender still belongs to the old order of the antebellum South, in which men are honored for their chivalry towards women.

Conversely, Stanley thinks of gender in an exactly opposite way, making sense of marriage by referring to the Napoleonic Code.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, the use of repetition and onomatopoeia in Blanche’s description of Stanley does not only highlight her anger towards him; it also explains the nature of their problem in recognizing and understanding one other.

Blanche also uses onomatopoeia to describe her impressions of Stanley and his friends on poker night, exclaiming that “his poker night! – you call it – this party of apes! Somebody growls – some creature snatches at something – the fight is on! *God!* Maybe we are a long way from being in God’s image, but Stella – my sister – there has been *some* progress since then!”<sup>142</sup> Her onomatopoeic description of Stanley and his friends at their poker game further demonstrates the difference between Stanley and her. Her aristocratic upbringing and previous occupation as an English teacher also lead her to express her resentment towards Stanley in the form of “personal lyricism.” Therefore, the poetic elements in her speech here also symbolize the nature of the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, which eventually leads to her tragic downfall.

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<sup>140</sup> *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Signet, 1951. p. 72.

<sup>141</sup> The Napoleonic Code is property law, in which what belongs to the wife would belong to the husband. It is mentioned in scene two of *Streetcar* when Stanley demands the details about the loss of Belle Reve, the DuBois’ family estate.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

Besides illustrating the nature of the conflict between Blanche and Stanley, “personal lyricism” has another symbolic purpose in the play, which is to illustrate Blanche’s unstable mindset when she has to confront the truth behind her self-made illusions of the past. In scene six after she and Mitch have their first night out, they go back to Stanley’s apartment and chat about the past. Mitch is one of Stanley’s close friends. He first meets Blanche on poker night in scene four and is very attracted by her delicate beauty and sensitive character. When their relationship gradually becomes serious, Blanche decides to tell Mitch about her past marriage, hoping that her sincerity will strengthen their relationship. When she reveals personal details about her failed marriage with the homosexual poet, Allan, she, again, speaks in a fluid and poetic manner, when she describes him as

a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I  
was sixteen, I made the discovery – love. All at once and  
much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly  
turned a blinding light on something that had always been  
half in shadow. ... I didn’t find out anything till our  
marriage when we’d run away and come back and all I  
knew was I’d failed him in some mysterious way and  
wasn’t able to give the help he needed but couldn’t speak  
of!<sup>143</sup>

There are a number of reasons for Blanche to speak in poetic verse when she verbalizes her past memories. Her failed marriage to a gay man is a devastating blow to her

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

aristocratic pride as a Southern belle. Her charm and sexual appeal were rejected by Allan simply because he was not interested in women. Although she could no longer blame Allan for his deception in their marriage, she has been left with a scar. Thus, when she approaches love again, she cannot escape the feeling of uncertainty; she is masking her sense of insecurity by speaking in a poetic and metaphorical manner when recalling her past painful experiences with love. Williams uses “personal lyricism” here to emphasize Blanche’s courage in sharing her painful past with Mitch and to portray Blanche’s contradictory feelings towards love.

The use of “personal lyricism” in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* is closely related to Blanche’s difficulty in confronting the truth of her past. Similar to Pai Hsien-yung’s use of “stream-of-consciousness” in portraying Madame Ch’ien’s unstable mindset in his short story “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream,” whenever Blanche gives voice to her past memories or when others confront her about her lies about the past, Williams articulates Blanche’s speeches using the technique of “personal lyricism.” The rhythm, alliteration, and repetition in her speeches highlight her contradictory thoughts of the past: she is nostalgic about her lost status as a privileged Southern belle, but she also wishes to avoid the truth of her family’s decline and of her own promiscuity with men in the Tarantula Arms Hotel.<sup>144</sup> Whether or not she is telling the truth when her conversation with Mitch in scene nine bursts out into an outcry, her painful recollection of past memories in being sexually engaged with random men at the Tarantula Arms Hotel seems to reflect more of how she views others’ misconception of

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

her, rather than the literal truth. Her self-description as a “big spider” at the “Tarantula Arms Hotel” coincides with Li T’ung’s symbolic spider hairpin in “A Celestial in Mundane Exile.” The symbol of a spider is used, in both the cases of Blanche and Li T’ung, to represent their seemingly promiscuous characters. However, their promiscuous behavior has not harmed anyone but themselves; the dangerous and cold-blooded nature of a spider can be seen as a irony that is actually in contrast with their sincere desire for true love and sexual fulfillments. Coming to New Orleans is Blanche’s final chance to redeem herself and escape from past sorrows. She hopes to be saved by a promising love relationship, but her misunderstood image as a dangerous spider has repelled her final chance with love.

Blanche’s unfortunate experience in New Orleans parallels the idea of loss and alienation in Hart Crane’s poem, “The Broken Tower.” Hart Crane was Williams’s favorite poet; Williams’s profound appreciation of Crane’s works helped inspire his own writings. He includes the following lines from “The Broken Tower” in the preface to *A Streetcar Named Desire* that foreshadow Blanche’s tragic fate in New Orleans.

And so it was I entered the broken world  
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice  
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)  
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.<sup>145</sup>

In this poem, Crane describes a lonely individual’s journey into a desolate world, where religious and social institutions, symbolized by the church bells and the broken tower, no longer live up to the faith people place in them. The speaker wishes to find company and

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<sup>145</sup> “The Broken Tower,” lines 17-20.

love in this desolate world but he thinks that love is almost unobtainable because it is floating in the wind. Blanche's tragic downfall is very similar to the speaker's journey in this poem. Coming from a declining elite culture, Blanche enters New Orleans in the hope of finding a love that could restore meaning to her existence. However, she is unable to overcome her nostalgia and escapist thoughts about past troubles. Most importantly, New Orleans is like the broken world described in Crane's poem, filled with misunderstanding, deception, and false hopes that prevent Blanche from securing a promising relationship. Therefore, Williams's use of "personal lyricism" in his characterization of Blanche and her tragic downfall is heavily influenced by Crane's pessimistic attitude towards an individual's fate in the modern world.

"Personal lyricism" is definitely one of Williams' unique and innovative techniques for characterizing nostalgic heroines in his plays about the decline of the Old South. In *The Glass Menagerie*, he inserts poetic elements into some of Amanda Wingfield's important speeches, in order to emphasize her nostalgic recollection of the past. Amanda is the head of the Wingfield family and has been since her husband abandoned them to seek adventures in Mexico. She was brought up in the traditions of the Old South and lived the life of a Southern belle before marriage. Because of her irresponsible husband, and the decline of the Old South in general, her life has gone downhill after marriage. Unlike Blanche, who relies on the kindness of others for strength to survive, Amanda is a courageous mother who is determined to lead her family through the hard times of the Great Depression. Although she often acts with foresight and urges her children to advance in their careers, she is still very much attached to the

past. She reminisces about her past as a Southern belle in ways that she herself may not even realize. As her nostalgia is hidden behind her outwardly progressive, determined appearance, the use of “personal lyricism” in some of her speeches becomes an important indicator that she is unconsciously indulging in past memories.

For example, in scene six, Amanda searches through her old dresses to look for a decent outfit for her daughter, Laura, to wear at dinner with Jim O’Connor, her “gentleman caller.” Amanda is outwardly excited about the dinner and acts as if she were the one to be receiving the “gentleman caller.” Williams structures Amanda’s speech here using “personal lyricism” to illustrate her underlying nostalgia for being a Southern belle.

I wore it on Sundays for my gentleman callers! I had it on  
the day I met your father .... I had malaria fever all that  
Spring. The change of climate from East Tennessee to the  
Delta – weakened resistance. I had a little temperature all  
the time – not enough to be serious – just enough to make  
me restless and giddy.<sup>146</sup>

Amanda has carried on her restless and giddy character from her youth as a Southern belle to the present day as indicated by the use of alliteration and parallelism in this speech. These poetic elements also emphasize her nostalgia for her days as a Southern belle; she cannot let go of her memories about dressing up for balls and being surrounded by suitors.

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<sup>146</sup> *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Directions, 1999. p. 53.

Amanda's past memories of being a Southern belle continue to haunt her when she opens the door for Jim on the night of the dinner. Regardless of her role as the mother in the family, she acts in a girlish manner and, again, behaves as if she were the one who is receiving a "gentleman caller." At the moment when she receives Jim at the door, Williams steps into the play and describes Jim's response to Amanda's girlish manner in the exposition of the scene: "He is making his first contact with girlish Southern vivacity and in spite of the night-school course in public speaking is somewhat thrown off the beam by the unexpected outlay of social charm."<sup>147</sup> Amanda has high expectations for this dinner because she sees Jim as the ultimate savior of her family. The Wingfield family has been struggling through hard times in the Great Depression. She thinks that her son, Tom, has been too selfish and has not cared enough about the prospects for the Wingfields. Her daughter Laura is almost like a recluse; she tries to detach herself as much as possible from any social events or engagements.

The fact that Amanda puts so much effort into organizing the dinner for her daughter's "gentleman caller," demonstrates that she is actually the one who longs for love and desperately needs a "gentleman caller" that can revive her memories of being a Southern belle. In the following speech, Williams uses "personal lyricism" to demonstrate Amanda's flirtatious attitude towards Jim when they first meet.

I have heard so much about you from my boy. I finally  
said to him, Tom – good gracious! – why don't you bring  
this paragon to supper? ... Mmm, so warm already! And  
not quite summer, even. We're going to burn up before

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-63.



summer really gets started. However, we're having – we're  
having a very light supper. I think light things are better  
fo' this time of year. The same as light clothes are. Light  
clothes an' light food are what warm weather calls fo'.<sup>148</sup>

The rhythm and repetition in this speech indicate Amanda is nervous as she acts in a girlish manner, as if she were regressing into her past. The poetic elements embedded in this speech also reveal her strong attachment to her aristocratic Southern upbringing because her girlish manner and hospitality belongs to her past memories of being a Southern belle. Along with her strong Southern accent, the repetitive use of the word “light” here ironically contrasts with her nervousness upon meeting this “gentleman caller.”

Amanda's uncontrollable recollection of past memories is once again demonstrated when she makes a long poetic speech at the dinner table with Jim and her children. She speaks with fluidity and grief about her Southern upbringing and about the decline of the South in general.

Well, in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone,  
gone. All vestiges of gracious living! Gone completely! I  
wasn't prepared for what the future brought me. All of my  
gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I  
assumed that I would be married to one and raise my  
family on a large piece of land with plenty of servants.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

Jim's presence as the "gentleman caller" at the dinner stirs up contradictions in Amanda's mind. She tries to put up a cheerful appearance and to please her guest in whatever ways she can, but she still cannot escape her grief over her bygone days as a Southern belle. The poetic elements in her speeches about the past also symbolize her mental struggle between her role as a caretaker in the family and her nostalgia. Therefore, Williams's use of "personal lyricism" serves an important role in revealing Amanda's suppressed nostalgia in an aesthetic way.

Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams's characterizations of the four tragic heroines selected for this paper are layered with symbolism in different ways. The two writers both take a rather aesthetic approach to describe the characters' clothing and in structuring the characters' important speeches. They focus on the details of the characters' physical appearances and they elaborate the characters' manner of speech. In the two short stories by Pai Hsien-yung, clothing is a significant element to the characterization because it symbolizes the nature of the conflict in the story. In "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," Madame Ch'ien's green, silk *ch'i-p'ao* and her thoughts about it suggest her attachment to the old order of pre-1949 and also her nostalgia for past glories; in "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," Li T'ung's various luxurious outfits, especially the diamond-studded spider hairpin, also signify her aristocratic upbringing and her gradual steps towards self-destruction.

While the description of physical appearance is also important in Williams's characterizations of the nostalgic women in his work, Williams also developed an innovative technique to illustrate his characters' mental struggles between past glories

and present troubles. He uses a technique called “personal lyricism” to add poetic elements to the female characters’ speech about their speeches. The rhythm, repetition, onomatopoeia, and alliteration embedded in their speeches bring out the women’s suppressed feelings of nostalgia and their sensitive and vulnerable character. When Blanche DuBois and Amanda Wingfield try to avoid confronting the truth about their present troubles, the poetic elements in their speeches become an indirect way of demonstrating their troubled states of mind. Blanche is haunted by the memory of her failed marriage with the homosexual poet, when Stanley challenges her with her lies about her past, she covers up her fear with alliteration and onomatopoeia as she speaks. Similarly, Amanda Wingfield speaks using “personal lyricism” whenever she recalls her joyful memories of being a youth Southern belle. The rhythm and repetition in her speech also reveals her suppressed nostalgia and her longing for love from a “gentleman caller.” In this way, the three important emotions, the sense of loss, alienation, and nostalgia, among the four selected characters discussed in this paper are made vivid by Pai and Williams’s aesthetic approaches to characterization. The symbolic clothing in Pai’s work and the “personal lyricism” technique in Williams’s work create an organic portrayal of the characters, presenting them in ways that are closely related to their states of mind and to the nature of their personal conflicts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **A CLOSE READING ON THE UNIVERSAL THEME OF LOVE**

It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.

--- William Faulkner "Nobel Prize Speech"

Through a close analysis of the four works selected for this paper, one can see that nostalgia is a shared theme. In these works, the tragedies of the female protagonists mirror the decline of the culturally specific aristocratic societies to which they belong. The women characters strongly identify with and are attached to antebellum aristocratic orders, causing them to experience a sense of alienation in their present worlds. Their mental struggles to balance memories of past glories with present life challenges are signs of their problematic nostalgia. The historical backgrounds of these women characters are, thus, immensely important to an understanding of the roots of their tragedies: their inability to adapt to present society is largely the result of their aristocratic upbringings. Without such a historical backdrop, consequently, their stories would not be as memorable.

Given the emphasis the authors place on the historical backgrounds of the characters and the strong sense of nostalgia in the works, it is not difficult for readers to identify these two qualities as the major shared themes of the works. However, another major common theme found among these four works is the humanistic approach that Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams take when narrating the tragedies of their nostalgic

heroines. Nonetheless, the two writers always write about the experiences of individuals within a specific historical context; this context can be generally summarized as times in the twentieth century when the decaying aristocratic order was still evident and in conflict with the present, ever-changing world. Although this paper has attempted to compare the works of Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams through an examination of specific elements of their writing, the respective historical backgrounds of the authors and their stories, their symbolic use of music and clothing, the most important commonality is to be found in their compassion for their female characters.

None of these women have particularly admirable personalities, nor do they demonstrate any qualities or actions that please the general reader. On a superficial level, their dissatisfaction with life may even seem arrogant, self-centered, or grating. Pai and Williams, however, create sympathy for them by emphasizing their failures in love. All are nostalgic for the bygone days of glory in an antebellum aristocracy, but above all, they are most troubled by their unfulfilled desires for love. All have experienced true love in the past: Madame Ch'ien, Amanda Wingfield, and Blanche DuBois were all deceived by past lovers; in Li T'ung's story, while not focused on any of her past failed relationships, the loss of her loving family can be seen as the root of her later mistrust. Thus, the reason for the unhappiness and uncertainty in the lives of all four characters is not discomfort with poorer living conditions but personal grief over being unable to find love. By shifting the source of their nostalgia from materialistic to spiritual concerns, Pai and Williams create a dominant theme surrounding the characters that William Faulkner referred to as "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Nobel Prize Speech. 10 Dec. 1950. Rpt. on [William Faulkner on the Web](#).

When William Faulkner accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, he made a remarkable speech about the importance of literature addressing the spiritual well-being of human being. Right in the middle of the uneasy twentieth century, when the world had been devastated by various disastrous revolutions, two world wars and the trauma that followed, Faulkner believed that literature's ultimate role at such a crucial historical moment was to restore faith and hope in humanity by reminding people of courage, honor, pity, and sacrifice, which were part of human experiences throughout time. Past memories of suffering, loss, and separation could be painful, but he believed that a writer could make use of them by creating remarkable stories that could "lift a man's heart."<sup>151</sup> Although Pai and Williams's sympathetic approaches to narrating their nostalgic heroines are similar to the beliefs described in Faulkner's speech, it cannot be seen as an inspiration for their writings, because the two Williams's plays discussed in this paper predate the speech, and there were other, more influential forces behind Pai's approach. Nonetheless, these three writers all share a strong belief in humanity and all wrote about painful human experiences from similar historical periods in the twentieth century; they all emphasize the conflict within the human heart that drives their tragic characters. Most importantly, they all demonstrate a strong sense of sympathy for the misfortunes of fallen aristocrats. Their humanistic approach to literature pushed their works to go beyond the simple historical context and towards a deeper exploration into of the troubled psyche of their individual characters.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Among previous scholarship on Pai Hsien-yung's short stories about Chinese exiles, Taiwanese writer and literary critic Ou-yang Tzu (歐陽子) has written a study outlining what she sees as the three main themes in all of the short stories in the *Taipei People* collection. In the first chapter of her book *The Swallow in Front of the Hall of Wang and Hsieh* (王謝堂前的燕子), she summarizes what these three are: the comparison between past and present (今昔之比), the struggle between soul and flesh (靈肉之爭), and the riddle of life and death (生死之謎).<sup>152</sup> She has justified the importance of these three themes by emphasizing them throughout her detailed analysis of the fourteen short stories in her book. However, her analysis is limited by her overstatement of the three themes. The predicaments faced by the various characters in *Taipei People* can obviously be described by these three themes, but the essential underlying theme shared by the *Taipei People* stories goes beyond a mere study of the basic similarities between the characters. One must also address the essential notions of sympathy and compassion in Pai Hsien-yung's depiction of his exile characters. These characters are connected by Pai's delicate methods for creating sympathy for them. Although their tragedies are mostly caused by obvious personality weaknesses and shared nostalgic sentiments, Pai nevertheless portrays them in a humanistic manner because they no longer have access to true love, which could have saved them from their downfalls. Therefore, the main theme in Pai's *Taipei People* short stories cannot be simplified into the three that Ou-yang Tzu argues for.

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<sup>152</sup> Ou-yang Tzu's "Pai Hsien-yung te hsiao-shuo shih-chieh" 白先勇的小說世界 (The Fictional World of Pai Hsien-yung) in *Wang-hsieh t'ang ch'ien te yen-tzu* 王謝堂前的燕子 (The Swallow in Front of the hall of Wang and Hsieh), Taipei: Erh-ya Ch'u-pien-she 爾雅出版社, 2000. pp. 5-29.

Pai Hsien-yung's humanistic approach to creating sympathy for his nostalgic heroines is based on a return to the purest of all human sentiments, the notion of *ch'ing* (情).<sup>153</sup> The notion of *ch'ing* has a long tradition in the history of Chinese fiction, spanning from the earlier Tang dynasty *Ch'uan-ch'i* (傳奇) short stories, to Ming and Ch'ing dynasty vernacular fiction. From this paper's earlier discussion of the various influences on Pai's literary style of writing, it is evident that his works are heavily influenced by Chinese vernacular literature, especially *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢). These two classics influenced more than just Pai's detailed descriptions of the settings and his elaborate characterizations based on symbolic pieces of clothing; the two classics emphasize the notion of *ch'ing*, and it is this notion that had a more important influence on Pai's works. Most importantly, the two works combine the concept of illusion with the notion of *ch'ing* in order to demonstrate how *ch'ing* can connect reality with the world of illusion. Similarly, Pai expresses Madame Ch'ien's sorrow over a lost love by having her illusions of the past intrude on her present consciousness. Thus, the delicate relationship between *ch'ing* and illusion is carried from the vernacular tradition into Pai's stories of modern day experiences.

*The Peony Pavilion*, a play written by T'ang Hsien-tsu in the Ming dynasty, is about how the power of *ch'ing* can transcend life and death. When the drama's heroine Tu Li-niang (杜麗娘) realizes her inward emotion of *ch'ing* in her dream, it provokes a spiritual awakening that leads her on a search for true love, a journey that transcends life and death. The power of *ch'ing* is emphasized throughout the play since it is the major

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<sup>153</sup> *Ch'ing* can be simply translated as "love" in the English language but the discussion of *ch'ing* here is based on its Chinese connotations. Therefore, the aspect of love in Pai Hsien-yung's fiction will be referred to as *ch'ing*, instead of its English translation.



force behind Tu Li-niang's spiritual awakening and her difficult journey to find true love. Dreaming is also important to the play's context because her enlightenment with *ch'ing* occurs in a dream, a situation when emotional desire overrules reality and reason. In the preface, T'ang describes his understanding of the notion of *ch'ing* as follows:

Love is of origins unknown, yet it runs deep. The living  
can die for it, and through it the dead can come back to life.  
That which the living cannot die for, or which cannot  
resurrect the dead, is not love [*ch'ing*] at its most supreme.  
Love in a dream: why can't it be real? As if there is any  
dearth in this world of dreaming one [or figures one dream  
up]! ... Alas! Events of the human world cannot be  
contained by the span of the human life. I am not one of  
those who have attained final understanding, who can  
constantly use reason [*li*] to apprehend all things! How  
little it is known that that which cannot be in the realm of  
reason simply has to be in the realm of love!<sup>154</sup>

T'ang's unique interpretation of *ch'ing* here allows its immortal power to lead Tu Li-niang through her extraordinary journey in search of identity and true love. It also redefined the meaning of *ch'ing* in the Chinese literary tradition and it greatly influenced how *ch'ing* is examined in later works. In Pai Hsien-yung's fiction, the notion of *ch'ing* does not have such immortal powers; rather it is the main tool for generating sympathy

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<sup>154</sup> “情不知所起，一往而深。生者可以死，死者可以生。生而不可與死，死而不可復生者，皆非情之至也。夢中之情，何必非真？天下豈少夢中之人耶！... 嗟夫！人世之事，非人世可盡。自非通人，恆以理相格耳！第云理之所必無，安知情之所必有耶！” Translated by Li Wai-yee in her *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. pp. 50-51.

for his nostalgic female characters. The nostalgia felt by Madame Ch'ien, from "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream," and by Li T'ung, from "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," are historically and culturally specific examples of the Chinese experience in the aftermath of the Chinese civil war. Readers who identify with either the decayed aristocracy or Republican Chinese rule can easily identify with the experience of these exile characters. However, by emphasizing *ch'ing*, Pai stimulates sympathy for the characters among readers who do not associate themselves with Republican Chinese rule. The concept of *ch'ing*, then, relates the tragedies in Pai's short stories to the universal idea that love is of great importance to humanity.

In "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from Dream," the reader's sympathy for Madame Ch'ien is generated by the depiction of her sincere yearning for true love. Although her exile status and worsened living conditions in Taiwan contribute to her nostalgia, her ultimate grief comes from her unfulfilled desire for love. It is true that she does complain about how present-day Taiwan cannot be compared to her past in Nan-ching (南京), but the story's stream-of-consciousness narration clearly shows that the climax of her mental breakdown occurs when she becomes frustrated and obsessed over the fact of her past failed love affair. Similar to T'ang Hsien-tsu's explanation of *ch'ing* as quoted earlier, Madame Ch'ien's past memories of the love affair are intertwined with her present illusions about the past. Her present passion for love is realized through her nostalgic illusions about the past. Because Madame Tou's banquet in Taipei reminds her very much of her past glories in Nan-ching, she cannot help but think of her once-fulfilled passion for love. Even when she tries hard to alienate herself from the crowd at the banquet, she is inevitably haunted by her past memories.

While the importance of *ch'ing* in “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” is articulated through Madame Ch'ien's illusions of the past, the relationship between *ch'ing* and illusion should be addressed in the context of the possible influences of traditional Chinese literature on Pai's literary interpretation of *ch'ing*. The realm of illusion, as illustrated through Tu Li-niang's spiritual awakening in her dream, is essential to the development of *ch'ing* in *The Peony Pavilion*. However, when it comes to the great vernacular novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, illusion takes on a much more important role in articulating the concept of *ch'ing*. One of the novel's main themes is demonstrated by the antithetical couplet at the entrance of the Illusory Realm of Great Void (太虛幻境): “Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; / Real becomes non-real when the unreal's real.”<sup>155</sup> The novel's treatment of *ch'ing* is also caught between the interconnected realms of illusion and reality. In her extensive study of *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>156</sup>, Li Wai-yee argues that the novel's “aesthetic illusion” forces the reader to “confront its fictionality through the enactment of a mythic-fantastic realm.”<sup>157</sup> As the attachment and detachment of *ch'ing* intertwined with the protagonist Chia Pao-yu (賈寶玉)'s journey towards enlightenment, “the dialectics of reality and illusion is also the dialectics of feeling and transcendence of feeling.”<sup>158</sup> When compared with the concept of *ch'ing* in the *Dream of Red Chamber*, Pai Hsien-yung's interpretation of *ch'ing* in his

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<sup>155</sup> Cao Xueqin's *The Story of the Stone: Volume I “The Golden Days.”* Trans. David Hawkes, “假作真時真亦假，無為有處有還無,” New York: Penguin Books, 1973. p. 130.

<sup>156</sup> See chapter four in *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. pp. 152-201.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

short story “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream” may not be as philosophical in its worldview. Still, they are both inspired by the immortal power of *ch’ing* in *The Peony Pavilion*. Similar to the situation of a play within a play in Pai’s “Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream,” the novel’s tragic heroine Lin Tai-yu (林黛玉) also overhears the lyrics of the same aria from *The Peony Pavilion* and is startled by the aria’s explicit illustration of *ch’ing*.<sup>159</sup> Considering Pai Hsien-yung’s profound appreciation for *The Peony Pavilion* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, he has undeniably been influenced by the emphasis of these two classics on *ch’ing* and this has helped shape his methods for creating sympathy for his nostalgic heroines.

Compared to Madame Ch’ien, the tragic heroine Li T’ung in Pai Hsien-yung’s short story “A Celestial in Mundane Exile,” appears less likely to draw sympathy from the reader because of her proud and arrogant character. She is a self-determined and independent woman living alone in New York City; she often behaves in a frivolous manner that drives people away. Similar to Madame Ch’ien, Li T’ung isolates herself from others because she is troubled by a sense of alienation from being in a world that does not belong to them. Although her tragic downfall is caused mainly by a lack of love and spiritual fulfillment in her life in New York, Pai Hsien-yung does not apply the traditional concept of *ch’ing* when narrating Li T’ung’s experiences. This is because her roots in China are quite different from those of Madame Ch’ien. Madame Ch’ien’s identity is rooted in pre-civil war Nan-ching. Conversely, Li T’ung’s identity crisis comes from her inability to identify with China or the United States. Her roots in China

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<sup>159</sup> See Chapter 23 of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

are maintained through her connection to her family, but after the tragic accidental death of her parents, this connection is severed. Conversely, her aristocratic upbringing in China has not prepared her for a realistic and practical lifestyle in the United States.

In addition, Li T'ung cannot let go of her strong sense of aristocratic pride, preventing herself from engaging in a spiritually fulfilling relationship that could save her from her gradual downfall. Therefore, the main theme in this story lies in the contradiction between her unspoken yearning for love and her disengagement from any possible love relationship, and her "human heart in conflict with itself." Unlike Madame Ch'ien, Li T'ung does not belong to nor identify with the Chinese literary tradition that emphasizes *ch'ing*; rather, she is in need of a financially and spiritual fulfilling marriage. Her troubles with love also do not involve a struggle between illusion and reality. Therefore, the concept of *ch'ing* is applicable to Madame Ch'ien's character but not Li T'ung's.

Given the different natures of Madame Ch'ien and Li T'ung's yearnings for love, Pai Hsien-yung symbolically uses other methods to garner sympathy; he uses the image of Li T'ung's diamond accessories in a crucial scene to symbolically illustrate her hopeless state of mind when searching for true love.<sup>160</sup> In her last visit to the narrator Ch'en Yin (陳寅)'s home in the city of Buffalo, Li T'ung gives away her diamond ring to Ch'en Yin's daughter Lili, with sincere wishes for the little girl to have good fortune in finding a good future husband.

It's Lili's now, I mean it." Li T'ung looked up to me, her face wearing a serious expression that came to her rarely.

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<sup>160</sup> See Chapter Four of this paper for the analysis on Li T'ung symbolic diamond hairpin.

She bowed down and kissed Lili on her chubby face,  
saying, "Be a good girl. The ring is for your dowry. Get  
yourself a good husband in the future. Go along now and  
let Daddy keep it for you."<sup>161</sup>

This diamond ring is symbolic of Li T'ung's unfortunate fate with love; it was given to her by her mother as her dowry. Thus, she would not give it away so casually unless all her hopes of finding true love had vanished. Despite the importance of this scene, the story's narration does not overly dramatize it because Li T'ung's hopeless state of mind is known only to herself. She has been successful, throughout the story, at hiding her longing for love behind her proud and detached appearance in front of others. However, when she realizes her hopeless fate with love, she can only let go of her wishes to be saved by love and pass on the symbolic diamond ring to the unfamiliar young girl. Her sincere wish for Lili's good fortune redeems her previous indulgence in alcohol and gambling, creating reader sympathy. Her refusal to become Lili's godmother also demonstrates her recognition of her own shortcomings; she is neither respectable nor suitable as a role model for this innocent young girl. In this way, Pai Hsien-yung illuminates the sympathetic side of Li T'ung's character by emphasizing how important true love is to her.

Similar to Pai Hsien-yung, Tennessee Williams also uses the importance of love to create sympathy for the two nostalgic female characters discussed in this paper,

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<sup>161</sup> References to Pai Hsien-yung's "Che-hsien chi" 謫仙記 / "Li T'ung: A Chinese Girl in New York," {referred here with the title preferred by the author, "A Celestial in Mundane Exile"}, translated by the author and C. T. Hsia in *Chi-mo te shih-ch'i-sui* (Lonely Seventeen) 寂寞的十七歲 / *Twentieth-Century Chinese Stories*, ed. C. T. Hsia. Taipei / New York: Yung-ch'en wen-hua 允晨文化/ Columbia University Press, 2003 / 2002. p. 312 / 234.

Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois. Nostalgia appears to be the main cause of these two women's predicaments because they both long to return to the past where they could enjoy better living conditions and, most importantly, could be secure in their feelings of being loved. For example, Amanda Wingfield demonstrates her nostalgia by telling her children about her past experiences of being a Southern Belle surrounded by suitors; Blanche DuBois bases her self-confidence upon her memories of her popularity among men when she was a Southern belle, even when she is living in much lesser conditions in New Orleans and no longer receives the same respect from men that she once enjoyed. Because their present lives are not as satisfactory and fulfilling as they wish them to be, Amanda and Blanche both feed their souls with illusions of the past that temporarily soothe their frustrations with the present. Their escapism is a sign of their yearning for love because all their past memories are filled with memories of being loved. They gradually descend into tragic downfalls because they slowly come to realize that love is out of their reach.

Although their abandonment by their husbands is an unchangeable fact, Amanda and Blanche are willing to move on with their lives in the hopes that they will find new spiritual fulfillment. Amanda rests her love and hope upon a better future for her children, only to find that she has misunderstood her children's true wishes, and that they will be unable to live up to her expectations. Blanche wishes to be loved and understood by her sister Stella, with whom she now lives in New Orleans, but she has even higher expectations for her relationship with Mitch. Her ultimate need lies in the realm of love.

Considering Amanda and Blanche's similar experiences when struggling with the contrast between their nostalgic sentiments and their present unsatisfying lives, nostalgia

appears to be an obvious theme shared by the two plays. However, the importance of being loved and understood is a significant background issue that heavily influences Amanda and Blanche's minds and actions. In addition, much of the audience sympathy results from an understanding of how their families and lovers misunderstand or betray them. In the case of Amanda, her husband should have been there to help support the family but he leaves them to seek adventures elsewhere; her daughter Laura is extremely dependent upon the family and cannot overcome her absolute shyness and lack of confidence, which intensify Amanda's worries for her. Most important of all, her son Tom should have become the breadwinner and shared the responsibility of taking care of the family but, like his father, he also abandons them to seek adventure alone. Considering the negative impact her family has on Amanda's frustrated state of mind, it is fair to say that nostalgia is not the only obstacle presenting her from overcoming life's challenges; the family's lack of appreciation for and understanding of her love and effort significantly contribute to her sorrows.

Williams creates even more sympathy for Amanda's character through Tom, the narrator. Tom has two identities in the play; the first is as a character that is involved in the past events that take place in the course of the play; the second is as the narrator of the story, someone who has already left his family to become a sailor and now returns to tell their story to the audience. The unique structure of the narration here allows Tom, through his subjective recollection of past memories, to share his feelings of sadness and guilt over not having been taken care of his family during difficult times. Audience sympathy for Amanda Wingfield is derived not just from how the audience perceives her tragedy, but also from Tom's reason for telling his story in the play. There are obvious



autobiographical elements to the play that connect Tom Wingfield's state of mind with that of Williams; the Wingfield family's experience mirrors Williams's own when living in St. Louis, and he bore a similar sense of grief over his family's misfortunes. However, the play successfully derives sympathy for Amanda without any direct reference to Williams's own experiences, making the autobiographical elements complementary, but not necessary.

In the beginning of the first scene, Tom, the narrator, introduces the theme of illusion versus reality with a long speech describing his position as both narrator and character in the play. He claims to be "the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of truth."<sup>162</sup> His narration of the story is based on his subjective memory of the events preceding his earlier departure from the family. He decides to present the illusion of the past through the guise of truth because the notion of love that runs in his family is also caught between illusion and reality. His earlier abandonment of his family left both his mother Amanda and his sister Laura to alone suffer with their mental struggles between illusion and reality. Tom's earlier self failed to either recognize or understand his mother and sister's difficulties accepting reality and the pain behind their withdrawal into a world of illusion, a world that offered them temporary peace of mind.

Tom's guilt and sympathy for his family, especially his mother Amanda, is also illustrated through the play's emphasis on memory. First of all, Williams set the play in a nonrealistic mode to allow Tom's subjective memory of his family tragedy to dominate

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<sup>162</sup> *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Directions, 1999. p. 4.

the narration. In the disposition of scene one, he claims, “the scene is memory and is therefore nonrealistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart.”<sup>163</sup> Because the play relies on its sentimental mood and on Tom’s subjective memory to bring out sympathy for Amanda, the role of memory becomes a unifying factor connecting the play’s “nonrealistic” narration, various symbolisms, and poetic elements within the theme of love.

The importance of memory is addressed by Tom, the narrator, in his opening speech. He states that: “The play is memory. Being a memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music. That explains the fiddle in the wings.”<sup>164</sup> Considering the nonrealistic framework in this play, one can gather that Williams’s intent was to emphasize the importance of love through the subjective memory of Tom, the narrator. All of the events, situations, and even the dialogues are based on Tom’s past memories, his perception of the events, and also his imagination. They are specifically articulated to serve Tom’s purpose in telling the story. Thus, the subjective portrayal of Amanda is also based on Tom’s earlier misunderstanding and later sympathy for her. Moreover, his presence as the narrator in the play demonstrates his sympathy for his family’s shortcomings. Even though he suffers from guilt over his earlier abandonment, he insists on telling the story to the audience because he hopes to, in some way, repent. By placing such a heavy burden on

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.5.

the narrator, Williams is asserting his feelings and sympathy for the Wingfield's tragedy through the voice of the narrator.

There is a brief and awkward moment in the beginning of scene five when Amanda and Tom, the character, are gazing at the moon from the "porch" of their apartment, which is actually a fire escape. Amanda and Tom's relationship, as illustrated in the context of the play, is very problematic; they fail to understand each other's goals in life and often engage in serious quarrels that are filled with uncontrollable anger and bitter sarcasm.<sup>165</sup> However, this brief moment in scene five is rather calm and peaceful, in sharp contrast to earlier scenes in which the two display strong anger for each other. Considering the play's framework as a memory play, this unique scene seems to be from Tom, the narrator's, later reflection on his own relationship with his mother, rather than an actual occurrence in the past.

Before the conversation begins, Tom steps inside his narration of the story to describe the surrounding environment of his family's apartment.<sup>166</sup> The hot and sensual music from the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley from the apartment sharply contrasts with the Wingfield family's depressing prospects in life. Then, Amanda comes onstage the scene with a slight complaint about the apartment's disgraceful entrance. The serene atmosphere continues when Tom and Amanda both make a wish upon the shining moon. Tom's wish remains unknown to both Amanda and the audience but Amanda prefers to say it straight out: "I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children! I wish for that whenever there's a moon, and when there isn't a

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<sup>165</sup> See scene three of *The Glass Menagerie* for a great example of their verbal fights.

<sup>166</sup> *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Directions, 1999. p. 39.

moon, I wish for it, too.”<sup>167</sup> Tom’s decision to include Amanda’s sincere wishes shows that he has finally recognized Amanda’s love and concern for her family. Amanda obviously always wished the best for her children, but her wishes were rooted in her own values. Her son longed for an intellectually stimulating and adventurous life, but she wanted him to provide financial support for the family with a dispiriting job at the shoe factory. She also completely disregarded her daughter’s physical disability and self-isolation, causing her to place false hope in Laura’s chances of attracting a gentleman caller.

Most importantly, Amanda’s elegant reference to the “little silver slipper of a moon”<sup>168</sup> reminds the audience of her Southern origins. Her gentle Southern character is highlighted through her sentimental reflections on the moon. Her Southern aristocratic upbringing has not prepared her for the difficulties of being a single mother during the Great Depression; she continues to be haunted by her nostalgic memories of being a Southern belle. Her nostalgia is epitomized in the scenes when she finally meets her daughter’s gentleman caller, Jim O’Connor. The subtle references to her gentle Southern manners when she speaks with Jim reveal her nostalgic sentiments in a rather objective way. Amanda may be blamed for her misunderstanding of her children, or even for her naïve hopes that for the gentleman caller will save her family. However, Williams’s depiction of her sensitive character illuminates the sympathy Tom, the narrator, has for his mother’s emotional weakness and shortcomings. Although the theme of nostalgia and the conflict between illusion and reality dominate the Wingfield’s story, Williams’s

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

artistic decision to present the story through Tom's subjective memory, the narrator, shifts the play's focus from the issue of nostalgia to the need for sympathy when "a human heart [is] in conflict with itself."<sup>169</sup>

Similar to the portrayal of Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams uses the theme of love in *A Streetcar Named Desire* to draw attention to the sympathetic side of Blanche DuBois' character. Blanche is another female character who suffers from nostalgia and a lack of love and understanding. Compared to Amanda, Blanche bears an even heavier burden from the past because she has suffered the painful loss of her family estate, Belle Reve, the suicide of her husband, and all tragic consequences that follow. The concept of love is integral to her tragic downfall because she believes that true love is her only outlet for spiritual fulfillment. Love is also the only thing that could restore her sense of self-worth following her family's decline and her move to lesser living conditions in New Orleans. However, Blanche is unable to reach out for true love. Instead of forcing herself into a forward-looking position that would allow her to pursue a serious love relationship, her intense nostalgia drives her further inside herself and towards her self-made illusions of once having being an innocent and popular Southern belle. The two characters for whom she cares the most, her sister Stella and her present lover Mitch, both fail to provide her with love, support, and understanding. Since Stella and Mitch are her final hopes for establishing a spiritually promising relationship, her tragic downfall into lunacy becomes inevitable. Considering Williams's methods for creating sympathy for Amanda, his treatment of Blanche is even harsher because she is betrayed and abandoned by the two people with whom she is most intimate in the play.

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<sup>169</sup> Nobel Prize Speech. 10 Dec. 1950. Rpt. on [William Faulkner on the Web](#).

When her search for true love becomes absolutely hopeless, she completely retreats into the realm of illusion and soothes her wounded soul with dreams she has of the admiration of an imaginary millionaire. Similar to *The Glass Menagerie*, the themes of nostalgia and of the mental struggle between illusion and reality are dominant throughout the story. However, the importance of love and understanding overrules these two themes and brings out the most important message of the play.

Blanche's name carries symbolic meanings that highlight her mental struggles between her two distinctive identities an illusory innocent and pure Southern belle and a flesh-and-blood alienated and frustrated woman struggling with her yearning for love. Blanche is French for "white" or "fair." The color white stands for purity, innocence, and virtues, qualities that Blanche wishes to have in her imagined self. These gentle qualities also remind her of her joyful youth as a popular Southern belle. Because she has an embarrassing past in her hometown Laurel – after the fall of Belle Reve and being fired from her high school teaching job, she begins to have casual relationships with random strangers – she hopes rebuild her reputation in New Orleans with the appearance and manner of a gentle Southern lady. Her evident concern over other's impressions of her also demonstrates her strong desire to start a new life in New Orleans and to find a promising love relationship. Therefore, the symbolic implications of her first name suggest not only the nostalgic illusions behind her identity as an ex-Southern Belle but also her strong desire for spiritual fulfillment in love.

Blanche's last name, DuBois, also carries a symbolic reference to her complicated state of mind. Her last name is also of French origin and means "wood" or "made of

wood;”<sup>170</sup> the solid nature of wood contrasts with Blanche’s unstable state of mind. Her status as a fallen aristocrat can also contrast with the meaning of her last name.

Her Southern aristocratic background should have provided her with financial stability, just as the literal meaning of her last name suggests, but since she lives in a time when the Southern aristocracy is in a general decline, she has lost the solid family support she once would have had. Therefore, her present feelings are filled with uncertainty and frustration.

Blanche’s nostalgia and escapist illusions are also represented by her full name. When her first name is put together with her last name, the full name suggests a surreal kind of white forest contained only in fairy tales. Similar to the references to “Blue Mountain” in *The Glass Menagerie*<sup>171</sup>, the fairy tale atmosphere that her full name suggests symbolizes her naiveté, and poor prospects for love. She sincerely wishes for a kind of fairy tale romance is not sustainable in reality, especially considering her past failures with love relationships. However, Blanche’s dream of a fairy tale romance is consistent with her imagined identity as a popular and gentle Southern lady. Therefore, her high expectations for love, as suggested by her full name, make it especially difficult for her to find a promising love relationship that could fulfill both her realistic desire for spiritual and financial support and her fantasy of falling in love with a cavalier type of gentleman.

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<sup>170</sup> “bois” in *Collins Pocket French Dictionary*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2003. p.33.

<sup>171</sup> See p. 31 of chapter one in this paper for the discussion of the reference to Blue Mountain in *The Glass Menagerie*.

The symbolism embedded in the meaning of Blanche's name is just one of the ways for Williams to draw attention to her frustrated state of mind and to the sympathetic side of her character. He also uses other important characters' deceptions of Blanche to exemplify her helpless situation in searching for true love. Blanche has two main goals in her life in New Orleans: the first is start afresh with support from her sister Stella, who is the only family member that Blanche can rely on; secondly, she wishes to engage in a serious and promising love relationship that could bring her both spiritual and love fulfillment. She falls in love with Mitch, her brother-in-law's co-worker, who may not be the ideal chivalric type of gentleman that Blanche desires, but his modest character and taste for romance literature nevertheless attract her. Although Blanche has not always been honest about her past in front of new acquaintances in New Orleans, she makes a courageous confession to Mitch about her failed past marriage, after their first night out.<sup>172</sup> Mitch is moved her honesty and the sad details of her past marriage; he embraces her at the end of the scene and utters words that give Blanche a hopeful sense of comfort: "You need somebody. And I need somebody, too. Could it be – you and me, Blanche?"<sup>173</sup>

Unfortunately, Blanche and Mitch's relationship suddenly goes downhill after this romantic scene because Stanley, Blanche's brother-in-law, discloses to Mitch the details of Blanche's promiscuous life before her arrival in New Orleans. Then, Mitch begins to distrust everything Blanche has told him previously and he conscientiously distances himself from her. He carries on this feeling of distrust when he confronts Blanche with

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<sup>172</sup> See scene six of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.



embarrassing details from her past.<sup>174</sup> Despite the fact that he had already fallen in love with this tragic heroine, he ends their conversation by saying “You’re not clean enough to bring in the house with my mother,” which leaves Blanche in absolute desolation.<sup>175</sup> Although Mitch’s prejudiced distrust of Blanche and his unwillingness to carry on with the relationship definitely contribute to Blanche’s tragic downfall, the most depressing fact about the failed relationship is actually how Mitch is Blanche’s final hope in love. Since love is such an important aspect in Blanche’s new life in New Orleans, Mitch’s abandonment destroys all of Blanche’s hopes for finding spiritual fulfillment through true love.

The lack of understanding from others is another crucial aspect to Blanche’s tragic downfall. It is really difficult for people who do not carry such a heavy burden from the past, like Stanley, Mitch, and Eunice the neighbor, to understand how Blanche’s aristocratic upbringing has contributed to her troubles adapting to the living environment in New Orleans. However, there is one character in the play who should be able to acknowledge the complex factors involved in Blanche’s predicament. Blanche’s sister Stella comes from the same wealthy and cultivated background, and she is placed in a similar position when the family declines. When Blanche first greets her in scene one, she calls her “Stella, oh! Stella, Stella! Stella for Star,” which actually points out the Latin meaning of Stella’s name. As stars carry a general connotation of shining in darkness, the reference to stars when mentioning Stella’s name symbolizes her supposed role in Blanche’s life. Although Blanche is known for her preference for darkness, since darkness represents the comforting zone of her illusions, Stella should have been

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<sup>174</sup> See scene nine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Blanche's guardian angel helping to lead her through the realm of darkness and to help her to start a new life in New Orleans. At the beginning of the play Stella defends Blanche when her husband Stanley starts to question her about the loss of Belle Reve. She even tries hard to accommodate Blanche's preference for luxury by taking her to expensive restaurants and by excusing her laid-back Southern lifestyle. However, her love and concern for Blanche are in direct, growing conflict with the sentiments of her husband Stanley, the person who is most cruel to Blanche in the play.

The play reaches a critical moment when Stella has to decide whether she should believe that Blanche has been raped by Stanley. Stella selfishly chooses Stanley over Blanche because he represents her future, while Blanche embodies her past.<sup>176</sup> Stella decides she must go on with life especially since she has just given birth to a new baby. Therefore, she sacrifices Blanche's life for the sake of her own well-being. The ultimate climax in the story is when Blanche is forcibly taken away by a doctor from a mental institution. Even though Mitch and Stella both express feelings of guilt and despair through spoken words and tears, they nevertheless helplessly stand on the sidelines without interrupting the act. Throughout the play the audience develops a growing sense of sympathy for Blanche as she gradually loses all chances to redeem herself through this new life in New Orleans, and Williams situates the most dramatic moment to reveal how truly sympathetic Blanche is. In comparison to the narration of Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, where there is at least Tom, the narrator, willing to acknowledge failure to take good care of his mother, Blanche is left entirely without support. Stella is completely unlike Tom and is lacking in any kind of pity and understanding for her sister.

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<sup>176</sup> See scene eleven of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Therefore, Williams's articulation of Blanche's tragedy is much more dramatic and memorable.

When analyzing Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams's works portraying the decline of their respective antebellum aristocratic cultures, the theme of nostalgia seems to be the most apparent of all. The four tragic heroines in the works discussed in this paper are all troubled by nostalgic sentiments of their past glories and are, consequently, unable to adapt to the present realities. These two writers both have roots in their respective antebellum aristocratic cultures, which may lead readers to think that they ought to use these stories to reflect the historical experiences of their parents' generation in this important era in modern history. However, considering the importance of love stressed throughout the portrayal of the female characters' tragedies, these two writers, instead, are using this specific historical background to emphasize the individual tragic experiences of their characters. Recalling William Faulkner's comments in his Nobel Prize Speech, he "decline[d] to accept the end of man" because he sincerely believed that literature should be able to strengthen people's ability to overcome the various traumas of the turbulent twentieth century.<sup>177</sup> Although part of the literary world, in the post-World War II era, began to shift its attention towards a general postmodern disbelief in the possibility of meaning, Faulkner continues to assert his humanistic approach to literature by suggesting that literature can still remind people of the transcendent values of past courage, compassion, sacrifice, and honor. Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams both adapted this humanistic outlook when describing the decline of their respective

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<sup>177</sup> Nobel Prize Speech. 10 Dec. 1950. Rpt. on [William Faulkner on the Web](#).

antebellum aristocratic cultures. Therefore, the portrayals of the nostalgic female characters in their works are connected by the two writers' common interests in examining "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself" and in creating sympathy and compassion for the characters in their unfortunate failed searches for true love.

## CONCLUSION:

### AN INEVITABLE LOSS OVER TIME

In an ever-changing world, there will always be some people unwilling or unable to let go of their attachments to the past. Their daily lives in contemporary society are in conflict with their nostalgia and their sense of belonging to the past; their identities and spiritual fulfillments are rooted firmly in their memories of the past. The motif of nostalgia is common in contemporary world literature because of the *fin de siècle* phenomenon that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Examples of literary works inspired by the gradual decline of aristocratic cultures during this time period include Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, William Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury*, Eileen Chang's "The Golden Cangue" (金鎖記), and the four works by Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams that are selected for this paper.

The notion of nostalgia in the four selected works is both spatial and temporal. The memories of the four tragic heroines, Madame Ch'ien, Li T'ung, Amanda Wingfield, and Blanche DuBois, all belong to a specific place in their native homes, such as Madame Ch'ien's Nan-ching and Blanche's Belle Reve, and a specific time that defines the golden days of their past, such as Li T'ung's childhood in China and her early days in Wellesley College, and Amanda's life as a Southern belle. Pai Hsien-yung creates a vivid image of Republican Chinese aristocratic lifestyles through Madame Ch'ien's recollections of the past, recollections that emphasize the origins of her nostalgia and sense of belonging to the past. Similarly, Williams uses Blanche's native home, Belle Reve and its literal meaning of "a beautiful dream," to locate her sense of belonging in

spatial terms. The notion of dreaming is also present in Amanda's nostalgia because her memories of past glories take the form of beautiful dreams in the present. At the dinner with the gentleman caller, her authentic Southern manners and the rhythm of her speech have symbolically suggested the influence of her Southern aristocratic upbringing on her present self. Comparatively, Li T'ung does not share the same kind of spatial nostalgia as Madame Ch'ien, Blanche, and Amanda. Her native ties to Republican Chinese aristocratic culture are severed by her parents' untimely deaths; thereafter, she is always troubled by her strong feelings of alienation while living in the United States.

All four of the tragic heroines examined in this paper can be seen as prisoners of time because their minds are trapped inside their memories of past glories. Their frustrations when attempting to adapt to the present society, to which they do not belong, are complicated by their nostalgic sentiments; their minds and bodies are separated by both time and space. Although their stories have no direct references to the historical background of the civil wars that devastated their countries, nor to the impact of these events on the decline of their respective traditional orders, the impact on the characters' mental stability is thoroughly emphasized by the use of various symbols. For example, the faded colors of Madame Ch'ien silk *ch'i-p'ao* and Amanda's antebellum-style dress remind the readers of joyful memories of the past. The allusion to *Peony Pavilion* in "Wandering in a Garden, Waking from a Dream" also represents Pai Hsien-yung's grief over the gradual decline of the traditional and elegant *k'un* opera, which is itself symbolic of the decadence of traditional Chinese aristocratic culture. Music is also used in *A Streetcar Named Desire* to highlight Blanche's frustration over her sense of alienation in New Orleans, which is symbolized by the music of blues piano, and her bittersweet

memories of her past as being fallen aristocrat with a failed marriage and a ruined reputation at home. In brief, the intimate connections between the four tragic heroines' spatial and temporal nostalgia are best described by Tom Wingfield's final remarks in *The Glass Menagerie*: "time is the longest distance between two places."<sup>178</sup>

Despite the importance of the socio-historical background to the characterizations of the four tragic heroines, Pai Hsien-yung and Tennessee Williams's portrayals of their respective declining aristocratic cultures transcend national boundaries through their overriding concern for the spiritual well-being of humankind. The spatial and temporal nostalgia experienced by the four characters are culturally specific, reflecting a particular *fin de siècle* response to the aftermath of the American and the Chinese civil wars. When the character development is examined through close reading, one can see that these stories are not just about a declining culture's impact on young aristocrats. Instead, the focus is the individual experiences of the nostalgic characters when dealing with a time when a new order replaces the old, changing their lives forever. The emphasis on love in these stories overrules the emphasis on nostalgia because love is depicted as the ultimate salvation for the lost souls of the four tragic heroines. The women are challenged by the existence of a new social order with which they neither identify nor belong to and which robs them of their previous aristocratic privileges. However, it is not their heartfelt attachment to the old order that brings them to a fatal end; in fact, throughout the stories they try their best to overcome such challenges. Their tragic ends are sealed only when they finally realize that love is out of their reach. Pai and Williams's concern for the spiritual well being of humankind is expressed through their emphasis on the importance of love and its potential to prevent the tragedies of their nostalgic heroines. This elevates

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<sup>178</sup> See scene seven of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Direction, 1945. p. 96.

their works from being simple narrations of someone's experiences in a specific historical moment, to a universal tale that reminds people of the most important values among humanity, such as true love, courage, and sacrifice. All of these values transcend time and space. Pai and Williams's shared belief in the humanistic role of literature and their reassertion of these humanistic values through the sympathetic sides of the four tragic heroines make their works even more comparable.

Pai and Williams's sympathetic approach to the four tragic heroines is another characteristic that allows the narrations of the characters' misfortunes to stand above the historical background of their stories. Although these stories are inseparable from the historical backgrounds of their respective declining aristocratic cultures, the writers have devoted most of the important scenes to pointing out the necessary compassion in understanding the nostalgic characters' tragedies. In "A Celestial in Mundane Exile," for example, the narration centers on the various stages of Li T'ung's gradual tragic downfall, all of which are connected by symbols, such as the diamond-studded spider hairpin or the diamond ring she received from her mother, highlighting her feelings of alienation, originating from the sense of loss over her parent's death, and the despair of an uncertain and unpromising future. Li T'ung's aristocratic pride, from the result of her upbringing in China, obviously influences a great deal of her despair while living in the United States, but Pai purposely chose to tell the story from the point of view of a close friend, using the narrator to emphasize the heartfelt concern and sympathy one should feel about her tragedy. Similarly, Williams's portrayal of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* focuses upon her difficulties with starting a new life in New Orleans, rather than on the ups and downs of her past life back in her hometown of Laurel. The declining



antebellum aristocratic culture serves more as a backdrop to her nostalgic memories of the past; her tragic downfall is mainly caused by a series of misunderstandings and by her betrayal at the hands of her sister Stella, her brother-in-law Stanley, and her new lover Mitch, all of whom once appeared to be her new hopes in life.

Although some scholars, like Ts'ao Ch'ien and Leonard Berkman, challenge the sympathetic side of the nostalgic female characters in Pai and Williams's works, a close-reading analysis of the texts helps to restore a better understanding of the writers' original intent when creating these characters. Even though their remarkable characterizations of nostalgic women deserve further explorations beyond the scope of this paper, their humanistic perspective upon the tragic experiences of fallen aristocrats, nevertheless, very much repay reading and re-reading. This is especially true because their strong belief in true love is emblematic of William Faulkner's belief in our universal human ability to overcome traumatic experiences by recognizing that one's innate spirit is "capable of compassion, sacrifice, and endurance."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Nobel Prize Speech. 10 Dec. 1950. Rpt. on William Faulkner on the Web.

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