

**THE CONSTRUCTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MOTHER
FIGURE IN THE FILM PRODUCTION OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:
TYPOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES**

*A CONSTRUÇÃO E A REPRESENTAÇÃO DA FIGURA DA MÃE
NA PRODUÇÃO DO FILME DE TENNESSEE WILLIAMS:*

TIPOLOGIA E ESTUDOS DE CASO

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ABSTRACT

The maternal figure has an important presence in the literary and film works of the American playwright Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). This writer, who grew up in a southern environment marked by the religion and social conservatism, had in his own family a source of inspiration to build their characters. In this sense, the influence of his mother, the absence of his father and his sister's disability, were determinants for the author to develop a special sensitivity to understand personal relationships. The person who exerted a great influence on his development was his mother, Edwina, who was first portrayed in "The Glass Menagerie", and, subsequently, reflected his character and personality traits that were evident in some of his major works and adaptations. With the aim of reflecting on the important influence of Williams' mother for the development and representation of their mothers in fiction, the aim of this article was to propose a typology of the parent that are present in his work. To do this, and with reference to Edwina, the article addresses mother-protagonists of some of his most relevant film adaptations, which were adapted in Hollywood between 1950 and 1968, such as "The Rose Tattoo" of Daniel Mann of the year of 1955, "Suddenly, Last Summer" of Joseph L. Mankiewicz of the year of 1959, and "This Property Is Condemned" of Sydney Pollack of the year of 1966, the latter being one of the most important film adaptations of the playwright.

KEYWORDS: Character. Film adaptation. Mother. Tennessee Williams.

RESUMO

A figura materna tem uma presença importante nas obras literárias e cinematográficas do dramaturgo americano Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). Este escritor, que cresceu em um ambiente do sul marcado pela religião e conservadorismo social, encontrou em sua própria família uma fonte de inspiração para construir seus personagens. Nesse sentido, a influência de sua mãe, a ausência de seu pai e a deficiência de sua irmã, foram determinantes para o autor desenvolver uma sensibilidade especial para entender as relações pessoais. A pessoa que exerceu maior influência para seu desenvolvimento foi sua mãe, Edwina, que foi representada em "The Glass Menagerie" e, posteriormente, refletia seu caráter e traços de personalidade que eram evidentes em algumas de suas principais obras e adaptações. Com o objetivo de refletir sobre a importante influência da mãe de Williams na criação e representação de suas mães de ficção, este artigo tem como objetivo propor uma tipologia dos pais presentes na sua produção. Para fazer isso, e com referência à própria Edwina, discute-se sobre as mães protagonistas de algumas das suas adaptações cinematográficas mais relevantes, que foram adaptados para filmes em Hollywood entre 1950 e 1968, como "The Rose Tattoo" de Daniel Mann do ano de 1955, "Suddenly, Last Summer" de Joseph L. Mankiewicz do ano de 1959 e "This Property is Condemned" de Sydney Pollack do ano de 1966, sendo esse a principal adaptação cinematográfica do dramaturgo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Personagem. Adaptações cinematográficas. Mãe. Tennessee Williams.

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Lanier “Tennessee” Williams (Columbus, Mississippi, 1911 – New York, 1983) was closely tied to his family origins through his literary and cinematographic work. Despite his solitary nature, his wanderlust and total acceptance of his homosexuality — a sexual orientation that clashed directly with the morals of his Christian upbringing —, Williams always knew who he was and where he came from. And this was expressed in the themes and, of course, in the characters of his writings, who were mostly victims of their own problems, circumstances, desires, and were without a doubt a faithful reflection of his closest family members: his mother Edwina, his sister Rose, and his maternal grandfather, Reverend Walter Dakin.

Due to a childhood marked by ill health and the frequent work-related absences of his father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, the future writer’s upbringing was confined to an essentially feminine universe and dominated by his mother, although he established a close bond with Rose that marked him forever due to her mental illness. At the same time, his parent’s relationship was unstable because of his father Cornelius’s autonomous and independent nature and the emotional and social dependence of his mother Edwina, who was an educated, and at the same time, very puritanical woman. Williams’s family life determined his vision of marriage and family lineage. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze Tom’s family nucleus to understand his literary work as “a writer’s life is his work and his work is his life” (PHILLIPS, 1980, p.38), words that apply accurately to the case of Williams.

His father’s constant travelling contributed to Tom being raised, alongside with his sister Rose, in his grandfather’s rectory in Columbus, Mississippi; a southern environment where tradition and social values played a strong role. There he received an upbringing that was marked by the absence of the male figure that Cornelius embodied and by the firm presence of the figure of God and of his mother: Edwina, raised under the same religious influences, added her own authority as the boy’s mother, admonishing him when he misbehaved, “God will punish you” (LEVERICH, 1995, p.37). Therefore, the most important and almost exclusive masculine reference Tom had during his childhood and adolescence was his grandfather:

The Reverend Dakin was a powerful contrast to the children’s father – he was a kindly, gentle, affectionate book lover who became the most important male figure in their life. Rosa and Tom flourished in the loving parochial environment of their grandfather’s rectory (SMITH-HOWARD; HEINTZELMAN, 2005, p.4).

Furthermore, Reverend Dakin admired the literary works of his grandson and respected his sexuality, despite his condition as a clergyman, and this allowed them to maintain a close relationship until 1954, when the reverend passed away.

However, the person who exercised the greatest influence on the vital growth of the writer was Edwina, who was faithfully portrayed when he designed Amanda Wingfield, the protagonist of “The Glass Menagerie”, his first big theatrical success. In the play, the most autobiographical one of all his work, Tom created a character that

was identical to his mother: a southern, polite, strict, protective, and religious woman with a special sensibility that never got used to her new life in Saint Louis, after having lived her entire life in the deep south. However, Williams also expressed the personal and psychological traits of Edwina in other female characters that had to hold the reins of the family on her own when facing the absence of the children's father, as it happens to the main characters in "The Rose Tattoo", "Suddenly, Last Summer" and "This Property Is Condemned", Serafina Delle Rose, Violet Venable and Hazel Starr, respectively. In Amanda's case, the husband is absent because he left her, which is what happened to Edwina — as Cornelius was always traveling —, but subsequently, Williams preferred to portray the mothers as widows, as the abandonment that his mother experienced when he was small, was similar to that of being a widow.

For this reason, the matriarchs in "The Rose Tattoo", "Suddenly, Last Summer" and "This Property Is Condemned" represent in different ways, through distinct spaces and circumstances, the behavior of Edwina in the society in which she had to live with her children and with her attitude towards life. This shows that Williams's principal reference to create his fictional mothers was his own mother. Additionally, in this article we will analyze other female characters who are closely related to the playwright's mother's personality: Alma Winemiller, the protagonist of "Summer and Smoke", and Hannah Jelkes, one of the main characters in "The Night of the Iguana". On the other hand, the recreation of these fictional beings through film permits the reader, and consequently the filmgoer, to have a closer and more accurate vision of Edwina's nature and personality through the characters in her son's writing. This essay intends to reflect on the influence Edwina had on Tom's upbringing and life and how this attitude enabled him to frequently draw upon his mother's personality to design the complex matriarchs in his literary works.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This work is based on the hypothesis that most of the Williams' characters share the personality traits of the author himself and members of his family. Taking into account that the female characters have an important role in the development of his dramatic works and adaptations, particularly the mothers, the following objectives can be established:

— To emphasize that the mother of playwright, Edwina Dakin Williams, stands as a model of the matriarchs in the production of the writer from "The Glass Menagerie", who is presently notable in his films.

— To set up a progenitor typology of deep psychological complexity (protective, obsessive and dominating) with respect to their descendants, and value the most representative cases of the dramaturgy of the author in the classic American cinema: "The Rose Tattoo" (Daniel Mann, 1955), "Suddenly, the Last Summer" (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1959) and "This Property Is Condemned" (Sydney Lumet, 1966).

A qualitative-descriptive methodology was used to conduct this research, associated with the analysis of discourse and audiovisual narrative. As for the adaptations, in the first place, a literary study

was conducted about Tennessee Williams' plays "The Rose Tattoo" of 1951, "Suddenly, Last Summer" of 1958 and "This Property Is Condemned" of 1942. Thus, a corpus based on three texts of Tennessee Williams, from a total of fifteen that inspired his film work, was considered, in which the presence of many female protagonists who played the role of mothers in a hegemonic form had been previously identified.

This prior work was important to analyze the films "The Rose Tattoo" (1955), "Suddenly, Last Summer" (1959) and "This Property Is Condemned" (1966), based on previous dramas, respectively and, in particular, their protagonists. Therefore, these films are the main focus of this study as it intends to develop an approach to represent the figure of Williams' mothers on the big screen, due to the impact the films based on the author's works had on post-World War II Hollywood. In addition, these adaptations are the only original works that have been adapted to the big screen and although most have had subsequently successful versions in United States television and numerous theatrical productions in different countries — up to the present day —, none of them have been remade. These films had a great impact in the 1950s and 1960s because of three issues: they were released during the structural, political and economic crisis that Hollywood was going through; addressed issues prohibited by the Hays Code; and showed some unpublished characters with remarkable internal complexity. In addition, the three films were highly acclaimed by the public and critics — especially "The Rose Tattoo" and "Suddenly, Last Summer" —, which received several Oscar nominations and other prestigious awards. Undoubtedly, this recognition indicates the audiovisual and narrative quality of these films as well as their commercial strengths/trends.

Finally, an analysis of the characters who match the traits related to iconography, psychology, sociology, or sexuality of the protagonists in these films, and the role they play in the story was conducted. To make it possible, the framework of Casetti and Di Chio (2007) was used to analyze the characters as persons. It is a qualitative tool that allows the investigation of key characteristics, such as age, appearance, the way of speaking, character, how to relate with others, their thoughts, feelings, psychological development, social, economic and cultural level, sexuality, or motivations, attitudes, and the role they play in the narrative. In addition, these films belong to the melodrama — one of the most popular narrative genres that relate to viewers because of their emotional character as they try to promote the process of identification between the public and protagonists, especially when there are characters who have a great influence on the family.

The film adaptations used for this analysis correspond to the first performed of the mentioned works of Williams: the films released between 1950 and 1968, a period in which a total of twelve dramas and one novel of this author were adapted to Hollywood, as follows: "The Rose Tattoo" (Daniel Mann, 1955), "Suddenly, Last Summer" (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1959), "Summer and Smoke" (Peter Glenville, 1961), "The Night of the Iguana" (John Huston, 1964), and "This Property Is Condemned" (Sydney Pollack, 1966). In addition, the film version of "The Glass Menagerie" that is addressed in this paper was directed by Irving Rapper in 1950.

ANALYSIS

THE MOTHER: EDWINA DAKIN WILLIAMS

Edwina Estelle Dakin was born in Marysville, Ohio, in 1884, but as a young child she moved to Mississippi with her parents, the rector of the Episcopal Church, Walter Edwin Dakin, and the music teacher of German origin, Rosina Otte Dakin. She was the couple's only child and received conscientious upbringing, so her childhood was happier than that of her future husband Cornelius, who lost his mother at the age of five and was raised by his aunts because his father fell into alcohol abuse after the tragedy. As she grew up in the environment of a rectory, she had a puritanical nature and strong religious convictions, but she also enjoyed a lot of social prestige in the city of Columbus where her family had settled and was highly praised. However, this family equilibrium would not correspond to the future emotional instability that her marriage to Cornelius would entail. At first the couple got along well, but the relationship took a turn for the worse when he found a job that required him to travel. For this reason, the couple decided that Edwina should live with the children at her parents' house, as the family had moved around from Columbus to Memphis to Canton to Clarkesdale in very little time. Even though he often visited the family at weekends, Edwina felt abandoned and consequently clung to her children and prevented them from getting close to their father. This caused Rose and Tom to feel that Cornelius was a stranger for whom they practically had no affection.

The overprotective role of their mother and the distance from their father resulted in Tom being very close to Edwina up until adolescence, and she had total control over his upbringing:

[...] on young Tommy Williams, however, no influence was stronger than his mother's. She was a beautiful, strong-willed, socially ambitious woman who observed every prescription of Southern etiquette and charm. Aristocratic manners were equated with profound virtue; delicacy of diction and a studied poise had almost religious significance (SPOTO, 1985, p.12).

However, Edwina's overprotection of her two older children — little Dakin was born in 1919 when the family had already moved to Saint Louis -, makes in the case of Rose worse, a very fragile girl due to her mental illness that had developed into an almost pathological shyness. This contributed to Mrs. Williams exercising absolute control over her daughter and the girl's deteriorating state after a lobotomy was performed in 1937, as Edwina was convinced that Rose would get better after this delicate intervention. Additionally, this maternal influence extended to Edwina's parents with whom Rose and Tom had a close relationship, especially with Grandpa Dakin who became one of the most important people in the personal development of the writer. Without a doubt, it is paradoxical that these children were much closer to the clergyman than to their own father, but in reality, they were afraid of Cornelius when he was present due to Edwina's influence.

The close tie Tom had with his mother's side of the family made the relationship with his father a distant and difficult one, which was aggravated by his sexual orientation:

Tom's father, often absent during these early formative years, had little influence on the lad's early growth. As a result, little

Tom's world took on the decidedly feminine frame of reference of his mother and sister, and he looked upon his boisterous and blustering father – and the masculine world which he represented – as crude and unpleasant by comparison (PHILLIPS, 1980, p.38).

With the passage of time, Tom and Rose gradually separated themselves from their mother's influence because they perceived she had molded them in her likeness and image; consequently, she had manipulated them so that they would be nothing like their father. Tom was able to leave home and become independent and later Dakin followed in his footsteps, but Rose never escaped Edwina's power due to her illness. However, escaping their mother did not get them any closer to their father because, although the couple finally separated, Cornelius disappeared almost completely from the lives of his children. In spite of the gradual distancing they experienced and the years without contact, the author confessed in 1970: "I stopped hating my father, and when I did, I felt like a great load was lifted from my mind [...] I was able to understand him better" (DEVLIN, 1986, p.169). Edwina died in 1980 at the age of 96 in Saint Louis and Cornelius died in 1957, in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was 78.

Tom created the best portrait of his family when he was an adolescent in "The Glass Menagerie". This "memory play" reflected Edwina's personal situation, Tom's dreams, and Rose's fragility through Amanda, Tom and Laura Wingfield, respectively, who were abandoned by the head of the family, in a small apartment in Saint Louis much like the one the Williamses occupied in the same city. Just like one of the main characters of the play, Tom dreamed of being a writer from the time he was a teenager and he confesses this in his article "Foreword to sweet bird of youth", published in the New York Times on March 8, 1959, two days before its Broadway premier: "At the age of fourteen I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge" (WILLIAMS, 2009, p.93).

This passion for writing, his family situation, and the influence of a dominating mother provided Tom's literary universe with characters living on the edge, from broken families and, above all, with mothers who shared some of Edwina's most peculiar traits.

TYPES OF MOTHERS IN THE SOUTHERN PLAYWRIGHT'S WORK

Tennessee Williams's penchant for creating female characters who had strong personalities and were psychologically unstable has its origins in his upbringing. During his childhood and adolescence, the author was strongly influenced by the women in his family — his mother, his grandmother, his sister, and his nanny, Ozzie —, and it was during this second phase, which was very important in his personal development, when he decided he would become a professional writer in the future. For this reason, one can affirm that "growing up in this female-dominated environment doubtless gave Tom the empathy shown in the woman characters created by the playwright Tennessee" (HALE, 1997, p.11). His family situation allowed him to become very familiar with the feminine universe as well as the complex world of family, couplehood, and the intergenerational conflicts between parents and children. Due

to Edwina's decisive role in his life, "Tennessee Williams is admired for his ability to create memorable women characters in his plays" (O'CONNOR, 1997, p.29), in such a way that the psychological aspects that his mother shares with three very different mothers in his literary production must be considered: Serafina Delle Rose, Violet Venable and Hazel Starr. These three characters are the most important mothers in his literary work, along with Amanda Wingfield, although the personal evolution of each one is different to that of Mrs. Williams. The types of mother that appear below correspond to three traits of Edwina as a mother.

THE PROTECTIVE MOTHER: SERAFINA DELLE ROSE, "THE ROSE TATTOO"

The character played by Maureen Stapleton in the 1951 Broadway production, and by Anna Magnani in Daniel Mann's film version three years later, is obsessed with the idea of protecting her adolescent daughter Rosa. As Williams's own mother, Serafina does not adapt well to her new living environment — which is not Saint Louis, as in the case of Amanda Wingfield, but rather a small coastal town near New Orleans —, and she misses her native Sicilia and the social status that she enjoyed there. Thus, it can be affirmed that this character has two important traits in common with Edwina: (1) a protective tendency towards her daughter and (2) a repudiation of the society she has settled in because of her husband's work. For these two reasons, Serafina gives her daughter a strict upbringing based on religion, Catholic morals, tradition and love for family, desiring to save her from the influence of an American society that she considers to be too loose and even indecent. This intent becomes stronger when her husband Rosario, at the beginning of the story, dies because Serafina is now faced with the task of raising Rosa on her own. Widowhood aggravates her aversion to the North American culture and her obsession to protect her daughter who, unlike Tennessee Williams's sister and Laura Wingfield, rebels against her mother because she considers she is not allowed to lead a life like the ones of her friends and high school classmates.

Serafina resembles Edwina regarding the importance she gives to religion, but contrary to Williams's mother, she is superstitious and has a passionate and religious nature which is almost Lorquian, similar to some of the female characters created by Federico García Lorca:

The output of these two dramatists is sometimes intensely religious; each found creative ways to depict the struggle between the physical and the spiritual, the flesh and the spirit, the body and the soul, the pagan and the Christian, with erotic desire pitted against social and religious norms (BADENES, 2009, p.82).

In contrast to Edwina's experience after her separation from Cornelius, Serafina sinks into a period of mourning when Rosario dies, which she manages to overcome three years later when she meets a man who reminds her of her deceased husband: Alvaro Mangiacavallo. Thus, her character softens when love appears in her life again and this allows her to be at peace with herself, to respect her daughter's freedom to marry an American, and to accept the social reality where she lives.

Serafina Delle Rose did not have the same polished upbringing and

distinction as the author's mother and she was characterized by having a vulgar image and a rough manner due to her humble condition as a Sicilian immigrant: "Serafina's language, with its disregard for grammar, unveils the world of working-class immigrants battling to make themselves understood so that they can survive" (DE ANGELIS, 2012, p.7). Without any doubt, these aspects distance her considerably from Edwina, but it is interesting that despite being so different from his mother, the author decided to portray the main character of "The Rose Tattoo" who showed excessive preoccupation for her daughter and disdain for the city where she began her new life with her family. For this reason, it seems that Williams depicted two of his mother's main personality traits in Serafina.

THE OBSESSIVE MOTHER: VIOLET VENABLE, "SUDDENLY, LAST SUMMER"

The character interpreted by Hortense Alden on Broadway in 1958 and by Katharine Hepburn in the film adaptation directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz in 1959, is obsessed by the memory of her dead son, the young poet Sebastian, whom she admired in almost an incestuous way. If "The Glass Menagerie" was a portrait of Williams's adolescence, with his mother and sister in Saint Louis, "Suddenly, Last Summer" is a portrait of his family traumas and personal experiences at the beginning of his adult life. In this screenplay, the figure of the absent father reappears, and Edwina is reaffirmed as an imperious, strong-willed and manipulative southern lady and Rose reappears as a victim of mental perturbation that condemns her to a lobotomy, as reflected in the characters of Violet Venable and Catharine Holly, respectively. Furthermore, the author finds his alter-ego in Sebastian Venable, who travels the world looking for inspiration and who usually satisfies his sexual needs with young men he does not know.

Like Edwina, Violet admired her son's literary work because his writings described life, but even though she knew he was gay, she preferred not to talk about it. Violet completely rejected her son's sexuality and she dared to even say that he was chaste, although he died under strange circumstances after engaging in homosexual relations in a place called Cabeza de Lobo when he was vacationing with his niece Catherine. This obsession for denying reality makes her want to eliminate the only witness of her son's death through lobotomy because she is convinced that Catherine's version of the event is full of slander against the memory of her son Sebastian. In this sense, Violet "saw herself as a poet's muse, and she is now devoted to preserving his name, or rather, creating his name, determined to delete sexual orientation from his story (with the help of Catherine's lobotomy)" (DI LEO, 2010, p.112). Moreover, she considers that the lobotomy will calm the state in which the girl finds herself after the violent occurrence and this echoes that Edwina also consented to her daughter having this type of intervention to calm the violent episodes that she suffered from because of her schizophrenia.

On an aesthetic level, Violet has Edwina's elegance, manners and culture — just like Amanda Wingfield and Blanche DuBois —, and she has the social status that Williams's mother would have had if her marriage to Cornelius had not gone wrong or if the couple had moved to New Orleans instead of Saint Louis, because the more southern city was closer to the lifestyle with which she had been

raised. This character embodies the typical southern beauty and exudes the charm and savoir faire of ladies meticulously raised on cotton plantations by their nannies. No doubt, Violet and Edwina came from a privileged family background that allowed them to enjoy a high social status, but their paths separate when they get married. For this reason, the protagonist of "Suddenly, Last Summer" was able to maintain a distinguished economic position from her mansion in the exclusive Garden District in New Orleans, and Mrs. Williams had to resign herself to surviving in a small apartment in an industrial town like Saint Louis.

Regarding the dénouement of the story, Violet goes insane when everyone discovers that Catherine was right, and Sebastian's story comes out in the open, given that she is incapable of admitting the true reality of her idolized son. Curiously, Edwina, perhaps under pressure, suffering from her unfortunate relationship with Cornelius and Rose's illness, also struggled with psychological difficulties until the end of her days — as Williams did —, and she had to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital.

THE CASTRATING MOTHER: HAZEL STARR, "THIS PROPERTY IS CONDEMNED"

The character interpreted by Kate Reid in the film adaptation directed by Sydney Pollack in 1966, who was originally going to be played by Vivien Leigh, is the most relentless in the entire literary and film production of Tennessee Williams. Hazel runs a boarding house next to the train station in Dodson, Mississippi, and she tries to get by after the crash in 1929 by renting rooms in her establishment and using her oldest daughter Alva, who is being wooed both by a wealthy older man and her own boyfriend, who is only with her to get closer to her daughter, as a mean for economic stability. This character is obsessed with controlling her daughter's life because she knows that her future plans will fall apart if she finally leaves New Orleans as she desires. In addition, she completely ignores her youngest daughter Willie, who is thirteen and can rarely go to school because she has to work at the boarding house and she is growing up in a very hostile environment. Miss Starr is "a domineering character obviously modelled on 'Menagerie's' Amanda Wingfield" (PALMER; BRAY, 2009, p.233).

At first glance, Hazel is totally different from Edwina because her manners are coarse and her character is extremely violent, but they coincide in that they are manipulative with their children. In this sense, she acts like a castrating mother because she believes that Alva will only be happy if she follows her orders and standards of behavior, as she is convinced that she can't make her own decisions because she will make mistakes. That is why when her daughter threatens to leave home and go to New Orleans, she tries to convince her through verbal abuse and emotional blackmail to dismiss the idea. One could say that Hazel represents a decadent Edwina that has lost her economic status and consequently, her moral conscience and that the only thing that concerns her is getting ahead economically at any price. It is an unpleasant and miserable version of the manipulative nature of Mrs. Williams, and the only tie that she has with her and Amanda Wingfield is that she desires to plan and control the life of her children. In fact, she "is cut from the same cloth as many of Williams's other strong-willed mothers are, such as Amanda Wingfield and Serafina Delle Rose, although Hazel

is willfully mean-spirited in a way that most of the others are not” (PHILLIPS, 1980, p.124).

In contrast with the other characters, Hazel maintains her aggressive attitude until the end, as she manages to ruin Alva’s life when she appears in New Orleans and she tells Owen Legate — her fiancé —, that he can’t marry her because she is already married, and she abandons Willie. “This Property Is Condemned” is closely linked to Tennessee Williams’s personal experience because it was written at the beginning of the nineteen-forties when the author was still very young. That is why the story takes place in a small city in Mississippi, the same state where the author was born and raised. In the story, he reflects on how difficult it was to survive after the absence of his father in the middle of the depression; and he placed the hopes of the protagonist on New Orleans, the city he chose to start a new life far away from Saint Louis.

OTHER CHARACTERS SIMILAR TO EDWINA

In Tennessee Williams’s literary production there are two female characters that do not carry out the role of a mother, but they have strong ties to the personality and physical appearance of Edwina: Alma Winemiller and Hannah Jelkes. In both cases, the author depicts the spirituality that completely determined his mother’s personality as she had been raised in the environment of a rectory, and she had a special capacity for resignation when overcoming life’s inconveniences. In this respect, one must bear in mind that Mrs. Williams was protective, controlling, and strict with her children, but above all, she was profoundly religious, a trait that was above her role as mother. Edwina was highly involved in the work her father did in the religious community that he served, especially during her youth, and this aspect was decisive for the writer when creating a character like Alma Winemiller, who is a faithful portrait of young Edwina.

The protagonist of “Summer and Smoke” (1961), which was interpreted by Geraldine Page both in the stage version and film adaptation directed by Peter Glenville, is a shy young woman who spends her days in her father’s rectory. She is deeply in love with her neighbor, John Buchanan; a boy with a personality completely opposite to hers. The screenplay is about the conflict between the body and the soul, flesh and spirit, and it faithfully represents the deep moral conflicts that a young woman could have when she experiences sexual awakening and is obliged to repress her desires as a matter of principle. Alma helps John get his life on track and she suffers in silence. When she finally decides to take a firm step, her decision is frustrated as he becomes engaged to one of singing students of Alma. Through this character, Williams is able to transmit to the reader what life was like for his mother at his grandfather’s rectory, how her religious upbringing totally conditioned the type of relationship she was able to have with Cornelius, and how her principles determined her family life as well as her role as a mother. For this reason, Alma Winemiller is one of Williams’ character that best represents Edwina’s personality as a young woman because she combined religiosity, purity and discipline, but she also “had the beauty and social inclinations of a Southern belle and, if not the wealth, the status that the Episcopalian ministry held in the small cotton center of Clarksdale, Mississippi” (HALE, 1997, p.11).

On her part, Hannah Jelkes embodies an air of peace and spirituality in the worldly chaos that takes place in "The Night of the Iguana" (1964). This character, interpreted by Margaret Leighton on stage and Deborah Kerr in the film version, directed by John Huston, has Alma's religious nature, but she is totally at peace with herself because she has been able to overcome the sexual barriers that her morality impeded her from achieving. Hannah is a mature version of Alma and she shares Edwina's special capacity for mediating conflicts by letting herself be guided by her religious and moral convictions, as "she is a paragon of spiritual harmony despite the difficulties she has faced during her life" (SMITH-HOWARD; HEINTZELMAN, 2005, p.176). Furthermore, Miss Jelkes maintains a very close relationship with her grandfather Nonno, the oldest working poet in the world, which is a reminder of the relationship that Alma has with her father and, more concretely, of that which Edwina had with her father. In this respect, a parallelism is established with the playwright since "the quality of Tennessee's love for his grandfather is reflected in Hannah's tenderness toward the old poet" (HAYMAN, 1993, p.183).

Alma Winemiller and Hannah Jelkes are two characters who together with the others — Serafina Delle Rose, Violet Venable and Hazel Starr —, show Williams' tendency to represent his mother's personality traits and status as a typical southern belle through the protagonists of his literary writings.

CONCLUSION

The family is one of the themes that Tennessee Williams touched upon the most deeply in his writings because his family played a fundamental role in his personal and professional growth. That is why the southern playwright was inspired by various family members to create the characters of his plays, stories and novels. Thus, the absence of his father is usually a constant theme in his writings, the young people's longing for freedom habitually collides with the rectitude of their forebearers — as it occurred between the writer and his mother Edwina —, the grandparents usually play an important role and the mothers have a clear tendency to dominate and control the lives of their children. This last case takes on special relevance because the playwright was raised almost exclusively by his mother and this explains that the different mothers in his plays have an evident similarity to Edwina's physical appearance and personality.

Despite the fact that Rose and Grandfather Dakin were the two people in the family with whom the author had the most special relationship, the one who most influenced his life was his mother and as a consequence she is the one who is the most present in his literary works and throughout his characters. All the mothers that appear in Williams' writings share some common personality traits or attitudes with Edwina, even though they are diverse characters such as Amanda Wingfield, Serafina Delle Rose, Violet Venable or Hazel Starr, and this also occurs with protagonists who are not mothers such as Blanche DuBois, Alma Winemiller, and Hannah Jelkes. Undoubtedly, Williams' tendency to create female characters with great strength and dramatic complexity is tied to Edwina's personality.

The reading and analysis of the playwright's works allow the reader

and researcher to become familiar with the existing connections between the personal and family realities of the writer and the lives and situations of his characters. This idea becomes more relevant in the theatrical representations of his dramas or the viewing of the film adaptations of the plays because this is how the audience can get a closer and more adequate view of Edwina's personality through the characters designed by her son. This essay intends to affirm that the role of the mother has a notable importance in Williams' work and because of this, all the mothers express the personality traits of his own mother. This line of investigation tries to look more deeply into the influence of the playwright's family on the development of his literary work and creation of his tortured characters.

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