

Olfa Gandouz, The Higher Institute of Languages Gabes, Tunisia

Southern American Women vs. the Agrarian South: An Ecofeminist Dimension to Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*

Abstract

The present examines the relationship between women and nature in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) from an ecofeminist perspective. Like the American South, which was affected by the presence of the industrial machine, 'the Southern Belle' was affected by the patriarchal mindset. The common thread between Williams and some ecofeminists lies their call for preserving nature from the dangers of deforestation and the peril of industrialization, as well as their advocacy for setting women free from various social stereotypes. Starting from Francoise D'Eaubonne's argument about 'Green Politics,' the paper will delve into the intricacies of the female self, focusing on the affinities between the downtrodden Green space and the marginalization of the "handicapped" Laura. Like Green politics, which focuses on creating an egalitarian society, *The Glass Menagerie* invites the audience to ponder over a better representation of women with special needs. In the same context of calling for equality, the ecofeminist theoretician Greta Gaard argues for the necessity of blurring the boundaries between nature and culture and respecting the ecological chain. She differs from other ecofeminist scholars in that she gives special attention to animals and is opposed to the minimization of women, animals, and nature. In the play, animal imagery will be explored through the presence of extinct animals (like the unicorn) in Laura's *The Glass Menagerie*. The ultimate goal of this paper is to demonstrate how belonging to the Southern ecosystem helps establish new facets of female identity.

Keywords: ecofeminism, frontier myth, agrarian south, Southern belle, female identity, Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*

1. Introduction

Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* is often interpreted as an autobiographical play that reveals the values and rules of the Southern American community in the mid-twentieth century. This was a conservative culture where the Southern belle was expected to be obedient and dependent. Laura's struggle, not only with the absence of the father but also with the social reaction to her partial physical disability, shows Williams's depiction of the oppressive situation some Southern women faced. In addition to women, the Southern American nature is affected by industrialization and the penetration of the machine in the Southern garden. The agrarian Southern American paradise gives way to the nightmarish reality of industrialization. Both women and nature are exploited by male domination in *The Glass Menagerie*. The affinities between Southern women and nature recall the integration between feminism and ecology. Ecofeminism is a theory that appeared in the late twentieth century. Although Williams and ecofeminists did not share the same context and did not flourish at the same time, both defend female rights and advocate for the preservation of the environment. Using a contemporary ecofeminist approach, the paper examines the vulnerability, oppression, and exploitation of both women and nature in *The Glass Menagerie*. It demonstrates how the play helps us understand the tenets of ecofeminism and how ecofeminism helps us grasp the correlation between the Southern belle and the role of the Agrarian nature in determining the specificities of the American South. Thus, the paper reveals the importance of ecofeminism in understanding Williams's drama. Williams and ecofeminists thrived in different contexts but share the same objectives of defending female rights and protecting nature and women from male hegemony. The paper aims at answering different research questions: what are the major tenets of ecofeminism, how is it possible to understand ecofeminism in an American context, how is ecofeminism applicable to Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, what are the areas of convergence between some ecofeminists and Tennessee Williams, and how do Williams and ecofeminists reshape female identity and advocate for preserving the natural chain?

2. Literature Review

Williams's Southern American women have been studied from different perspectives. While some critics focus on the autobiographical dimension of the play, other critics examine the ecological awareness of the playwright. For instance, An Guo-Ping studies the role of ecology in creating socially balanced characters. In "Tennessee Williams' Ecological Awareness in His Plays," Guo-Ping observes that "Tennessee Williams' ecological awareness originates from his own experience and his strong feelings of southern culture" (119). Indeed, Williams is keen on preserving Southern heritage. This paper will develop the idea of Williams's ecological awareness by linking ecocriticism to feminism, and therefore employ an innovative ecofeminist study of Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. The aim is to demonstrate the affinities between women and nature and to perceive the role of patriarchal regimes in undermining the role of women and nature in shaping a well-balanced society. Other critics pay attention to the psychoanalytic dimension of the Southern American play. In this context, Chander and Campus deal with a Freudian reading of the Wingfields. In "A Psychoanalytic Study of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*," they write: "the psychological crisis in Wingfields is mainly due to their inability to accept the reality of their life" (781). The tragic error of the Wingfields lies in the oscillation between reality and illusion. Laura retreats into the shell of the self to transcend the rules of the new urban South. The innovative aspect of this paper lies in analyzing the characterization of Laura from an ecofeminist standpoint. Harold Bloom claims Laura is "someone experiencing life-in-death or death-in-life" (73). "someone experiencing life-in-death or death-in-life" (73). This perspective will be discussed by showing that Laura has a world of her own. She resorts to the arts as a source of power and self-expression. On the other hand, in "Entering *The Glass Menagerie*," Bigsby believes that "the glass animals of [Laura's] menagerie transport her into a mythical world, timeless, immune from the onward rush of the twentieth century" (38). This paper will discuss the close relationship between Laura and the glass animals from an ecofeminist perspective, which contributes in a novel way to the study of *The Glass Menagerie*.

3. Theoretical Framework

Before analyzing the ecofeminist dimension in the play, it is pertinent to grasp the main tenets of ecofeminism, the context of the literary movement, and the impact of ecofeminist ideas. The ecofeminist researcher Karen Warren defines the movement as a reaction against the dehumanization of women and the overexploitation of 'Mother Nature.' She writes: "The language used to describe women, nature, and nuclear weaponry often is sexist and naturist. Women are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats" (Ecofeminism 12). Women are associated with negative connotations, and animals are also implicitly perceived as subordinate creatures. Warren is attacking the male discourse for misrepresenting women and animals and for disrespecting the natural chain. She adds: "'Mother Nature' is raped, mastered, conquered, mined; her secrets are 'penetrated' and her 'womb' is to be put into service of the 'man of science'" (Ecofeminism 12). In the same context of defining the female body as a commodity, nature is affected by the invasion of science, and it is defined as an inanimate object by the patriarchal regime. Ecofeminism involves an interdisciplinarity between women and nature, rejecting domination over marginalized subjects. Warren develops the idea of authority, and she argues that ecofeminism "extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism ...) ... In fact, an understanding of the overlapping and intersecting nature of isms of domination is so important to feminism, science, and local community life that I have found it helpful to visualize ecofeminist philosophy as the intersection of three spheres" (Ecofeminism 4). Ecofeminism is interdisciplinary because it attacks scientific conquest, shares the feminist struggle against the male hegemonic agenda, and carries on the ecologist quest for liberating 'Mother Nature' from the perils of deforestation, pollution, and other hazards.

In the same context of defining ecofeminism, Greta Gaard believes that ecofeminist philosophy is meant to abolish the different forms of oppression. She states: "Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" ("Living Interconnections" 1). Women, members of ethnic minorities and nature are minimized by the same external forces which affect the psyche of the oppressed agent, and they trigger feelings of internal otherness. Gaard

studies the intersection between social ecologists and ecofeminists, and she affirms that both women and nature are victimized by a hierarchical system. She gives a deeper insight into the tenets of ecofeminism using the following words: “Though some may agree with social ecologists, for example, that the root cause of all oppression is hierarchy, ecofeminists tend to believe hierarchy takes place as a result of the self/other opposition” (“Living Interconnections” 3). Put differently, ecofeminism has a larger scope as it digs deep into female psyche, and it studies the role of social hierarchy in generating external and internal otherness of the female self. Warren shares with Gaard the same denouncement of the social chain and she criticizes social hierarchy for boosting the exploitation of both women and nature. Warren describes the hierarchical system as a dysfunctional system as it is based on a biased view against women and nature. In fact, Warren argues that

“[d]ysfunctional systems are often maintained through systematic denial ... [and] this denial need not be conscious, intentional, or malicious... furthermore, dysfunctional social systems often leave their members feeling powerless or helpless to make any significant changes” (qtd. in *Ecofeminism* 180). In a nutshell, the two prominent ecofeminists Warren and Gaard perceive ecofeminism as an intellectual movement against the hierarchical system which delineates women as powerless creatures and ‘Mother Nature’ as a passive inanimate object.

4. Ecofeminism and the United States

Ecofeminist ideas developed during the second half of the twentieth century, when nature was invaded by industrialization and the sciences, and the female body became a mere object for scientific experiments. Indeed, “toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their first toll on women, women’s reproductive systems, and children” (Gaard, “Living Interconnections” 5). Nature, women, and children are negatively affected by technological progress, their needs denied by male practices. Therefore, some American senators called for protecting the environment and Earth Day was organized for the first time in the 1970s by Gaylord Nelson. In one of his speeches, the Earth Day founder declares: “[O]ur goal is not just an environment of clean air and water and scenic beauty. The objective is an environment of decency, quality and mutual respect for all other human beings and all other living creatures” (qtd. in Reid

and Vail 16). Nelson is obviously raising people's awareness about the necessity of preserving the natural chain and creating a healthy rather than a beautiful planet. Nelson's ideas were supported by the sustainability movement of the nineteen-seventies, which invited ecologists to reconsider their ideas about the planet and to dig deep into the reasons behind the depletion of natural resources. The sustainability movement of the nineteen-seventies is concerned with the roots rather than the features of environmental hazards. The movement is significant as it "realizes the necessity of addressing the social, and especially economic, causes of environmental degradation. This has led to an increasing appreciation of the role of poverty and other economic factors that encourage people to deplete resources" (McKinney 20). Accordingly, human rights activists started to develop a new understanding of the environmental crisis and to work on improving the socio-economic conditions.

The environmental movement is supported by feminist voices who perceived women as examples of the downtrodden social category as they suffer from social marginalization and economic dependence. Accordingly, ecofeminism appeared in the United States primarily out of "the non-violent direct movement against nuclear power and nuclear weapons... [Its] initiating event was the Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 1980s Conference at Amherst in 1980, organized by Ynestra King (then of the Institute for Social Ecology ..., and other women from the anti-nuclear, environmental and lesbian-feminist movements" (Sturgeon 262). The same way life on earth has been threatened by the existence of nuclear power, female liberation has been blocked by the patriarchal agenda. The ecofeminist leader, Ynestra King, criticizes the male-limited view regarding women and nature and calls for having a larger scope: "Acting on our own consciousness of our own needs, we act in the interests of all....Without a more sophisticated dialectical method which can transform historic debates and offer a nondualistic theory of history, social transformation and nature/culture interaction, feminism will continue to be mired in the same old impasse" (203). The recurrent use of the verb 'to act' reveals King's insistence on getting firm decisions against the fake dichotomy between nature/culture and male/female. This opposition should be avoided, and an inclusive look should be adopted. This argument is further developed by the ecofeminist researcher, Stephanie Lahar, who writes: "Ecofeminism sees as destructive not only the perceptual distancing and isolation of different peoples from each other, but also the habits of dualistic thought

that separate human society from nature” (96). Ecofeminist researchers and theoreticians share the same views on deconstructing various kinds of binary oppositions and reconstructing a better planet based on equality, balance, and respect for all living creatures.

Ecofeminism applies to a Southern American modern context where the businessmen, scientists, and capitalists have exploited the natural resources, and the Southern belle has been intimidated by the patriarchal regime. Starting with natural hazards, the Mississippi River has become a dead zone due to the drainage system. It is observed that in the nineteen-nineties runoff draining into the Mississippi river from thousands of farms and towns produces a 7.0000 square mile dead zone off the coast of Louisiana each summer where shrimp and fish cannot survive (Ruether17). The vast river, which has long been associated with freedom and regeneration, has become a source of disease where sea creatures cannot remain alive. The river which used to be a source of refreshment and inspiration for artists becomes a source of suffocation for the modern Adam. In fact, the runoff draining into the Mississippi is hazardous and “ingested in humans, it reduces oxygen in human blood, causing the blood disease myoglobinemia” (Ruether 17). Like nature, which is contaminated and lacks fresh air, the Southern belle is suffocating and still affected by male-dominated practices. During modern times, Southern American female colleges respected the ideals of the past and did not easily accept the unified and more liberated educational system. For example, in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, “[i]n the Mississippi valley, religious schools [sic] played a leading role” (Farnham 36). Religious schools used to teach the Southern belle the rules of womanhood, the necessity of being pious, pure, and submissive to the law of the father. Southern schools fostered the patriarchal thought about the female subsidiary position, and they tried to internalize in women the idea of dependence. The Southern belle believes that “men were her protectors, her knights in shining armor who rode out into the world, fighting her battles for her. She deferred to their superior knowledge, which came from their experiences in this world and did not feel much necessity for enlarging her understanding of his sphere” (Farnham 128). Southern American women are confined to the domestic sphere and treated as inferior creatures who lack experience and who are expected to rely on their male relatives. In the same context, this paper will shed light on Tennessee Williams’s Amanda

Wingfield as a conventional Southern belle, lamenting the absence of her husband and perceiving her son as the family protector.

This section has drawn certain parallels between Southern American nature and Southern American women: like nature, damaged by the ravages of capitalism, Southern belles are affected by male dominance. This part has also described the environmental situation in Mississippi because it is a dear place to Tennessee Williams. In fact, the Southern American playwright spent his childhood hovering around the vast Mississippi fields. Accordingly, some critics argue that Tennessee Williams has an ecological thought and he is deeply concerned with preserving the Agrarian culture. In fact, “[a]ll the descriptions of natural world imply the ecological awareness of Tennessee Williams, the dissatisfaction of industrialization and the desire of going back to natural world” (Guo-Ping 117). This paper supports the claim on Williams’s ecological awareness, adding that ecofeminism is also applicable to his works because Williams is concerned with both Southern nature and women. Ecofeminism will be deployed to show the affinities between nature and women in Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*. Indeed, like some politicians, ecologists, feminists, and ecofeminists who defended human rights and called for preserving ‘Mother Earth,’ Williams used drama as a way of resistance against the corruption of nature and the repression of women. Williams and some ecofeminist theoreticians did not live at the same time, nor were they in the same position in the literary community, nor did they share the same interest regarding the status and function of their writing. While ecofeminists explored feminism and political ecology, Williams used the stage as a medium for exposing Southern American issues like gender and nature. Ecofeminists and Williams have different concerns but share the same objective of reconstructing female identity and preserving nature. Both tackle the affinities between nature and women in different texts and settings. Ecofeminist tenets are applicable to Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*. The next section presents a textual analysis of the play and the relevance of ecofeminist ideas for our understanding of Southern ecology and the position of the Southern belle.

5. Ecofeminism and the Setting in *The Glass Menagerie*:

Ecofeminist ideas are explored from the very beginning of the play through the description of the Wingfield apartment, which is introduced as a tight space where flowers are not growing properly,

and women are not enjoying freedom. The apartment is described in the following naturalist style: “The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation” (Williams 1). Naturalism is made obvious using words with negative connotations, “warty,” “symptomatic,” “enslaved,” etc., and they imply meanings of homogeneity, the absence of individuality, and the dominance of a dull and monotonous way of life. Williams describes the ugly reality of cultural homogeneity in St. Louis, lamenting the loss of natural richness, verdure, and cultural diversity. The use of naturalism is reinforced by simile and the witty way of depicting the apartments as “vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living wits that flower as warty growths” (1). The verb “to flower” is used deceitfully as it accentuates the absence of vastness, overcrowding, and the transformation of fresh flora into artificial supplies. Williams criticizes urban architecture as it is based on the imitation of the same style, that is, the absence of diversity, and a lack of creativity. He is obviously nostalgic for the Agrarian past, which once celebrated nature. Williams has an affinity with the ecofeminist tenet of attacking urbanization. In this context, Warren writes: “Industrial development and urbanization have worsened an already unjust division of labor between women and men. Factory production wipes out domestic handicrafts business on which women depend, but women are at a disadvantage competing with men for factory jobs” (Ecofeminism 116). Women are negatively affected by the industrial system as it widens the gender gap and heightens the socio-economic exploitation of women. Like Williams, who rejects the hierarchical system generated by industrialization, Warren criticizes the maltreatment of women in factories and points out the role of industrialization in creating a filthy atmosphere. Both Williams and Warren are opposed to the hierarchical classification of men, women, living and non-living elements, and nature as opposed to society. The analysis of the setting has thus shown that there are ecofeminist dimensions in *The Glass* which are manifested through the naturalistic depiction of the apartment and through the rejection of binary oppositions. The setting is introduced in an ironic way, uncovering Williams’s belief in the dysfunctional urban system.

Ecofeminism can also be analyzed through the presence of fire in the apartment. Fire has a symbolic dimension as it stands for the foggy atmosphere created by the smoke of factories, and it alludes to the hierarchical social divisions. Indeed, the events of the play take place in St. Louis, which was damaged by industrialization and fire during the nineteenth century. Rapid industrial growth has nasty effects on the ecological system in St. Louis. In this respect, “On a tranquil St. Louis evening in the spring of 1849, the rhythms of urban life were suddenly interrupted by the kind of noise, fear and confusion.... Fire company bells joined in seconds later, a sense of dread” (Hurley 126). The dramatic image of fire highlights the role of industrialization in bringing about a fiasco, human loss, and environmental issues. Fire extinguished due to deforestation, the absence of green spaces, and fresh air. The suffocating atmosphere recalls the Wingfield’s space where “[t]he apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire-escape, a structure whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth, for all of these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation. The fire-escape is included in the set—that is, the landing of it and steps descending from it” (Williams 7). The image of fire is open to various interpretations as it portrays Tom’s inner conflict and his oscillation between accepting the reality of failure and escaping into an illusory romantic world. Tom tends to escape fire because it reminds him of his “private hell” (Bloom 11), of his dysfunctional family, and his failure at concretizing his American dream of accumulating wealth. The female reaction regarding fire is different because Laura fails at avoiding fire escape but succeeds at facing her reality of being a woman with special needs in a patriarchal society where female freedom is stifled. Fire can be interpreted as a source of female resistance, as it stands for Laura’s ability to go beyond physical and social challenges. In fact, “fire escape is a bigger barrier to Laura than it is to those not wearing a leg brace” (Hill and Malo-Juvera 138). Laure proves to be strong as she faces the beams of corruption, and she is still standing high against the marginalization of women with special needs. She uses a confident and serene tone when she faces fire: “I am alright. I slipped, but I’m alright” (Williams 29). Fire is a symbol of female determination to move forward and of Laura’s insistence on respecting the rule of nature over culture. She implicitly believes that fire is a natural element and it should be faced because it is an essential source of survival.

From an ecofeminist perspective, fire is a source of hierarchical division between nature and culture. According to Gaard, fire may “portray nature itself as internally divided and at war, with order possible only through dominance and hierarchy” (Critical Ecofeminism 73-74). This dichotomy is evident in Laura’s characterization and her vacillation between submission to patriarchal culture and natural longing for freedom. She is torn between the Southern rules of bellehood, which are imposed by her mother, and her self-independence from the social stereotypes that classify a woman with special needs as a “handicapped” and inferior creature. The comparison between Tom and Laura’s reactions regarding fire leads to the conclusion that there are affinities between women and nature. Like Laura, who is suppressed by patriarchal corruption, and she faces the reality of social marginalization, nature is damaged by the patriarchal spirit and the fire and smoke generated by factories. Williams is for creating a functional system, and he shares with ecofeminists the belief in “[n]onhierarchical analysis, coupled with an expanded conception of moral community” (Gruen 81). The playwright is implicitly criticizing the hierarchical system that is biased against women and nature, and he calls for a better representation of the natural chain and the Agrarian Southern space. He laments over the transformation of the American South into a sterile wasteland. It is clear that misogyny is inscribed in social practices. Industrialization is the main cause of women’s oppression. Women were objectified in the twentieth century and treated as commodities. Both women and animals were affected by industrialization. Both were considered the scapegoats of industrialization. Like women who were denied socio-economic rights, animals suffered from pollution, and animal extinction became a modern phenomenon. The twentieth century is crucial in terms of female struggle because it witnessed the emergence of the first wave of feminism, which called for gender equality. The innovative aspect of this paper lies in employing ecofeminism as a relevant theory to grasp the relationship between women and the natural chain. The next part offers a textual analysis of *The Glass Menagerie*.

6. Amanda, Laura and Animals

The ecofeminist dimension of the play can be exemplified through the relationship between female characters and animals. Before turning to the textual analysis of animal imagery, it is pertinent to analyze the importance of animals and their role in maintaining natural balance. From an

ecofeminist angle, animals and women are treated as scapegoats in some patriarchal societies. Lori Gruen observes that “women often served as symbols for the uncontrollable and harmful and thus were sacrifices in order to purify the community ... it has been suggested that many animals were first domesticated not as food sources but as sacrificial creatures” (64). The ecofeminist researcher criticizes patriarchal societies for considering women and animals as scapegoats. In the same context, female characters and animals are presented as scapegoats of the patriarchal regime in Williams’s *The Glass*. For example, Laura has an affinity with the unicorn as they share the same feelings of alienation and frailty. Laura describes her glass menagerie to Jim using the following terms: “[t]hey are ornaments mostly! Most of them are little animals made out of glass, the tiniest little animals in the world. Mother calls them a glass menagerie! Here’s an example of one, Oh be careful –If you breathe, it breaks! You see how light shines through him?” (Williams 78). Laura personifies the glass and the animals, and she reveals that the unicorn has a specific light. The image of the radiant unicorn highlights Laura’s belief in the importance of animals and Williams’s attack on the phenomenon of animal extinction. Indeed, the unicorn is one of the endangered species that have been affected by deforestation, pollution, and the patriarchal machine of industrialization and hunting.

From an ecofeminist perspective, “if hunting had been so relevant because humanity had been convinced of the healing powers of the horn, then man is solely responsible for their extinction” (Crisologo and Davidson 17). Unicorns went extinct because they were treated as scapegoats and sources of healing. Hunters are condemned for animal extinction and for the harmful exploitation of nature. In the same context, the act of breaking the horn in the play stands for Laura’s fall from innocence into experience. Indeed, the horn is linked to the purity of the Southern belle, and breaking the horn is associated with shattering female immaculateness. In fact, breaking the unicorn is deeply associated with Jim, “the lover of virgins and icon of chastity and the chief visual symbol in the play” (Kolin 41). Removing the horn is linked to affecting Laura’s innocence and touching her pristine purity. Like Mother Nature, who lost her virgin lands because of hunters, deforestation and the gigantic industrial apparatus, Laura lost her innocence after Jim’s symbolic kiss. The Southern belle is victimized by the patriarchal system, which demands a lady to be chaste, debasing her when she opts for freedom. This situation recalls Williams’s *A Streetcar*

Named Desire, in which Blanche is debased because she breaks Mitch's rules about female domesticity, purity, and submission. Male ambivalence is the common point between Mitch and Jim. Both male characters share the same ambivalence about the oscillation between female idealization and debasement. They are impressed by female innocence, but they are responsible for the female experience. In the same way, man seeks to create an earthly paradise but is responsible for pollution, animal extinction, and natural imbalance. Like ecofeminists, Williams deems hunters responsible for the nightmarish transformation of the utopian American South into a dystopian urban area where chivalric values, natural beauty, and balance fade away.

In the same context of condemning the patriarchal system for animal extinction and female social alienation, this part will analyze the image of the deer. Laura is associated with the deer, especially after the panic she faces when the glass breaks and the horn falls off. She is bored with the reality of dysfunctionality, and she escapes into her own imaginary world. In the stage directions, Williams informs us: "She turns awkwardly and hurries into the front room. She pauses a second by the Victrola. Then she catches her breath and darts through the portieres like a frightened deer" (62). The simile reveals the marginalization of both women and animals in the American South. Both the deer and Laura are maltreated as wild and uncivilized creatures. Like the deer, which is secluded and perceived as a dangerous creature, Laura is confined to the tight domestic sphere, and she does not have social links because of her limp. This physical defect affects her psychologically, socially, and personally. She is compared to the deer as they share the same feelings of social exclusion, aloofness, and dislocation. She is socially dislocated in a conservative society where the Southern belle is expected to "[represent] power without sacrificing the aspects of femininity that most women are still trying to acquire kindness, unselfishness, beauty, grace and optimism" (Harris 39). From a male-dominated perspective, Laura is a spinster because she lacks physical beauty and grace. Her slight physical disability is the source of her social troubles. The limited view about beauty is revised by Williams, who tends to highlight the inner beauty and the soft spirit of Laura. Indeed, Jim was impressed by the uniqueness, sensitivity, frailty, and innocence of Laura. Williams subverts the negative image of the deer and spinsters by associating them with softness and good qualities. Some ecofeminists defended the rights of deer and their right to survive. Historically speaking, Andean people in Southern America used to appreciate the deer, "respect the deer's

swiftness as well as its shy and aloof nature” (Bingham 37). From an ecofeminist angle, the deer should not be stereotyped as being wild and dangerous but should be linked with positive connotations of softness. The deer should not be killed because its presence is necessary for maintaining the balance of the natural chain.

The ecofeminist leader, Karren Warren, cites the example of native inhabitants in California who were keen on preserving nature and respecting wild animals. The native citizen “kills a deer only when he needs it for his livelihood... The hunter who has lost his luck does not say I cannot kill deer anymore, but deer don’t want to die for me” (qtd. in Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* 135). The act of killing is used in a soft way, as it reflects the positive image of the hunter who kills in moments of urgent need. The deer is introduced as an active creature, not a passive agent, and the hunter regrets killing the deer, promising to treat the deer as a sacred animal and not as a sheer scapegoat. This view is different from the postmodern citizen who announces: “It’s my right as a free citizen to take a deer from the forest” (qtd. in Warren, *Ecofeminism* 123). Understanding of freedom is limited because a free citizen should be liberated from the belief in the huge gap between nature and culture. The limited understanding of freedom or human rights is discussed by Warren who believes that “this idea of ‘rights’ actually serves to keep us separated from each other and the land” (*Ecofeminism* 123). Warren is implicitly calling for revising the concept of rights and for not confusing human rights and animal rights. The human being should not infringe on animal rights by killing wild animals, as they present a threat to children and citizens. Rather, wild animals should be preserved and have a space of their own, as they are also progenitors of Mother Nature. Warren and Williams sympathize with women, calling for decentralization and a shift from the margins to a better representation of women and animals. The next part will examine female subversive strategies and resistance against patriarchy.

7. Nature and Plants: Female Subversive Strategies

Laura resists the patriarchal system, the conventional traditions incited by her mother, and the imposed cultural norms by escaping into the shell of the self and creating her own world. She resorts to nature as a form of spiritual revival and she defies sciences. Unlike Jim, who is impressed by scientific development, Laura prefers natural beauty and is impressed by the fresh

breeze. Jim asks: "Did you take in the Century of Progress? LAURA [says]: No, I didn't" (Williams 72). The use of negation reflects her rejection of Jim's consideration of science as a form of progress and her implicit views about the repercussions of science. In this respect, some ecofeminists point out the damage brought about by scientific experiments. For instance, Gruen argues that science has "exploited the bodies and minds of women and animals ... based on a conception of [them] as different and lesser beings" (69). Gruen supports her arguments by referring to Harry Harlow's experiments on monkeys and on mother deprivation. A monkey was deprived of her newborn, and she reacted violently to the sight of the baby after long moments of deprivation, "[It] was a shaking mother which rocked so violently that the teeth and bones of the infant chattered in unison" (qtd. in Gruen 68). Ecofeminists condemn the atrocious practices against animals, and they reject the maltreatment of monkeys. They believe that scientific experiments are not ethical practices as they objectify animal and female bodies. This objectification can affect the mind, and it leads to female psychological torment and results in animal extinction. While Jim continues his impression by scientific achievements, "it was quite a wonderful exposition. What impressed me most was the Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is!" (Williams 72), Laura admires Jim's voice, and she reminds him of their singing courses. While Jim believes in scientific advances, Laura is engrossed in music and the arts. She is clearly resorting to the arts as a means of resistance and a tool of self-empowerment. The voice of Laura reflects Williams's condemnation of scientific invasion and its role in transforming the Old South into a valley of ashes. Ecofeminists are also criticized for their failure to create intersectionality between different fields and for being limited to ecology and feminism, as well as ignoring the importance of sciences and rationality in creating biological balance. Ecofeminists are invited to be realistic and to ponder over "creating a different kind of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive/spiritual and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic... To envision and create a free, ecological society" (Sturgeon 75). In the play, the idea of science is rejected by Laura, who can be blamed for not creating an interdisciplinarity and for being limited into the shell of the self, focusing on ecology without acknowledging the positive aspects of scientific developments. Jim is equally criticized for being equipped with a scientific spirit but forgetting about the importance of land and spiritual development in creating balanced male and female psyches. Williams creates intersectionality

when he implicitly rejects extremism and calls for a convergence between science, nature, men, and women.

8. Ecofeminism and Modern American Drama

There is a remarkable intersection between ecofeminism and modern American drama; like modern American drama, which is based on conflictual relationships, ecofeminism is based on the dichotomy between culture and nature. Patriarchal culture is partly responsible for ruining nature and for affecting its progenitors, especially women, children, plants and animals. Drama is defined as a “dialogue which implies debate and conflict. Without debate, the drama is propaganda; without conflict, mere fantasizing” (Brustein 13). The ecofeminist aspects of *The Glass* help us deduce that conflictual relationships are the major components of both modern drama and ecofeminism. The play stages a series of conflicts that are responsible for the dramatic height of the play. Conflict is defined as “tension between two or more characters, leading to a crisis or climax. The basic conflict is the fundamental struggle or imbalance underlying the play as a whole” (Wilson and Goldfarb 40). Conflict is a key concept in Modern American drama and one of the major problems in ecofeminism.

The conflicts in Williams’s works stem from a lack of reconciliation between man and nature, between the past and the present, and between the agrarian past and the urban present. Like the modern American play, which stages the otherness of the female self (especially Laura) and externalizes the repressed feelings, the ecofeminist projects are based on externalizing the invisible issues about the exploitation of Mother Nature. In *The Glass*, the female “self shares the stage with the others. The platform is double-layered” (Burstein 13), and in her ecofeminist project, Warren insists on sharing with readers the suffering of both nature and women and on highlighting the role of patriarchal culture in bringing about female and natural troubles. Another finding of this paper is that Williams is not a misogynist playwright; he is rather defending female rights and bringing to the fore the negative effects of the patriarchal agenda on the female psyche and on the Southern American former idyllic space. The modern play stages the role of implacable cultural forces in ruining Mother Earth and mother Amanda, who is left by the absent husband. Like modern drama, which accentuates the conflict between characters and external cultural

determinants, ecofeminists have proved that culture is responsible for the destruction of Mother Nature. Williams and ecofeminists rebel against the invisibility of women and nature and call for removing the boundaries between nature and culture and man and woman. Like the modern stage, which “makes the rebel dramatist vacillate between negation and affirmation, between rebellion and reality” (Brustein 13), ecofeminism grants activists the floor to rebel against the imbalanced natural chain and to call for a harmonious dialogue between nature and culture. This absence of dialogue is exemplified through the presence of monologues in *The Glass*, which contribute to heightening the dramatic pathos. Indeed, through Laura’s monologue, we find out that the female character suffers from the absence of social integration in a culture where a woman with special needs is stereotyped as an inferior creature.

9. Discussion

Ecofeminists may be criticized for being utopian and having “unrealistic” ideas. This part is important as it offers a discussion of ecofeminism, perceived by some as an ideal and a naïve approach to women, nature, and animals. This discussion part aims at questioning the tenets of ecofeminism and Williams’s ideas about female isolation. Opening the discussion about ecofeminism, Sargisson criticizes ecofeminists for being essentialists and for having a dreamy project. She writes, “Ecofeminism is essentialist, biologist and it lacks political efficacy. Ecofeminism is inconsistent, intellectually regressive and it lacks rigour. Ecofeminism is the fluffy face of feminism” (Sargisson 52). Sargisson argues that ecofeminism serves patriarchy in the sense that it perpetuates stereotypes about the limited role of women and their social positions as mothers. Sargisson mocks ecofeminists for linking Mother Nature to the image of socially repressed women because this correlation serves the patriarchal system and gives a limited view of the female self. She adds that ecofeminism is not efficient because it is merely a theoretical project that does not have realistic aspects. Maria Mies is another critic who defines feminism as an ineffective project, and she affirms that “the utopia of the independent, isolated and autonomous female individual is not attractive. They do not wish to live free and alone in the anonymity of big cities” (Mies and Shiva 220). Mies believes that ecofeminism is utopian because women pretend to be independent, but they cannot live alone. Put differently, female independence should not be

linked to isolation; it should rather be linked to social integration and imposing female identity within a given society. This idea can be used to criticize the ending of Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, where Amanda and Laura live alone, and Laura chooses to escape her social surroundings and to invent her own happiness. They partially succeed at achieving independence, but they fail to impose their personalities or to contribute with concrete social reforms. Yet, Laura can be described as a strong woman because she transforms from being a frail girl at the beginning of the play to an independent lady who is careless about the social stereotypes against women with special needs. She refuses the institution of marriage and the limited classification of women into reproductive machines. Ecofeminism has its own limitations, and Williams can be criticized for the idealistic ending, but ecofeminism can still be applied to Williams's Southern American play. The merit of this paper lies in foregrounding Williams's attempt at rethinking the balance between nature and culture, male and female, the Agrarian space and urbanized thoughts, human, non-human and vegetal elements.

10. Conclusion

To conclude, studying *The Glass Menagerie* from an ecofeminist lens shows the deep affinities between women and nature. Williams delivers a message about the necessity of redefining women and nature as essential bedrocks for natural and social balance. Williams criticizes female confinement and natural exploitation by patriarchal strictures. He calls for revising the relationship between modern man and nature and for going beyond patriarchal oppression. The intersection between gender and ecological studies emphasizes the urgent need for liberating both women and nature from patriarchal manacles. Both Williams and ecofeminists seek to recreate a functional system based on a harmonious dialogue and a balanced view of men and women, nature, and culture. Culture is expected to serve nature and to represent women more objectively. Laura can be classified among Williams's strong female characters who succeeded in overturning the patriarchal norms. She is among Williams's "violets in the mountains [who] have broken the rocks" (Williams xvi). The image of the violets can be compared to Laura's transformation from frailty into spiritual, personal, and individual strength. The rock can be associated with female social resistance and audible voices of rebellion. She rebels against the stereotype of the Southern belle,

which expects women to be fragile, meek, and submissive. On the other hand, resisting violets can bring a glimmer of hope and give an image of the power of nature in a wasteland. Nature and women still bloom in harsh conditions, and the merit of Williams's works lies in enlightening the audience about the necessity of liberating both women and nature from the scientific invasion, strong patriarchal norms, and the perils of urbanization.

Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. Infobase Publishing, 2007.
- Bingham, Ann. *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z*. Infobase Publishing, 2004.
- Bigsby, Christopher W.E. "Entering *The Glass Menagerie*." *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams*, edited by Mathew C. Roudané, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 29-44.
- Brustein, Robert. *Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama*. Elephant Paperbacks, 1991.
- Chander, Subhash, and Bhaderwah Campus. "A Psychoanalytic Study of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 778-781, <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT1705115.pdf>.
- Crisologo, Jonalyn, and John Davidson. *Drawing Unicorns: How to Draw Mythical Creatures for the Beginner*. Mendon Cottage Books, 2015.
- Farnham, Christie. *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*. New York UP, 1995.
- Gaard, Greta. *Critical Ecofeminism*. Lexington Books, 2017.---. "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple UP 1993, pp. 1-13.
- Graham, Mary. *The Morning after Earth Day: Practical Environmental Politics*. Brookings Institution Press, 2010.
- Gruen, Lori. "Dismantling Oppression." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple UP, 1993, pp. 60-91.

Guo-Ping, An. "Tennessee Williams' Ecological Awareness in His Plays." Proceedings of the Third Annual International Conference on Social Science and Contemporary Humanity Development, Atlantis Press, 2017, pp. 116-20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2991/sschd-17.2017.24>.

Harris, Adam. *A Single Southerner across America*. Lulu Press, 2005.

Hill, Crag and Victor Malo-Juvera, editors. *Critical Approaches to Teaching the High School Novel: Reinterpreting Canonical Literature*. Routledge, 2018.

Hurley, Andrew, editor. *Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis*. Historical Society Press, 1997.

King, Ynestra. "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature." *Reading Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*, edited by Susan Archer Mann and Ashly Suzanne Patterson, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 200-204.

Kolin, Philip, editor. *Tennessee Williams: A Guide to Research and Performance*. Greenwood Press, 1998.

Lahar, Stephanie. "Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History." *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple UP, 1993, pp. 91-118.

McKinney, Michael L., et al. *Environmental Science: Systems and Solutions*. Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2017.

Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 1993

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2005.

Reid, Debra A., and Vail David D. *Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

Sargisson, Lucy. "What's Wrong with Ecofeminism?" *Environmental Politics*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2001, pp. 52-64. Taylor and Francis Online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714000513>.

Sturgeon, Noël. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. Routledge, 2007.

Warren, Karen J. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Warren, Karen J. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Indiana UP, 1997.

Williams, Tennessee. *The Glass Menagerie*. New Directions Paperback, 1999.

Williams, Tennessee. *Camino Real*. New Directions Publishing, 1953.

Wilson, Edwin, and Alvin Goldfarb. *Theater: The Lively Art*. Indiana UP, 1991.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License