Yesterday Once More:
Queer Time, Physical Memory, and Gay Partnership in Tennessee Williams

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Tennessee Williams wrote an essay titled “The Timeless World of a Play” as a preface to his play The Rose Tattoo (1950) to present his unique perception of theatre and time. Referring to Arthur Miller’s masterpiece Death of a Salesman (1949), Williams supposes how we would react to Willy Loman if we met him in a world where time is prevented from intruding. He proposes that we would “receive him with concern and kindness and even with respect” (vii), not easing him out just as his young boss Howard does in the play. According to Williams, the hours are hastening on at a giddy speed in modern society, and they dehumanize us not only by making us forget our compassion for others, but by “depriv[ing] our actual lives of so much dignity and meaning” (vi). Based on this pessimistic view of time, Williams wrote Sweet Bird of Youth (1959), which is his investigation into the influences of the relentless passage of time on human psychology. The play, with its focus on the losing battles fought against time by Chance Wayne and the Princess Kosmonopolis to recapture their youth, closes with Chance’s pitiful words to the audience: “I don’t ask for your pity, but just for your understanding—not even that—no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy, time, in us all” (124). While using those words to let us recognize time as the enemy, Williams also tells us about a site free from the dehumanizing influences of time. As he states in “The Timeless World of a Play,” a play provides us with an occasion “to view its characters under that special condition of a world without time” (vii); in the theatre, therefore, we see such belittled characters as Willy Loman and Chance Wayne as men of dignity and great depth.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955; hereafter referred to as Cat) is also a time-conscious play. In the play, “the passage of time [is] a central thematic concern as well as a structural one” (Murphy 110). For the staging of the play, Williams offers a suggestion about the unity of time in particular, saying that “its running time [should be] exactly the time of its action, meaning that one act, timewise, follows directly upon the other” (Memoirs 212–13). The play’s consciousness of time is also evidenced by Williams’s description of the stage scenery: “a fair summer sky that fades into dusk
and night during the course of the play, which occupies precisely the time of its performance, excepting, of course, the fifteen minutes of intermission” (15). And a mantel clock, which Big Mama bought during, to quote Big Daddy, “that damn Cook’s Tour” (85) round Europe, strikes the hour in several scenes (85; 105; 213). It makes the audience, not only the characters in the play, notice that time is passing.

Bruce McConachie sees that time in Cat is represented as the destroyer, “forcing the characters into ever more absurd contortions” (118). Presumably, Williams attempted to dignify such contorted characters as he did in Sweet Bird of Youth, using the theatrical medium which creates the special condition of a timeless world. But this does not offer a sufficient explanation of time in Cat. As will be revealed in this article, the play’s time-consciousness is closely linked to the author’s political consciousness against heteronormativity: Williams as a gay playwright presents one mode of alternative temporality in the play to counteract the time perception that associates the passage of time with the narrative progression of heterosexual romance. This point has never been examined in studies on Williams; even the latest scholarship of his sexual politics by critics such as John Bak and Michael Hooper fails to recognize the significance of time in Cat. This article therefore starts with a critical reading of the play to prove our point. This also entails examining the correlations between gay partnership and memory in Cat and Williams’s other gay texts, “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio” (1954) and Something Cloudy, Something Clear (1981), so the latter half of the article is dedicated to addressing that issue.

Cat can be read as a play describing the process of “straightening out” the sexual orientation of Brick, the male protagonist with implied homosexual bent. Thrown into despair by the death of his friend Skipper, with whom he had a relationship he calls “too rare to be normal” (121), Brick has spent every day drinking to assuage his grief. Significantly, when his parents attempt to treat his mental paralysis, both of them use the same phrase: Big Daddy confronts him, saying “I’m going to straighten you out” (100) and Big Mama suggests to Brick’s wife Margaret: “you’ve got to cooperate with Big Daddy and me in getting Brick straightened out” (147). We can see that the term “straighten out” functions as a double entendre in both cases and its implied meaning is to cure Brick’s sexual perversion, even latent, so that he can act as a sexually “straight” man. As Williams explains, one main cause of Brick’s mental collapse is his profound disgust for social respectability, as he criticizes it as “mendacity” (114), demanding that he should disavow his homoerotic feelings for Skipper to “‘keep face’ in the world” (114). Thus, the most effective remedy for him is to eradicate the root of his disgust by “straightening out” his (homo) sexuality.
The ultimate goal of the process of “straightening out” Brick is to motivate him to have sex with Margaret for the production of their baby. Each member of Brick’s family, except Gooper and Mae, has his or her own reason to achieve this goal. Big Mama believes that having a child will make his son quit drinking (159) and, if we believe Big Mama’s words, her husband wants to look at his grandson for comfort before he dies (157). Most importantly, Margaret considers that she will be able to claim her inheritance of Big Daddy’s plantation and money after his death by giving birth to Brick’s baby. So she prepares her body for conceiving by checking her menstrual period, as demonstrated by her remark: “this is my time by the calendar to conceive” (62). She repeats this remark even before she tries to invite Brick to bed at the close of Act Three (164). As will be discussed, Williams describes both success and failure in the attempts of the Pollitt family, especially Margaret, to make Brick decide to engage in procreative acts.

Before the play was performed in Broadway in 1955, Williams had revised the script of Act Three according to several requests from stage director Elia Kazan. As Williams writes in “Note of Explanation,” the most problematic request is that “the character of Brick should undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father in Act Two” (168). He accepts this request reluctantly because he does not believe that “a conversation, however revelatory, ever effects so immediate a change in the heart or even conduct of a person in Brick’s state of spiritual disrepair” (168). The most remarkable change in his action is his yielding to his wife’s sexual temptation at the end of the play. In the middle of Act Three, Margaret makes a false announcement to her family that she is pregnant by Brick, and then she tries to invite him to bed to make that lie true. The original script of Act Three presents Brick responding cynically to Margaret’s passionate words “I do love you, Brick, I do!” (166) by saying, “Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true?” (166). This phrase serves as a coda to make us imagine that he will never sleep with Margaret even after the play ends. On the other hand, the Broadway version, showing them sitting on the edge of the bed at the final moment of the play, ends with Margaret’s gesture of touching Brick’s cheek gently (215), thereby implying that they will subsequently have sex. Interestingly, Williams has already taken a step before the close of the play to encourage the audience to anticipate in their sex for a baby. In the Broadway version, Brick supports his wife’s false announcement of pregnancy: when Mae asks Margaret “[h]ow can you conceive a child by a man that won’t sleep with you?” (211), he replies for his wife by saying “how d’ you know that I don’t sleep with Maggie?” (211), and he also states that “not everybody makes much noise about love” (211) to get Mae to understand that he and his wife are “silent lovers” during
their sex, not “huffers an’ puffers” (211). Those reactions do not occur to Brick in the earlier version; he just remains silent during Margaret’s announcement, as seen from her words “Thank you for—keeping still” (162).

Thus, the endings of the original and the Broadway versions indicate the failure and the success, respectively, of the attempt to “straighten out” Brick’s sexuality. As Williams writes at the end of “Note of Explanation,” it is up to the reader or audience to compare the two antithetical endings and decide which ending is more convincing (168), so the published text of Cat carries the two third acts. But, as explained above, Brick’s transformation in the Broadway version was not convincing for Williams, and he approved of the earlier version which does not describe Brick’s change. This approval is also shown by his textual editing of Act Three: he uses as the Broadway version the script which was “taken directly from the stage manager’s prompt book” (Murphy 98) without rewriting it and places it after the original one to emphasize the importance of the latter. Kazan resented this editing, for he complains in his autobiography that Williams has made him “a villain corrupting a ‘pure artist’” (544). But Williams did not restrain himself from demonstrating the superiority of the original script to show his criticism of the idea of Brick’s transformation.

Though the third act in the Broadway version failed to gain favor with the author, however, it also serves to express his criticism about the heterosexual romance to tame Brick’s desire by interacting with the previous acts of the play. After Brick utters his supportive words about Margaret’s false announcement of pregnancy, the clock strikes 12 o’clock midnight (213), which is shortly before the close of the play suggesting that they will subsequently have sex. This indicates that Brick’s surrender to his wife’s sexual temptation occurs around the end of the day. To put it differently, the process of his transformation is almost finished at the same time as the day ends. Consequently, the audience watching the Broadway version is induced to perceive the temporal succession on the stage as a narrative to progress toward the end of curing Brick’s perversion. In the original version, on the other hand, time is not arranged in that way; time goes by, but a change does not happen to Brick.

What should be noted here is the temporality which Brick embodies. He is characterized as a male protagonist immune to the influences of aging, as shown by the play’s first description of his appearance: “He is still slim and firm as a boy” (19). His eternal boyishness is also demonstrated by his mother’s words about him: “Tonight Brick looks like he used to look when he was a little boy, just like he did when he played wild games and used to come home all sweaty and pink-cheeked and sleepy, with his—red curls shining...” (156). Many critics have made comments about
Brick’s boyishness. For instance, John Clum regards it as a case of “arrested development” (Still Acting Gay 127) and Douglas Arrell develops Clum’s idea to state that Brick’s immaturity exhibits a sign for Freudian psychiatrists in the 1950s to interpret that “he either was or was on his way to becoming homosexual” (67). Mark Winchell does not consider Brick’s case as pathological; instead, he associates it with the tradition of American literature. He refers to Leslie Fiedler and maintains that Brick and Skipper offer one example of the ideal companionship of, to quote Winchell, “boys who never grew up” (85) recurrent in classic American literature, like pairings of Huck and Jim, Natty and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg. Like the above-cited critics, our discussion will focus on the “queerness” of Brick’s eternal boyishness, but we would like to see it from a different perspective: examining it in connection with the play’s strong consciousness of time.

Here we would like to refer to Judith Halberstam because she provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding Brick’s timelessness and Cat’s time-consciousness. She theorizes on what she terms “queer temporality.” She explains that “it is about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2) and argues for its potential for replacing “a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality” (4) which organizes our life cycle from birth through marriage/reproduction to death, aiming for its maximum productivity. Halberstam regards queer subcultures, which “suggest,” she writes, “transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation” (154), as a site to accommodate people who live in this alternative mode of temporality, for example those who choose to “live in rapid bursts” (5) rather than pursuing long, stable lives, and those who free themselves from the responsibilities of building family life and “visit clubs and participate in sex cultures well into their forties or fifties on a regular basis” (174). To characterize these queer life modes, Halberstam conceives the notion of “stretched-out adolescence” as a lifestyle challenging “the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood” (153); this alternative lifestyle justifies “the refusal to grow up and enter the heteronormative adulthoods implied by [the] concepts of progress and maturity” (179).

Brick’s temporality is also queer because he lives in “stretched-out adolescence” to disrupt lifestyle norms based on heterosexism. This is clarified when we look at his friendship with Skipper. Upon graduation from college, Brick became a professional football player and organized with Skipper a football team named the Dixie Stars. According to Margaret, the reason for their having organized the team is that they wanted to “keep on bein’ teammates forever” (58) and they were also “scared to grow up” (122). As these remarks attest, the Dixie Stars served as a special site in which
Brick could "stretch out" his adolescence and maintain the friendship with Skipper forever. And in this timeless site, their relationship was even allowed to assume a homoerotic tone:

BRICK. It was too rare to be normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal. Oh, once in a while he put his hand on my shoulder or I'd put mine on his, oh, maybe even, when we were touring the country in pro-football an' shared hotel-rooms we'd reach across the space between the two beds and shake hands to say goodnight, yeah, one or two times we—

BIG DADDY. Brick, nobody thinks that that's not normal! (121)

As unspoken words at the end of Brick's lines suggest, only a few times during the tour of the Dixie Stars, he and Skipper made closer physical contact with each other than goodnight handshakes. Thus, the temporality embodied by Brick and Skipper seems to function as a counter-narrative in the play: it continues to hold its timelessness even while time is passing in the play, and it also resists, with its timelessness and homoeroticism, the heterosexual romance emphasized in the Broadway version which synchronizes the process of Brick's transformation with the passage of time on the stage. To corroborate this point, we would like to refer to David Savran. According to Savran, the end of the Broadway version does not "resolve the question of [Brick's] sexual identity, nor confirm the primacy of heterosexual desire" (109); it rather attests to "the perpetuation of a homosexual economy" (109), which enables Brick to exchange homosexual pleasure with Skipper via Margaret, who had sex with Skipper in the past to prove that he was not a homosexual (but in vain). The end of the play therefore opens up a possibility that Brick might remember Skipper during sex with Margaret just as Skipper imagined Brick when he had sex with her (Margaret tells Brick about her sex with Skipper as follows: "And so we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us" [56]). Considering this reasoning, Brick's homoerotic relationship with Skipper will haunt him and his wife perpetually to prove its timelessness even after they succeed in

1 Michael Hooper comments on the physical contact between Brick and Skipper: "As [Brick] outlines the physical gestures permitted by their friendship—hands on shoulders, handshakes—we sense that Brick must have policed the contact between them" (89). Moreover, Hooper remarks that Brick's interrupted confession signifies his "curbs on the relationship [with Skipper]" (89). But he leaves out of consideration the suggestiveness of Brick's unspoken words about the friendship. Williams demands that the dialogue between Brick and Big Daddy, which suggests their homosexual experiences in the past, should be played "with the great concentration, with most of the power leashed but palpable in what is left unspoken" (115).
having a baby.

It has already been evident why Brick's friendship with Skipper is timeless. It is because Brick holds it in his memory and, as shown by Margaret's words to him, "You two had something that had to be kept on ice, yes, incorruptible, yes!—and death was the only icebox where you could keep it" (58), Skipper, a person to be remembered, is already dead. Brick idealizes his companionship with Skipper in his memory as he calls it "a pure an' true thing" (121) to keep it "incorruptible." The act of remembering a dead partner to keep his memory "incorruptible" is not only performed by Brick. His father, Big Daddy, also recalls his relationship with the original owners of his plantation, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello:

I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! (77)

As Robert Corber points out, Big Daddy's partnership with Ochello was sexual as well as professional, implying that "Straw and Ochello hired him purely on the basis of his good looks and athletic build" (118). Big Daddy talks less about his relationship with the two gay men than Brick does about Skipper, as indicated by the stage direction "leaving a lot unspoken" (116), but his act of remembering is more complicated due to his position of having directly observed the partnership between Straw and Ochello. When Big Daddy remembers the death of his partner Ochello, he also recollects what deep feelings Ochello had for his dead friend: "When Jack Straw died—why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when its master's dead, and died, too!" (117). From these words, which are Big Daddy's remembrance, we can also learn Ochello's great grief over the death of his partner.

This does not only explain the complicated nature of Big Daddy's recollection. In the play, we need to notice, there is another reminder of the relationship between Straw and Ochello. It is the set of the play, "the bed-sitting-room of a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta" (15), which partially, if not completely, compensates for what Big Daddy leaves unspoken about the late owners of his plantation. In "Notes for the Designer," Williams gives us the background information on that room:

It hasn't changed much since it was occupied by the original owners of the place, Jack
Straw and Peter Ochello, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon. (15)

As the above description indicates, the bedroom, which was originally used by Straw and Ochello, functions as an archive of their memories. "[A] tenderness which was uncommon," which has been preserved in that archive as a memory of their partnership, haunts the stage in a mysterious way to demonstrate its timelessness. In "Notes for the Designer," after noting "This may be irrelevant or unnecessary" (15), Williams lengthily explains how he came up with the design of the stage set:

I once saw a reproduction of a faded photograph of the verandah of Robert Louis Stevenson's home on that Samoan Island where he spent his last years, and there was a quality of tender light on weathered wood, such as porch furniture made of bamboo and wicker, exposed to tropical suns and tropical rains, which came to mind when I thought about the set for this play, bringing also to mind the grace and comfort of light, the reassurance it gives, on a late and fair afternoon in summer, the way that no matter what, even dread of death, is gently touched and soothed by it. (15)

When he found an inspiration for the set design from "a quality of tender light" which reflected on Stevenson's last tropical residence in a photo, he also sensed the tenderness of that light, which gently touches and soothes even the fear of death. He seems to associate that tenderness with the sentiment which Straw and Ochello felt together as "a tenderness which was uncommon" because the explanation about Stevenson's home comes shortly after the description of that gay couple. Indeed, there is one significant moment when the light assumes homoerotic tenderness on the stage. In a few moments after the play starts, Brick is touched by the summer twilight as Williams indicates in the stage direction: "Perhaps in a stronger light he would show some signs of deliquescence, but the fading, still warm, light from the gallery treats him gently" (19–20). But this light is not so tender to Margaret because she lets down the blinds after she fretfully says, "There's so much light in the room" (20). If we consider "the fading, still warm, light from the gallery" as the apparition of Straw and Ochello, it is understandable why it is so tender to Brick, not to Margaret. It is because Brick resembles Big Daddy in his youth. Williams emphasizes their resemblance: "[Big Daddy] must have had something Brick has, who made himself loved so much by the 'simple expedient' of not loving enough to disturb his charming detachment, also once
coupled, like Brick's, with virile beauty" (138–9). So, that tender twilight is attracted to Brick and touches him gently, remembering his father's "charming detachment" and "virile beauty" when he was a young worker for Straw and Ochello.

As we have discussed, the acts of mourning in *Cat*, which are conducted by the bedroom as a memory-archive as well as by the characters (Brick and Big Daddy), aim to idealize the memory of a dead partner and eternize it. To attest the ideality of homosexual companionship, that memory haunts the married couples in the play. Like Brick, Big Daddy has endured the weariness of his married life, as clearly shown by his reaction to his wife's words of affection:

**BIG MAMA.** And I did, I did so much, I did love you!—I even loved your hate and your hardiness, Big Daddy!

*She sobs and rushes awkwardly out onto the gallery.*

**BIG DADDY.** Wouldn't it be funny if that was true... (78; italics in original)

Big Daddy's words are the same as Brick's utterance at the close of Act Three in the original version, which indicates the lovelessness of their married lives. On the other hand, Gooper and Mae appear to be happily married, but they are grotesquely portrayed as an animalized couple producing children called "no-neck monsters." In contrast, the homosexual relationships of Straw and Ochello and of Brick and Skipper are described as ideal partnerships: the first involves "a tenderness which was uncommon" and the latter is called "a pure an' true thing." By making this contrast, Williams emphasizes the supremacy of homosexual companionship.

But we need to remember John Clum's critical comment here:

The bed of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello represents an unstated ideal relationship that seems unattainable for the heterosexual marriages in Williams play. In positing this ideal, the play is subversive for its time, yet the love of Straw and Ochello never seems a possibility for homosexuals either. It is more of a figure of speech than a matter of fact, and a rather paradoxical figure of speech at that, since the only positive words used to describe the relationship are silent hints in the stage directions. (*Still Acting Gay* 130)

According to this comment, the homosexual companionship described in *Cat* is just an ideal: it is never materialized on the stage; it is only referred to by the characters or in the stage directions. But is this a limit of Williams's description of homosexuality
in *Cat*. To address this question, we would like to consider the strength of memory. In the book aptly titled *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*, Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed argue for the potential of memories for imagining a utopian world by asserting that "memories craft a world that stands as a counter-reality to the lacking or painful present, creating narratives of 'the past' so as to challenge the inevitability of dominant constructions of 'reality'" (12). Drawing on this view, we can say that the homosexual relationships in *Cat*, which reside in the memories of those who are bereaved, function as "counter-reality" to the tiresome present dominated by the heterosexual romance. In other words, that alternative reality is a utopia which maintains the primacy of homosexual companionship over heterosexual marriage, as we have discussed above. But we also need to consider the plausibility of that queer utopia. Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed note that the "counter-reality" constructed by memories distinguishes itself from an implausible utopia because it optimistically tells us that "what once was might be again" (14) and makes us hope that what we remember experiencing in the past might happen again in the future. Unfortunately, *Cat* is not so optimistic as to promise that the homosexual companionship in the memory will be rebuilt in the future. But the play, as pointed out earlier, demonstrates the timelessness of the homosexual memories: Brick's friendship with Skipper haunts his married life as a "counter-narrative" to the heterosexual romance and the partnership between Straw and Ochello continues to exist apparitionally as the summer twilight on the stage to touch Brick/Big Daddy gently. By making the past intervene in the present, the queer memories in the play express their fervent hope that "what once was might be again."

One year before the first production of *Cat*, Williams published the short story "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio." Like *Cat*, the story also articulates a great concern with time. Mr. Gonzales, a male protagonist who was known as Pablo when he was young, is a watch repairman who has grown to be "rather indifferent to time" (99) because he has been working surrounded with a multitude of watches and clocks, which "deprive them of importance, as a gem loses its value when there are too many just like it which are too easily or cheaply obtainable" (99). As a result, he manages to avoid observing the regularity of time in his life, although he works in a town where "nearly everybody [has] an old alarm clock which [has] to be kept in condition to order their lives" (100). His body clock is timed to the afternoon light that tells him to stop his job and go to the movie theater named 'the Joy Rio.' In that place, he cruises male prostitutes and enjoys public sex with them to satisfy his carnal desires.
He learned this practice from his late illegal guardian/mentor Emiel Kroger as well as inheriting a watch shop from him.

One of the biggest mysteries in the story is the physical rejuvenation of the aging Gonzales:

Now rather startlingly, after all this time, the graceful approximation of Pablo’s delicate structure has come back out of the irrelevant contours which had engulfed it after the long-ago death of Emiel Kroger. The mirrors are not very good in the dim little residence-shop, where he lives in his long wait for death, and when he looks in them, Mr. Gonzales sees the boy that was loved by the man whom he loved. It is almost Pablo. Pablo has almost returned from Mr. Gonzales. (106)

The truth of this physical transformation is that Gonzales, suffering from the same disease of the bowels of which Emiel Kroger died, has lost weight and, as a result, he looks slim and young. But he convinces himself that he has regained his youthfulness, and his mind goes back to the time when he was a boy receiving the deepest affection from Kroger. Interestingly, after this rejuvenation, there is no description in the text to remind the reader of Gonzales’s former self as an old fat man; even when he is chased after by a young usher of the Joy Rio, who shouts at him the word “morphodite,” Gonzales runs away “with the lightness and grace of his youth” (108) and his flight gathers “an irresistible momentum” (108), which makes his legs move “like pistons bearing him up and up” (108) the staircase of the Joy Rio.

This mysterious transformation of Gonzales, which even critical readers of the text have failed to explore, seems to reflect the author’s utopian vision of gay companionship. This is clarified when we look at the other mystery described at the end of the story, which is the encounter of rejuvenated Gonzales with the ghost of Kroger:

Pablo was too breathless to say anything except, Yes, and Mr. Kroger leaned over him and unbuttoned his collar for him, unfastened the clasp of his belt, all the while murmuring. There now, there now, Pablo.

The panic disappeared under those soothing old fingers and the breathing slowed down and stopped hurting the chest as if a fox was caught in it, and then at last Mr.

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2 Although Dennis Vannatta claims that “[t]he most obvious motif, at least early in the story, is time” (24), he does not examine Gonzales’s rejuvenation. When Robert Martin and Edward Sklepowich read the story’s concluding scene in which Gonzales encounters the ghost of Kroger, both critics see him as an old fat man, ignoring his regained youthfulness (Martin 61–2; Sklepowich 532).
Kroger began to lecture the boy as he used to, Pablo, he murmured, don't ever be so afraid of being lonely that you forget to be careful. (108–9)

After the above-cited passage, Kroger continues his lecture while soothing Gonzales with "the moist, hot touch of his tremulous fingers" (109) to ease his fear of his impending death. A similar situation also occurred in the past when Kroger was still alive, but in that case Kroger was comforted by young Gonzales: "The long-ago Mr. Kroger had paid little attention to his illness, even when it entered the stage of acute pain, so intense was his absorption in what he thought was the tricky business of holding Pablo close to him" (100–1). This reciprocal relationship between the two gay men indicates the timelessness of their companionship: it is built beyond temporal boundaries. Compared with Cat, this is a more direct and radical expression of gay partnership. While the play presents a hopeful vision of that partnership wishing that it might be built again, "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio" shows the miraculous moment—it might be Gonzales's hallucination—in which what he experienced with Kroger in the past also happens in the present. Since the Joy Rio is now Gonzales's "earthly heaven" (107) and it was also Kroger's haunt portrayed as "a fiddler's green where practically every device and fashion of carnality had run riot in a gloom" (103), it is a suitable locale for them to meet beyond temporal boundaries.

In his later years, Williams tries to have such miraculous encounters with his lost relative and partner for himself. As Bruce Smith depicts in his intimate memoir of Williams's last days before death, the playwright had a strong interest in conducting a "séance". Smith recollects how Williams and his friends attempted to have spiritual communion with his late mother Edwina. What deserves attention here is not Edwina's messages received by Williams as the medium, but rather his words before the séance: "I used to try [séances] back in the sixties, after Frankie died. But experts said that I had too many conflicting substances in my system for me to act as a viable channel, of any kind, I guess" (207). As this remark attests, he started having séances when his male companion Frank Merlo died in 1963. To put it differently, it is his homoerotic desire to meet the spirit of dead Merlo—he calls him "My closest, most long-lasting companion" (Memoirs 166)—that drew him into this occult practice. Probably, he thought that a séance would be the ultimate art of remembering, whereby he could bring what is lost to the present.

His autobiographical play Something Cloudy, Something Clear is a dramatization of the séance in which he attempts to summon the memories of his lost friends and associates on the stage. The play is the retrospection of August, the alter ego of
Williams in the 1980s, who remembers the time when he was about to be acclaimed as a professional playwright for the production of his first full-length play, *Battles of Angels*, in September, 1940, which is also the time when he first met Kip, the young dancer who served as Williams's male partner. Some of the characters appear in the play under their real names: Hazel, Williams's girlfriend in his childhood; Tallulah Bankhead, the Hollywood movie star who appeared in some of his plays; Frank Merlo; and Kip. All of them were already dead when *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* was first performed in 1981, so the play was an occultist practice in terms of bringing those long dead back to life through the bodies of actors on stage to enable August/Williams to talk with them.

What characterizes this play is its unique temporality. The play allows past and present to co-exist simultaneously—a technique which is called "double exposure" (38) by August. Since there are numerous scenes employing this technique, we would like to quote the most typical one:

KIP: How beautiful she is, the Queen of the Fireflies. It's dark now, it's time for her to shine.

AUGUST: When did she ever stop shining? Like the sky on the sea?

[Pause. Kip rubs his forehead. August leans forward and places his fingers tenderly on Kip's face and along his wide throat.]

Child of God—you—don't exist anymore. (84)

In this dialogue August and Kip talk about their friend Clare. While participating in that dialogue, which takes place in 1940, August simultaneously reviews the action of the play in retrospect from the vantage point of 1980, which enables him to say to Kip "Child of God—you—don't exist anymore" at the end of the above quote. According to Philip Kolin, this technique shows the postmodernist aspects of Williams's playwriting style, and "[c]onsiderably more than an autobiographical junket, *Something Cloudy* interrogates the larger postmodern issues of the creation of art and culture; the synchronicity of memory and contemporaneity; the representation of fictions and disclosure of self; the register of authority; the playwright's negotiations with self and with the community of the disremembered; the sexualization and theatricalization of place; and the commodification of art" (38). Moreover, Kolin

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3 John Clum states that this "double vision" reflects Williams's "internal conflict that compelled him to write of his homosexuality and, in doing so, to rely on the language of indirection and homophobic discourse" ("Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams" 165).
emphasizes how the play differs from *The Glass Menagerie* (1945): “*Something Cloudy* is unredeemed by lyricalizing nostalgia or benevolent future blossoming into career found in *Glass Menagerie*” (47). But Williams himself says that *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* is a play about Kip, “a boy I loved and who is now dead,” and it is also “the most lyrical play I’ve done in a very long while” (Rader 346). Considering these words, the play contradicts Kolin’s understanding; it is “redeemed by lyricalizing nostalgia” for the time Williams spent with Kip. Importantly, this nostalgia accounts for the play’s unique representation of time. That sentiment enables the past to intervene in the present to create the miraculous moments in which August/Williams meets Kip again. Given our discussion about the temporality in “The Mysteries of the Joy Rio,” the companionship between August/Williams and Kip is viewed in tandem with that of Kroger and Gonzales, which is also built beyond temporal boundaries. But the former seems to surpass the latter, thanks to the present-tenseness of performance, which allows the audience to see the relationship of the two gay men materializing in this moment on the stage, not just letting them imagine it as one utopian possibility in the story.

This also means that in *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* the author is doing what he could not do in *Cat*, which is to realize the hope that “what once was might be again” and represent the homoerotic partnership visually on the stage. This involves one fundamental challenge of expressing what is left unspoken in *Cat*: the carnal desire of the gay partners. In analyzing this issue, instrumental is Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of “erotohistoriography,” which she defines as “a new term that can capture the centrality of pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, in queer practices of encountering and documenting the past” (xxiii). According to Freeman, erotohistoriography utilizes the body as a tool to bring the lost object into the present, and the encounter between the past and the present, which is realized by erotohistoriography, also causes bodily sensations pleasing to those who engage in it (95–6).

To develop this idea, Freeman refers to Maria Torok’s article “The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse,” in which Torok gives a radical analysis of melancholia. Torok calls her attention to Freud’s short, but opaque, observation in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia” that the patient of melancholia often senses a frenzy of joy after suffering the loss of his or her beloved. Freud failed to theorize on it, but Torok attempts to give a reasonable explanation of it by examining Freud’s personal letters about mania. She concludes that melancholia is not caused by the overwhelming grief at the loss of someone close, but rather by “the feeling of an irreparable crime: of having been overcome with desire, of having been
surprised by an overflow of libido at the least appropriate moment, when it would behoove us to be grieved in despair" (110; italics in original). Freeman applies this sense of melancholia to her concept of historiography to define it as “a way of imagining the ‘inappropriate’ response of eros in the face of sorrow as a trace of past forms of pleasure” (120). According to Freeman, the act of documenting history is melancholic in the sense of responding to erotic calls from the past obsessively.

To write about his personal history, Williams also responds to erotic calls from the past. In his personal writings, Williams unabashedly discloses his memories of sex with Kip. In Memoirs, he recalls the nights he spent with Kip in a “two-story shack on Captain Jack’s Wharf in P-town” (68): “so incontinent was my desire for the boy that I would wake him repeatedly during the night for more love-making. You see, I had no sense in those days—and nights—of how passion can wear out even a passive partner” (68–9). And in a letter to his friend Donald Windam, we can find much rawer descriptions:

I lean over him in the night and memorize the geography of his body with my hands—he arches his throat and makes a soft, purring sound. His skin is steaming hot like the hide of a horse that’s been galloping. It has a warm, rich odor. The odor of life. He lies very still for a while, then his breath comes fast and his body begins to lunge. Great rhythmic plunging motion with panting breath and his hands working over my body. Then sudden release—and he moans like a little baby. (9–10)

What activates Williams’s recall in the above quote is his memory of physical contact with Kip. Something Cloudy, Something Clear also conjures up that physical memory by letting August touch Kip’s bodily parts sensuously: in one scene he “places his fingers tenderly on Kip’s face and along his wide throat” (84) to feel close to him, and he even “kisses the back of Kip’s neck” (75) in another scene. Moreover, the setting of the play—“A time and sun-bleached shack on dunes rolling upward like waves of pale sand-colored water” (x)—serves as a locale to remind the author of his pleasurable moments with his male partners.4 “A time and sun-bleached shack” is reminiscent of a lodging used by Williams when he stayed in Provincetown in the early 1940s, which he calls a “two-story shack on Captain Jack’s Wharf in P-town” (68) in Memoirs. As

4 Bruce Mann and Philip Kolin also comment on the set of the play, but both of them are negative about it, focusing on the dilapidation of the shack. Mann says that “the set represents the ruins of the playwright’s aging imagination” (144) and Kolin views it as reflecting “the world not with comforting boundaries but in jarring fragments” (48).
explained above, he stayed there to enjoy having sex with Kip. And the sand dunes on which that shack is built are also an important landscape for Williams's physical memory. He experienced the carnal pleasures of sex with Frank Merlo on that beach, as he recalls in Memoirs: “it was a fantastic hour in the dunes for me that evening even though I have never regarded sand as an ideal or even desirable surface on which to worship the little god. However the little god was given such devout service that he must still be smiling” (167). In the play, there is a short scene in which Merlo in a wheelchair appears on the dune (17–8).

Thus, as if to show an affinity with Freeman’s erotohistoriography, Something Cloudy, Something Clear is understood as Williams’s personal investigation into the past which is precipitated by his memory of homoerotic bodily sensations: the play provides the author with the means of responding to erotic calls from the past by allowing him to substantialize his physical memories on the stage acting as a bridge between “now” and “then”. To emphasize this point, the play ends with August’s soliloquy about his lost friends: “The lovely ones, youthfully departed long ago. But look [He points.] very clearly here, and while this memory lives, the lovely ones remain here, undisfigured, uncorrupted by the years that have removed me from their summer”(85). While standing where the past and the present meet, which is realized by his double vision, August believes that “[t]he lovely ones,” who include Kip, are still alive in his memory and feels their existence as if they “remain[ed] here” at this moment. Interestingly, after August finishes this soliloquy, there is no indication of “end” or “curtain.” This fact seems to reflect Williams’s determination never to stop responding to erotic calls from the past even after Something Cloudy, Something Clear, aiming to keep writing his history as a retrospective construction of his physical experiences of pleasure in the past.

Prefectural University of Kumamoto Received September 1, 2012

Works Cited


