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Faculty of Humanities

MA THESIS

The Dynamics of Gender Roles

in the Plays of William Inge

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CERTIFICATE OF RESEARCH

By my signature below, I certify that my ELTE MA thesis, entitled *The Dynamics of Gender Roles in the Plays of William Inge* is entirely the result of my own work, and that no degree has previously been conferred upon me for this work. In my thesis, I have cited all the sources (printed or electronic) I have used faithfully and have always indicated their origin. If this pledge is found to be false, I realise that I will be subject to penalties up to and including the forfeiture of the degree earned by my thesis.

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Abstract

This paper looks at the four major plays of William Inge: *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950), *Picnic* (1953), *Bus Stop* (1955), and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957). Taking a psychoanalytic approach, it argues that Inge destabilizes gender roles through the use of psychological conflict to render the idea of fixed gender roles unsustainable—something that he achieves by such techniques as highlighting the contrasts and parallels that exist between characters, and through such gender role reversals where male subjects assume traditionally female roles and vice versa. Identifying major psychological conflicts which serve as the dynamics of gender roles, this paper also makes the point that Inge presaged the social and sexual revolution of the 1960s by his provocations regarding prevailing social norms of gender that characterized the 1950s. In this, Inge's plays are more socially embedded than the plays of such contemporaries as Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, which can be seen as one of the reasons behind Inge's unfortunate decline in popularity both in the world of theater as well as in American drama criticism. In order to achieve its aims, this thesis relies on the works of five psychoanalysts who are also feminist and men's studies theorists. These authors include: Jessica Benjamin, Nancy J. Chodorow, R. William Betcher, William S. Pollack, and Stephen Frosh.

Keywords: William Inge, gender roles, psychoanalysis, twentieth-century American drama, feminism, men's studies, 1950s, theater

Contents

1. Introduction

In the November of 1944, Tennessee Williams was staying at the house of his mother, in a small suburb called Clayton, on the outskirts of St. Louis. Temporarily home from New York, Williams was soon on his way to Chicago where rehearsals for his play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) were about to begin for a pre-Broadway performance (Voss 81). It was during this period that he received a call from William Inge, a reporter from the *St. Louis Star-Times*, asking about whether he would agree to do an interview. Perhaps overly anxious about *Menagerie* or reluctant to talk about the play in front of his mother (whom he portrayed in the play), "Williams agreed to come to Inge's apartment for the interview" (Voss 81). "He was living in a housing project, way downtown in a raffish part of the city"—Williams recalled years later— "but, when he opened the door I saw over his shoulder a reproduction of my favorite Picasso and knew that the interview would be as painless as it turned out to be" (Williams, "Introduction" ix). The two men got along well, and after the interview Inge introduced Williams to some of his friends and "later . . . attended the St. Louis Symphony together" (Williams, *Memoirs* 89).

It was not much later that they met again, during the tryout-run of *The Glass Menagerie* in Chicago. In his introduction to Inge's *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957), Williams writes: "Bill came up one week end to see the play. . . . After the show, we walked back to my hotel in the Loop of Chicago, and on the way he suddenly confided to me, with characteristic simplicity and directness, that being a successful playwright was what he most wanted in the world for himself" (Williams, "Introduction" ix). Williams at the time did not take Inge's aspirations to write for the theatre very seriously, but this was about to change. In 1949, while visiting St. Louis again, Williams relates the time that Inge showed him a play that he had recently written, a play entitled *Come Back, Little Sheba*. "He read it to me in his beautifully quiet and expressive voice; I was

deeply moved by the play and I immediately wired Audrey Wood [his literary agent] about it and urged him to submit it to her. She was equally impressed and Bill became her client almost at once" (Williams, *Memoirs* 89).

Thus began the career of a dramatist who was not only "the most commercially successful American playwright of the [the 1950s]" (Bryer and Hartig) but also one of the most critically acclaimed—a writer whose work some critics of the day put in one league with the plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams (Shuman 41). Yet, nowadays, almost 70 years after Inge's last Broadway success, it seems that very few people have heard of William Inge. He is certainly omitted from most university courses on American drama, and there are histories of the American theater one finds in a library where his name is reduced to nothing but a small footnote, if it is mentioned at all. Before we can ask the question of what the reason for such a decline in popularity might be, however, we have to examine whether his legacy is alive today at all. During my research for this study, I have found reasons to believe that not only is his legacy not forgotten today, but it seems that there is that which one can call a rediscovery of his work in twenty-first century.

The most apparent evidence that Inge's work has not sunk into obscurity is the continued existence of The William Inge Theatre Festival. Named as the "official state theatre festival of Kansas" ("Festival"), the event is organized ever year in Inge's hometown of Independence. According to the website of The William Inge Center for the Arts, the festival, despite being an obvious celebration of Inge's work, is "[a]t its core, [a festival that] asserts that living playwrights matter, their stories matter" ("Festival"). A wide variety of people attend this festival, including "artists, high school and college students from around the region, community members, those who work to support art, and those who are enthusiastic fans of the stories told on . . . [the] nation's stages" ("Festival"). Since its conception in 1983, The William Inge Theatre Festival has

welcomed as honorable guests such distinguished playwrights as Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, August Wilson, Neil Simon, Paula Vogel, David Henry Hwang and many more ("Past Festivals"), proving that the festival has always been and continues to be a success.

Another indicator that William Inge's work is alive and well is the number of major revivals of his plays. Such notable revivals include a 2008 production of *Come Back, Little Sheba* at the Biltmore Theatre on Broadway; revivals in 2010 and 2011 of *Bus Stop* at the New Vic and the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the UK; a 2011 revival of *Bus Stop* at the Texas Repertory Theatre; a 2012 revival of *A Loss of Roses* at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre; The Roundabout Theater Company's 2013 production of *Picnic* on Broadway; the Raven Theatre's 2016 production of *A Loss of Roses*; The Transport Group's 2017 production of *Picnic* and *Come Back, Little Sheba*; the 2018 staging of *Picnic* by the Stage Door Players in Georgia; the Eclipse Theatre Company's 2018 revival of *Bus Stop, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* and *Natural Affection* and so on.

We can conclude then that Inge's plays continue to be produced by major theater companies. Nevertheless, we still need to ask the question of why his reputation has suffered so much when compared to his contemporaries whose works are put on stage on a much more regular basis. There can only be speculations about this, of course, but I think that as an introduction to this study, it is right for me to present my own opinion on the matter. First of all, I agree with Harold Clurman, the original director of *Bus Stop* on Broadway, when he writes: "Inge was the dramatist of the ordinary. He plumbed no great depths, but this limitation does not negate the honesty or genuineness of his endeavor" (832). Indeed, when compared to the tragedian spirit of O'Neill, the moral grandiosity of Miller, or the poetic sensibility of Williams, Inge's plays seem rather mild and limited in scope. Moreover, the language of his plays is also deceptively simple, but that is because he is perhaps a more committed and stylistically more conservative realist than

his contemporaries and because of this, his texts require careful treatment by the actors in order to let the plays' subtexts to emerge.

Secondly, Inge was also a playwright whose plays commented on the social realities of his time, particularly the 1950s. Sexual taboos, double standards, harmful cultural stereotypes are constantly treated in his plays. As Stella Adler, the famous acting teacher writes: "he wrote about a period that wasn't understood, wasn't touched by anybody else. Nobody knew how to write about it" (297). While this should certainly be seen as a valuable part of his dramaturgy, I think that it can give the false impression that Inge's plays are "outdated" or "old-fashioned". Instead, my opinion is that his works should be treated as period pieces; that is, one can hardly "modernize" an Inge play in the same way one can innovate while staging an Arthur Miller or a Tennessee Williams play. His dramas are more socially embedded and might even be called provincial since they are mostly set in a specific Midwestern small-town setting. The human conflicts and the emotions that Inge portrays however, are universal and the compassion with which he treats his confused and frustrated characters makes his characterizations timeless.

While he never did produce a dramatic masterpiece on par with such plays as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) or *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), William Inge has made an immense contribution to the American theater that should be studied and appreciated by critics and audiences alike. Seeing how there was no criticism whatsoever about his work in Hungary, I was all the more eager to write a study about him and therefore, in the following I offer my interpretation of four of his major plays: *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950); *Picnic* (1953); *Bus Stop* (1955); and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957). Despite omitting it from my analysis, I will also note here that his fifth play, *A Loss of Roses* (1960) needs a critical reevaluation and should

be considered a major Inge play. It is my personal favorite from all of his works and perhaps I will examine it in a paper sometime later on.

In this study, I use a psychoanalytic framework to argue for that which I see as perhaps the most important aspect of his work: the destabilization of gender. More specifically, I make the argument that Inge, a playwright who was very much familiar with psychoanalysis (Voss 142), uses psychological conflict to show that the gender roles of his time are cultural products and non-static formations with no real essence of their own. These psychological forces behind the undermining of gender roles are what I refer to in my thesis title as "dynamics"—the psychological phenomena which produce movement and change in gender relations. During my analysis, I will also try to identify the different techniques that Inge puts to use to create dramatic meaning: literary tools like "contrasting" and "paralleling", gender role reversals where female subjects are made to occupy male roles and vice versa, or the intertextual play that he creates with the works of Shakespeare.

While drama criticism about Inge is generally scarce, there are a few very insightful and useful essays as well as book-length studies on his work. Of these, the most important book on Inge that anyone writing about him should consult is Ralph F. Voss's 1989 biography, *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph*, which is a first-rate exploration of the life and work of a sensitive, but troubled artist who has achieved immense success that was followed by a steep career decline—a decline from which he could never recover from. Another well-researched and generally well-constructed study is Jeff Johnson's 2005 book, entitled *William Inge and the Subversion of Gender: Rewriting Stereotypes in the Plays, Novels, and Screenplays*. It is this work that my own analysis falls closest to in that I also focus on the subversion of gender roles, a crucial difference being that I use a psychoanalytical approach to trace the patterns that Inge's

deconstruction of gender roles follows. While it is highly perceptive, I also consider Johnson's work to be slightly reductionist in the way that it assigns Dionysian and Apollonian attributes to characters, thus reproducing the very same binary that Inge aims to dismantle.

R. Baird Shuman's 1965 biography and critical examination (revised in 1989) simply entitled *William Inge* is also notable, particularly because the author has consulted with Inge during the writing of this book. I have generally found Shuman's analyses helpful, although I do think that many times he portrays Inge's work as more socially conservative than it actually is, thus downplaying its subversive nature. Another essential work that must also be mentioned is a fairly recent essay collection that celebrates Inge's achievements as a writer, as well as his personal influence on the various people that he met and knew all throughout his life. Published in 2014, the book bears the title: *William Inge: Essays and Reminiscences on the Plays and the Man*. Edited by Jackson R. Bryer and Mary C. Hartig, it is a reliable scholarly source for anyone interested in researching Inge's plays. In addition, two other sources that are highly informative are Susan C. W. Abbotson's analysis of Inge's major plays in the 2018 book, *Modern American Drama: Playwriting in the 1950s* as well as Christopher Bigsby's comments in his 2000 book (revised in 2004) *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000*.

As far as I know, as of yet, there has not been any systematic, psychoanalytical analysis of William Inge's plays published anywhere. In this way, I consider my thesis to be a potentially fruitful attempt at contributing to the understanding of these plays, which I admire greatly for their truthfulness as well as for their complex dramatic composition. These are also plays that I find to be greatly undervalued, underresearched and too rarely produced. I think that that is very unfortunate, not only because Inge showcases a profound understanding of his time, but also because his characters and situations remain—even when read as texts, but especially when they

are performed—strikingly relevant today. Thus, the omission of Inge's work from the literary canon is a loss not only for American drama, but also for the art of theater in general.

2. Literature Review

In this study, instead of using classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory which, in the 1950s, Inge must have been familiar with, I am relying on psychoanalytic theories articulated by second-wave feminists of the late 1980s and men's studies theorists of the early 1990s. Particularly, my interpretation is based on Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* (1988), Nancy J. Chodorow's *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989), R. William Betcher's and William S. Pollack's *In a Time of Fallen Heroes* (1993) and Stephen Frosh's *Sexual Difference* (1994) to offer a reading of *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950); *Picnic* (1953); *Bus Stop*; and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957), that shows how Inge uses psychological conflicts to render the idea of fixed gender roles unsustainable. During my analysis, I attempt to map these changing gender roles and place them on a timeline of psychological conflicts, crises, and resolutions/lack of resolutions. The reason behind me choosing these works is that they address foundational issues regarding gender and psychoanalysis while also, on certain occasions, commenting on social formations and phenomena that were also in place during Inge's time, but which are perhaps less discernable in our own times.

The work I rely most heavily on is Jessica Benjamin's 1988 book entitled *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*. One psychological concept that I borrow to understand character development is that which Benjamin calls "vicarious pleasure" (78), a psychological phenomenon she identifies to be common among many adult women. Vicarious pleasure means emotional enjoyment that is not experienced directly by the subject but is rather felt through identification with another who enjoys and desires—by another whose "assertion of subjectivity and difference is like a breath of the inaccessible outdoors" (Benjamin 79) to the subject. Benjamin sees this as a form of female masochism, which can be traced back to the culturally and socially conditioned, self-sacrificing attitude of one's own mother (78) with whom the young girl identifies to a great extent. This is because the child fears that any kind of

self-assertion would somehow hurt her mother who is “not only an object of love but also a mainstay of identity” (Benjamin 79). As a result, in adulthood many women may reenact the vicarious pleasure of their mothers, thus giving up their entitlement to direct enjoyment and desire.

Another key theoretical aspect that I make use of during my interpretation is Benjamin’s description of female sexual awakening during adolescence. Benjamin elaborates on this by interpreting the tale of Cupid and Psyche as told by the ancient Roman prose writer, Lucius Apuleius. Focusing on the character development of Psyche, Benjamin discusses how Psyche “is freed from idealization and objectification . . . [and] can experience a true sexual awakening” (129) once she is left on her own, far away from her admirers where she has the chance to “discover what is authentic in [herself]” (129). Only later does this kind of sexual awakening find an object of desire—the other eponymous character of the myth, Eros (Benjamin 129).

Another theoretical block is closely connected to this one since it also has to do with women’s desire. In her book, Benjamin elaborates on a specific attribute of women’s sexuality that nonetheless can be experienced by men just the same, which she terms “the intersubjective mode of desire” (126)—a sort of desire which “escapes the borders of the imperial phallus (Benjamin 130). She describes this psychological phenomenon as the “exchange of gestures conveying attunement . . .[which] serves to focus women’s pleasure . . . mak[ing] use of the space in-between that is created by shared feeling and discovery” (Benjamin 130). Also called “[t]he dance of mutual recognition” (Benjamin 130), this mode of desire consists of a meeting between two subjects in the intersubjective space without the object-subject binary that is inevitably bound up with the phallus as a symbol of desire (Benjamin 132).

The fourth idea which I have found extremely useful during my analysis was the distinction which Benjamin makes between a healthy relationship between two subjects as opposed to the

domineering relationship between a subject and an object. Benjamin explains that in a positive relationship that is based on genuine connection, the partners remain individuals who exercise their assertion of their own subjecthood while also recognizing their partners (53). In contrast, in a relationship based on domination, "this essential tension" (Benjamin 53) between self-assertion and recognition that is supposed to be within the individual, is split in a way that one partner comes to exercise complete self-assertion without recognizing the other partner who in turn is made to give up their entitlement to subjecthood and become a person who only recognizes (Benjamin 55). Thus, a master/slave dichotomy is put into place (54) that can barely be called a relationship.

Another work of feminist psychoanalysis that I refer to is Nancy J. Chodorow's 1989 book, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. One aspect from her work that I utilize is her description of the many consequences of the fact that women are the primary caretakers of children. One such consequence is the ubiquitous nature of the ideal of the self-sacrificing mother—something that Benjamin has also emphasized. Accordingly, Chodorow argues that in "post-Freudian society . . . [the mother] is isolated with her children . . . [which leads her] to look to them for her own self-affirmation . . . [thus causing] an over-involvement in her children's lives (63). Because of this, later in life "most men and women retain towards their own mother [a] . . . naïve egoistic attitude [where] they take it for granted that the interests of mother and child are identical" (103).

Regarding female socialization, Chodorow also offers some crucial observations. For example, she notes how there is a tendency in the case of girls to idealize their fathers and men in general starting from the Oedipal crisis. She explains that this is due to the fact that a girl "does not receive the same kind of love from her mother as a boy does . . . [since] a mother, rather than confirming her daughter's oppositeness and specialness experiences her as one with herself" (Chodorow 72). What this leads to is that "a daughter turns to her father looking for this kind of

confirmation and a sense of separateness from her mother, and cares especially about being loved" (Chodorow 72). According to Chodorow, this prepares the groundwork for a woman's idealization of her father in particular, and men in general—an idealization due to which the girl is ready to overlook the faults and shortcomings of the father and later lover "as long as she feels loved" (72).

In connection to male socialization, Chodorow poignantly criticizes the way that the attainment of a male identity is closely linked to the definition of the masculine as that which is not feminine (Chodorow 51) and how this also involves the repression of those feelings [boys and men] experience as feminine: feelings of dependence, relational needs, emotions generally" (109-110). She is also concerned about the isolation of boys growing up, who are generally "on their own or participate in a single-generation world of age mates" without taking part in an "intergenerational world" (Chodorow 57) like girls do with their mothers, aunts and grandmothers.

Another key idea comes from her analysis of the role of intimate relationships in the age of industrial capitalism. According to Chodorow, one of the defining aspects of living in such a world is that intimate relationships become more essential to the well-being of the individual. She explains that this is due to the fact that the "neolocal nuclear family . . . [is] increasingly physically isolated" and that "[a]t the same time, the public world of work, consumption, and leisure leaves people increasingly starved for affect" (Chodorow 78).

The other two works are specialized on problems regarding male sexuality and identity but nonetheless comment of female developmental problems as well. In their 1993 book, *In a Time of Fallen Heroes: The Re-creation of Masculinity*, R. William Betcher and William S. Pollack comment on a wide variety of issues which I have found to be relevant to my research. One of such issues is that which can be called the creation of a madonna/whore binary in the male psyche which is created as one kind of solution by which the child tries to solve the Oedipal conflict of

looking at the mother as a prohibited sexual object (Betcher and Pollack 63). The invention of this binary consists in the splitting off of “erotic desires from romantic, tender feelings, with each directed at different women” (Betcher and Pollack 63) so that some women are seen as the loving, nurturing, and maternal kind towards whom one feels “great affection but no sexual interest” (Betcher and Pollack 63-4) while others are viewed as sexual objects towards whom one feels no real connection but finds intensely erotic as well as degrading (Betcher and Pollack 63-64).

Moreover, these two psychoanalysts also offer an illuminating dissection of the inner workings of shame in the mind of the masculine subject. Accordingly, they enumerate a number of examples where there is an intense emotion that the individual displays, masking the dominant feelings of shame that hides behind those emotions which are outwardly manifested. Thus, for example, “depression can be seen as a response to the injury caused the self by shame, contempt is a projection of our own shame onto others, and rage may a self-restorative attempt to expel unbearable feelings of shame” (Betcher and Pollack 126). They also point to certain kinds of addictions that function as an anesthetic to feelings of shame, like “gambling, . . . womanizing . . . overwork . . . [or] alcohol (Betcher and Pollack 126).

Their commentary on the male tendency to self-isolate is also note-worthy. They agree with Chodorow that boys are socialized toward defining their masculinity as that which is not feminine and, that thus, they see masculinity as an antithesis to those allegedly “feminine” attributes as “strong feelings, dependency, and openness” (Betcher and Pollack 38). As a consequence, they explain, men tend to close themselves off from women “to reassure themselves of their identity (‘not female’) and [also] to protect themselves against ever being left again” (Betcher and Pollack 39) by their mothers when they were little—something which Betcher and Pollack see as a “societally enforced separation from the most cherished, admired, and loved

person" (38) in their lives and, thus a traumatic moment that "forever casts a shadow on their relationships" (39).

Finally, their examination of the confusion of boys and men regarding the difference between aggression and self-assertion must also be mentioned. They indicate how "[l]ittle boys may engage in power struggles or violent and aggressive activities as a distorted form of asserting their sense of self" (Betcher and Pollack 130) and how this replicates itself in adulthood, when men find it hard to put a stop to aggressive behavior because they fear that it will lead to the loss of the self-assertion. What this means is that many men "would rather have angry, hurtful control struggles that alienate them from other men and women than to risk the shame of passivity" (Betcher and Pollack 130).

The fourth work on which I base my analysis of Inge's plays on is a book authored by Stephen Frosh entitled *Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis* (1994). One crucial idea from this book is how throughout history as well as during the development of psychoanalytic theory, femininity has been used as a blank canvas without any essence of its own on which "male fantasies" as well as male "anxieties" (Frosh 89) could be projected on. In practice, this can mean "denigration; but sometimes, as part of the same movement of projection, it means engaging in an equally imaginary idealisation" (Frosh 89). It is easy to see how this is connected to the madonna/whore binary outlined by Betcher and Pollack and indeed, Frosh does make this connection, although he links this binary not to the Oedipus complex, but rather to male sexual socialization in connection with intimacy: "the madonna/whore division . . . parcels out the safe sphere of nurture from the demonic sphere of the erotic" (113).

The theorizing of Frosh about the act of looking was also put to use. He contends that the "act of looking objectifies the other, places it outside the self and holds power over it through

negation of its inner life" (Frosh 29). What this means is that the onlooker assumes a position of power (Frosh 30) through which he objectifies the other, negating its likeness to the onlooker while denying its subjecthood and placing whatever label or categorization he finds suitable on it. Frosh observes that while in Lacanian thought "it is when the infant catches sight of her or himself in the mirror that the whole activity and structure of the ego are cranked into operation" (29), the act of looking can also have a distancing, alienating or maybe even hostile effect—something that I found relevant when it comes to Inge's work.

A third idea Frosh focuses on is the vital distinction that is to be made between the penis as an organ and the phallus as a symbol of power. Frosh believes that a mistake that many men make is equating the two, because this false idea "sets up an unattainable fantasy of power for men, so that men's actual and irrevocable experience of not being able to 'attain the phallus' leads them to experience themselves as lacking and empty" (98). This mistake is what Frosh terms as "[t]he myth of masculinity" (99), which says that men are inherently powerful merely because of their anatomy. When met with reality, however, this myth crumbles and produces a fragile kind of masculinity and an idea of dominance that is premised "on a desperate denial of inner emptiness" (Frosh 98). In such a situation, men are left with nothing else but "a fragile armour of masculinity, kept in place by repression of emotion, desire and intimate connection with others" (Frosh 114).

There are two additional, psychoanalytical ideas that I borrow that are not from these five authors quoted above but are nonetheless highly important in terms of my own work. One of them is an idea from Freud, more specifically, from his 1899 study, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this work, Freud ventures into the field of literary criticism when he considers how Sophocles' Athenian tragedy, *Oedipus Rex* can be viewed as the textual unconscious of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (282). He justifies his argument by pointing out that while Oedipus did kill his father and did have

sex with his mother, in the case of Hamlet these wishes remained in the main character's unconscious. In this way, Freud contends that "the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind" (282).

The theoretical concept I close this literature review with comes from the Scottish psychoanalyst, Ronald Fairbarn, but is explained by the British psychologist, Harry Guntrip in his 1961 book, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction: The Developing Synthesis of Psychodynamic Theory*. In particular, I borrow two concepts relating to psychological development: the concepts of "infantile dependence" and "mature dependence". Guntrip elaborates that "*infantile dependence* . . . is characterized by a persistence of both *primary identification* (the emotional state of the infant in the womb) and the *oral incorporative or 'taking in' attitudes* (contributed by breastfeeding) as the infant's chief means of object-relationship after birth" (291). On the other hand, Guntrip continues, "[*m*]*ature dependence* is characterized by full differentiation of ego and object . . . and therewith a capacity for valuing the object for its own sake and for giving as well as receiving" (291). In more simple terms, infantile dependence means complete dependence on the object (mother) with an attitude that is purely consisted of taking and of receiving. By contrast, mature dependence is a two-way relationship where the ego stands alone as an individual but is nonetheless capable of making a connection with the other without reducing it or taking advantage of it according to its own needs. Guntrip accentuates that mature dependence does by no means entail "an independence of needs for other persons" but it simply means that "the mature person . . . does not collapse when he has to stand alone" (293).

3. "Some Things Should Never Grow Old":

Idealization and Vicarious Pleasure in *Come Back, Little Sheba* (1950)

"Psychoanalysis seems to me to be the great learning experience that the Twentieth Century can provide. . . . [A]ll writers who have undergone analysis have been grateful for its broadening influence upon their insight" (Freeman 173-74)—William Inge told an interviewer in 1966, when asked about his thoughts and experiences regarding psychoanalysis. This was not the first time, however, that Inge had publicly commented on how psychoanalysis has been important to him as a writer or, as a matter of fact, as someone undergoing psychoanalytic treatment. In his foreword to the 1958 volume of his four major plays—*Come Back, Little Sheba*; *Picnic*; *Bus Stop*; and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*—works which have made him the most successful American dramatist of the 1950s (Bryer and Hartig, "Introduction"), Inge relates how he first began to get psychoanalyzed following the success of his first major hit, *Come Back, Little Sheba* (v). Illustrating the way in which psychoanalytic theory was crucial to Inge as a writer, R. Baird Shuman, one of Inge's biographers describes how Inge even "had several psychiatrists read [*Come Back, Little Sheba*] before its production" (30) and got their professional opinion regarding the dream sequences, which they found to be psychologically sound (30).

It does not come as much of a surprise then that William Inge's work lends itself to psychoanalytic readings particularly well, and the way that critics have resorted to psychoanalytic concepts to understand his plays only attests to this claim (see Shuman, Johnson, Voss). There have been no systematic, psychoanalytical readings of his plays, however, and thus, one of my aims with these chapters is to try to contribute to the filling of this gap in Inge criticism.

One of the central characters of *Come Back, Little Sheba* is Doc Delaney. A middle-aged ex-alcoholic, he spends his days around the house and in his nearby office where he works as a

chiropractor. His commitment to staying sober is apparent from his involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous and the short prayer he recites every morning: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom always to tell the difference” (Inge 9). He and his wife, Lola, do not have children since Lola’s miscarriage some twenty years ago has left her sexually sterile. It is no wonder then that their young boarder, Marie, a 19-year-old college student, inevitably reminds them of the child they could have had and the different lives they could have led. As Lola puts it: “If we’d had the baby, she’d be a young girl now . . . and she could be going to college—like Marie” (Inge 33).

Doc’s major psychological conflict is his idealization of Marie. Once this ideal crumbles, he relapses and starts drinking again. What we must conclude then is that this idealization has deep psychological roots. One of the ways that Doc’s fascination with Marie can be explained is to see it, as Betcher and Pollack describe it, as the splitting off of “erotic desires from romantic, tender feelings, with each directed at different women” (63) which develops as one kind of solution to the Oedipal crisis (63). Thus, the individual creates in his fantasy a madonna/whore binary: some women are seen as the loving, nurturing, and maternal kind towards whom one feels “great affection but no sexual interest” (Betcher and Pollack 63-4) and those whom one feels no real connection to but finds intensely erotic as well as degrading (Betcher and Pollack 63-64). Frosh describes a similar splitting, though he links it more generally to male socialization regarding intimacy: “the madonna/whore division . . . parcels out the safe sphere of nurture from the demonic sphere of the erotic” (Frosh 113). It is precisely this kind of splitting that I see as the key to Doc’s character development, specifically when it comes to his gender role transformations.

Doc wants to believe that Marie is an innocent, young woman who is going to college to become an artist. Soon, however, he has to realize that the reality is quite different: even though

she is soon to marry, Marie is sexually active and the man she spends most of her time with is not even her fiancé, but a young, boisterous athlete called Turk. Inge suggests that this will be the major conflict for Doc right at the very beginning of the first scene, with skillful subtlety. Doc is the first to arrive on the scene, and in his preparations for breakfast, Inge already upsets gender roles by having Doc do activities traditionally assigned to the housewife: "*He lights stove . . . fills dishpan . . . tucks towel in vest for apron*" (Inge 5). Once Marie arrives, she mentions that she needs to return some books to the library to which Doc replies: "Yes, you want to study hard, Marie, learn to be a fine artist some day. Paint lots of beautiful pictures. I remember a picture my mother had . . . of a cathedral in a sunset . . . Made you feel religious just to look at it" (Inge 6). A number of things are happening here: one cannot help but notice Doc appropriating Marie's inner motivations to himself, as if he knew perfectly well what was going on in her head. It is an idealization done through projection onto a woman of whom Doc has little information, especially when it comes to her inner life. According to Frosh, femininity has always been "constructed to offer a space which can be filled by projected male fantasies" (89) and Doc participates in this tradition of appropriating the feminine when he conceives of an idea and prescribes it to Marie.

The ideal of Marie has connotations for Doc which are clearly religious, but also, what is more important from a psychoanalytic point of view, are connected to his mother. Doc's close relationship to his mother is noted at the end of "Act Two: Scene One" (Inge 48), and if we are to believe Chodorow's claim that "most men and women retain towards their own mother [a] . . . naïve egoistic attitude [where] they take it for granted that the interests of mother and child are identical" (103), we find an explanation for Doc's projection and prescription of his own wishes onto Marie. Marie is similar to mother; therefore she must want what I find most beautiful and honorable—this is Doc's thought process.

This already foreshadows the conflict that will be delineated in more explicit ways later in the play. But this is not all. The terror of reality, that which Doc fears the most (the erotic possibilities of Marie) already appears in Marie's response to Doc's reminiscences quoted above, where she corrects him:

> MARIE. These books aren't for art, they're for biology. I have an exam.
>
> DOC. Biology? Why do they make you take biology? (Inge 6)

Biology, not art; a sexually active Marie, and not pure, innocent beauty—this is the reality-fantasy opposition that Inge carefully foreshadows in such simple pieces of dialogue.

Regarding Doc's gender role, which is already unorthodox for the era—he is the one to get up and prepare breakfast—we can agree with Jeff Johnson that this scene, for Doc at least, "takes on the character of a date" (51) when he says: "sit here and I'll serve you your breakfast now, Marie, and we can eat it together, the two us" (6). Here, because of his idealization of Marie, he has come to assume the role of the platonic, courtly lover—another displacement of gender roles. Since Doc is married and from the point view of all the other characters, is no more than an attentive, gentlemanly landlord to Marie, this role which throughout the play Doc secretly assumes is both socially and culturally subversive—his psychological idealization overwrites his actual, official role to which he must abide by.

Another crucial part of the play that puts Doc into a gender role that is conflicting are the scenes in which he shows his strong disapproval of and contempt for Turk, Marie's temporary, premarital boyfriend. Having to acknowledge Marie's relationship to Turk but being in denial about the terrifying possibility that that relationship might have a sexual dimension, Doc takes on

the part of the protective father. It is a role that is conflicting for him because—although he has the protective feelings of a father—he has none of the right or the authority to intervene, nor can he allow himself to give expression to these feelings due to the obvious social constraints (he is not Marie's actual father). All he can do is to scold his wife Lola about what he sees as her encouragement of the Marie-Turk affair.

We must stress however, that his objections against this relationship between the two students never comes to affect his idealization of Marie—until that idealization crumbles, that is. In one scene, for example, when he expresses his dislike for Marie doing a drawing of a half-naked Turk in their living room for one of her classes and Lola suggests to him that he should tell Marie about it if he thinks it is inappropriate, his reply is: "No, Baby. I couldn't do that" (Inge 26) and immediately after, he adds: "Besides, it's not her fault. If those college people make her do drawings like that, I suppose she has to do them" (Inge 26) not ready to acknowledge the possibility that Marie could do something willingly that he finds improper. His denial is unsustainable however, and Inge relies on this to build tension, ending "Act One: Scene One" with Doc's harshest line to Lola yet: "*(Very angrily)* All right, but if anything happens to the girl I'll never forgive you", a line that is followed by the stage directions: "DOC *goes upstairs.* TURK *then grabs* MARIE, *kisses her passionately*", insinuating that the conflict is only to tighten as the plot progresses.

There is one character in the play who, at one point, had occupied a similar gender role that Doc holds himself to. It is Lola's father. An unseen character, his authority and influence looms over the play as if it was a force coming up every now and then from the depths of the play's unconscious. He is someone who has fulfilled what Doc merely has threatened to do, but to a more severe extent: he has disowned his own daughter, never forgiving her early marriage to Doc, a

marriage that was done out of necessity after Lola had fallen pregnant. What is crucial for us in order to fully grasp the parallels between Doc and Lola's father is to mention Lola's upbringing. A high school Beauty Queen, Lola was never allowed to have proper relationships with boys. Lola reminisces over how she wasn't "let . . . [to] go out after supper for a whole month" (Inge 14) because her father caught her once holding hands with a boy. "Just because I was pretty. He was afraid all the boys would get the wrong idea—*you* know" (Inge 14), she tells Marie. We can see now, how the prudishness and strictness of Lola's father mirrors Doc's fear of the erotic and fear for Marie's safety and purity, the difference being that one patriarchal figure can enforce his authority while the other is powerless. This is a device that we can call "paralleling" and it is one of Inge's most important dramatic techniques alongside, as we shall later see, "contrasting".

But Doc can only handle his powerlessness for so long, and he can only deny the reality of Marie's sexuality up to a certain point. "Act Two: Scene One" is where his ideal collapses and his disappointment and the subsequent shame becomes so unbearable that he has to dull himself to these feelings the only way he knows how: through alcohol. In the stage directions, Inge writes: "*He picks . . . up* [Marie's scarf] . . . *and fondles it. Then there is the sound of* TURK'S *laughter . . .* [which] *sounds like the laugh of a sated Bacchus. . . . The lyrical grace, the spiritual ideal of Ave Maria is shattered.*" (*Sheba* 45). Bacchus and Ave Maria—this is the sexuality-innocence binary that we have previously mentioned. After this, Doc steals the whiskey bottle from a cabinet and leaves, only returning in "Act Two: Scene Three" around "*5:30 the next morning*" (Inge 55).

The drunken scene where Doc confronts his wife, Lola, is the most intense scene from all of Inge's major plays. It is a powerful scene in large part because it goes against everything that we have come to learn about Doc Delaney. But it is the behavior of a diseased individual that we are witnessing here—Inge makes that perfectly clear, from the way the situation is assessed and

handled by the Alcoholics Anonymous members who arrive on the scene. Describing their attitude, Inge notes in the stage directions: "*They have developed the surgeon's objectivity*" (*Sheba* 59). Edward W. Gondolf talks about the "'disease' aspect . . . of alcohol abuse . . . responsible for cravings and addiction with impulsive and aggressive behaviors" (279) that seems to support this. But even if we are talking about such a condition, it cannot be denied that Doc's behavior in this scene does reflect at least some of his repressed feelings, however exaggerated and out of character they may seem. It will be with this assumption in mind that this scene will be analyzed.

During this confrontation what we get is the other side of the madonna/whore opposition. In Doc's male fantasy, if the ideal of blissful innocence is not true, then it is the devalued, the degraded that must take its place. And so, he verbally abuses his wife with such sentences as: "You and Marie are both a couple of sluts" and "My mother didn't buy those dishes for whores to eat off of." It is interesting to see, how even in such a terrible state, the figure of the mother as a reference point for purity and morality is still very much present, the image of his mother still upholding the madonna ideal, while the other female figures shift to the other side. His attacks are also an assault on gender roles that, in his mind, have been subverted for the worse: "What are you good for? You can't even get up in the morning and cook my breakfast" (Inge 57). His misogynistic insult: "you two-ton old heifer", makes explicit Lola's "failure" as a housewife who has not been able to bear any children.

While it is only Lola's gender roles that are explicitly brought up in this scene, it is in no way the case that Doc's conflicted feelings regarding masculinity do not enter into it. In this scene, he finally feels powerful, as someone taking charge, which according to Betcher and Pollack, often happens when men are lacking "a more confident feeling of authority and express their darker side: they boss, they devalue in order to feel superior, and they abuse and hurt" (117). It is not genuine

authority—it is power without legitimation. But I would argue that his outburst is more complex than that, for it also has to do a lot with shame: he has built an ideal and has been deceiving himself until that ideal collapsed, leaving his tender feelings and vulnerabilities exposed and mocked. The death of the ideal is a direct attack on his masculinity, and he must rescue it by projecting his own shame onto others, which typically takes the form of contempt; by trying to purge himself of heavy feelings of shame—usually expressed through rage (Betcher and Pollack 125); and by attempting to rescue his pride—frequently channeled through violence (Betcher and Pollack 130). All this hurt is expressed in this drunken frenzy, but it is stopped even before the help which Lola asked for on the telephone arrives. And what stops it is a loving memory that is powerful enough to bring him back to his senses. It is brought up by Lola: "You said I was the prettiest girl you ever saw. Remember, Doc!" (Inge 58).

Since the meaning of the ending scene can only be considered with a better understanding of Lola Delaney, we now turn towards a consideration of her character and gender-role development. We will also incorporate into this analysis a brief look at the gender roles of the secondary characters, particularly that of Marie and Turk.

The title of the play encapsulates Lola's major psychological conflict: Little Sheba, a small, furry dog which has somehow disappeared from the home of the Delaney's, symbolizes Lola's lost youth—that time when she was as beautiful as Marie, and had intense experiences like that of falling in love with Doc. The naming is appropriate: in the Biblical account, the Queen of Sheba is "a woman of materialism, in love with wealth" (Abdulaali) similarly to the way that Lola is in love with her lost youth. The most obvious way that this manifests itself is, of course, in Lola's calling for Little Sheba and reminiscing about her with Doc, who actually tries to help her come to terms with the dog's disappearance, encouraging a mature acknowledgment and acceptance of

its loss—something Lola is yet to learn. Thus, Doc somberly accepts Sheba's disappearance without denying Lola's feelings of loss: "Some things should never grow old. That's what it amounts to, I guess" (Inge 8). Doc and Lola then complement each other: where Doc is in denial regarding Marie's sexuality, Lola understands it; and where Lola cannot accept the disappearance of Little Sheba along with the vanishing of her youth, Doc realizes that nothing can be done about those things—that one has to move on.

However, what I will argue for in this section is that this wish is expressed in another major way too, through a psychological phenomenon which Benjamin calls "vicarious pleasure" (78). It is this process that presents itself more frequently in Lola's behavior and therefore, this is the psychological drive that I will mostly focus on. In addition, Lola's need for connection will also be discussed, since it can be seen as a motivator for her seeking pleasure through the experiences of others.

According to Benjamin, vicarious pleasure-seeking is a psychological phenomenon that can be traced back to the differentiation phase—that phase of development when the individual starts to establish a self that is conscious of its separateness from other people (12). During this process, "[t]he girl's sense of self is shaped by the realization that her mother's source of power resides in her self-sacrifice" (79). Because she fears that any kind of self-assertion would somehow hurt her mother—who is "not only an object of love but also a mainstay of identity" (Benjamin 79)—the girl identifies with her mother to the point where she is "unable to distinguish what she wants from what mother wants" (Benjamin 79). Later in life, because of "their early identificatory relationship to their mother", women may reenact "the vicarious pleasure of the self-sacrificing mother" (Benjamin 79), thus creating a kind of vicious cycle where vicarious pleasure-seeking is passed down from one generation onto another (Benjamin 79-80). In this way, Benjamin explains,

women may be blocked from playing the role of the subject, the role of the one who enjoys and desires (82).

A few remarks on the psychological need for connection, particularly in women, is also needed. According to Chodorow, women define themselves "in relation and connection to other people" more than men (45) and generally "have a more complex set of relational needs . . . [including] primary relationships to women as well as to men" (77). Betcher and Pollack agree and point out how "women's center of gravity lies between themselves and other people" (45). They specify that that does not mean that women measure themselves depending on the opinions of others, but rather that their sense of self is valued "in terms of the quality of their transactions with intimate others" (45-46).

With these two theoretical considerations, we can now begin to look at the different gender roles that Lola occupies or comes into conflict with. The most obvious clash is that between Lola's need for connection and self-expression and her role as a housewife. Thirteen years preceding the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), in the character of Lola Delaney, Inge had already dramatized the plight of the unhappy housewife, isolated in her home, stifled by mundane, domestic responsibilities and locked away from the possibility of any kind of self-fulfillment. The scenes that illustrate Lola's incompatibility with this role the best, are the scenes where she is left on her own and seeks interaction with anyone she can come into contact with: the postman, the milkman and the neighbor, Mrs. Coffman.

"*The sight of the dishes on the drainboard depresses her. Clearly she is bored to death*." Inge writes in the stage directions, once Lola is left alone. As soon as the postman arrives, she invites him in for a glass of water, but for fear that the interaction will be cut short, she overshares to make the postman stay. Clearly, the amount of information—stories about Doc's alcoholism

and daily habits—is much more than the postman is comfortable with. What we can see in this oversharing is Lola trying to invite real conversation—an attempt that, for her, fails almost every time with each character in the play: Doc is emotionally unavailable, Marie is too busy, Turk and Bruce too enthralled with Marie, leaving Lola unable to satisfy those complex "relational needs" (77) that Chodorow identified when discussing feminine personality.

Then there comes Mrs. Coffman, a stark contrast to Lola. Mrs. Coffman is the archetypal housewife who lives by the motto: "Being busy is being happy" (Inge 19). The mother of seven children, she has no time to stand around talking to the neighbor. As far as the status quo of the era goes, the situation is clear: Mrs. Coffman is the norm, Lola Delaney the deviant and Inge makes this perfectly clear when he has the milkman address the two women in very different ways, calling the neighbor by the family name of her husband (Mrs. Coffman) while he simply greets Lola as "lady" (Inge 19).

Lola's interaction with the milkman is similar to the dialogue between her and the postman but with a slight difference. The milkman too is uncomfortable around Lola, and seems annoyed at how she always (most likely purposefully) forgets to check the items she wants delivered and in turn, has to invite him in. Lola's advances are this time successful, however, as one of her compliments gets the milkman to talk about his physique. Lola even feels his muscles and marvels at them—a clear transgression of the boundaries of the formal client-supplier relationship.

Once she is left alone again, Lola turns to the radio to provide her company. In her wonderfully insightful essay entitled "*Come Back, Little Sheba* and Mass Culture", Jane Courant rightfully notes how "[l]ong before others looked to mass culture as the subject of creative exploration, Inge incorporated its insidious messages into his art" (Courant, "Media"). And indeed, we can see an example of this where he inserts a speech from a radio program called "Taboo" to

make a statement about the sexual repression of the early 1950s, where even one's longings and desires have a specific timeslot when they can be entertained and even then, one is painfully reminded of how taboo those desires are. And so the announcer goes: "It's Ta-boo, radio listeners, your fifteen minutes of temp*ta*tion. Won't you leave behind your routine, the dull cares that make up your day-to-day existence . . . and follow me where pagan spirits hold sway . . . But remember, it's TABOOOOOOOOOOOO! (Inge 22). Of course, the play itself is all about taboos: Doc's yearnings for Marie, Lola's vicarious pleasures and admiration of young men, Marie's premarital sexual life are all socially unacceptable in the decade in which the play is set and the words of the announcer show that Inge has no illusions whatsoever about that.

Right after the scene where Lola listens to the radio, Turk and Marie arrive to the house and ask for Lola's permission to turn her living room into an art studio. Turk, the muscular athlete strips half-naked and poses for Marie to be drawn for her life class. But first, Turk needs something resembling a javelin—an obvious phallic symbol. Lola suggests that he uses a broom for his pose and goes out to the kitchen to get it. Turk follows, gets the broom from her and resumes his pose. As Marie sketches Turk and orders him around, Lola too begins to peer at him closely to the point where Turk "*becomes a little self-conscious and breaks* [his] *pose* . . . [which, in turn] *also breaks* LOLA'S *concentration* (Inge 24).

What is happening here is a classic example of Inge's gender reversals: instead of the objectification of the female body, it is the masculine physique that is framed by the female subjects to be looked at, to be judged and to be studied. According to Frosh, the act of looking at an object is never an innocent activity, since it "objectifies the other, places it outside the self and holds power over it through the negation of its inner life" (29). If in this scene, Maria and Lola are depicted as the ones occupying a position of power, then it could be said that Turk, on the other

hand is made to feel powerless, not only through the fact that he is the object who is looked at but also through Inge's careful deconstruction of his masculinity, which is represented through his pose of throwing a broom, a laughable replacement for the javelin.

It is important to look at this scene with greater scrutiny. Firstly, it is Lola who goes out to the kitchen to get the broom for Turk so that he can perfect his masculine pose. The phallic symbol, then, is discovered and given to Turk by a woman. Secondly, while posing, Turk is not only instructed how to pose, but is even bossed around and infantilized when Marie orders him to "get back in [his] corner" (Inge 25). Thirdly, in the case of Turk, the possession of the phallus with all its masculine authority and glory is revealed to be nothing but a pose behind which an insecure masculine identity resides. This is the most apparent when Lola, taking full advantage of the power she has as the onlooker "*peers* [at Turk] *so closely,* [that] *he becomes a little self-conscious and breaks pose* . . . [which] *also breaks* LOLA'S *concentration*" (Inge 24). Here, it can be argued that Turk's insecurity stems from that which Frosh identifies as men's hidden feelings of lack and emptiness, explained by the fact they can never really possess the phallus but merely long for it in an "unattainable fantasy of power" (98). This is because the phallus, with all its associations of masculine authority and power cannot actually be equated with the penis, since—as Frosh notes—"the phallus is a symbol rather than a substance . . . [meaning that] the real organ cannot match the imaginary one" (99). Once the pose is broken, however, so is Lola's power over Turk—the power of the observer over the observed.

If Inge subverted gender roles by showing that the objectification of the other is not reserved for men but that it can also be done by women to men, only a few lines later he criticizes the way in which even this process of objectification is contaminated by a double standard. This is pointed out by Lola during a conversation with Doc:

LOLA. You know what Marie said, Doc? She said that the women pose naked, but the men don't.

DOC. Why, of course, honey.

LOLA. Why is that?

DOC. *(Stumped)* Well . . .

LOLA. If it's all right for a woman it oughta be for a man. But the man always keeps covered. That's what she said.

DOC. Well, that's the way it should be, honey. A man, after all, is a man, and he . . . well, he has to protect himself.

LOLA. And a woman doesn't?

DOC. It's different, honey (Inge 26-7).

What Inge points out is not only what we have noted before in relation to Turk—that masculine identity is inherently fragile because of the unattainable status of the phallus—but that looking at and, thus holding power over the female body has become so deeply engrained within the culture that is now taken for granted. Moreover, its origins can be traced back to what Frosh describes as a masculinist ideology in which "the body is what holds [men] back, keeps [men] in the muddle of nature; the body is what is *par excellence* feminine, to be seen and owned, but not to be intrinsic to [men]" (103).

The drawing scene might be one of the very few instances where Lola is, for a brief moment, allowed to play the role of the subject. Otherwise, the only thing left for her to do is to rely on mediated pleasures. The radio is one example of such pleasures that we have already

mentioned. But the one source of comfort that is even more readily available for Lola is that which she has already experienced—her past, and the past that she and Doc share together. In one scene when she is alone with Doc, Lola brings up memories of their courtship, undoubtedly colored by nostalgia for a time when they were both young: “The trees were so heavy and green and the air smelled so sweet. Remember the walks we used to take, down to the old chapel, where it was so quiet and still?” (Inge 32). One cannot help but notice the Wordsworthian quality in her words and in her next line, where she describes the moment of their engagement, it is as if her words were taken out of the script of a classic mid-century Hollywood romance: “Then for the first time you grabbed me and kissed me. Tears came to your eyes, Doc, and you said you’d love me forever and ever. Remember? You said . . . if I didn’t marry you, you wanted to die (Inge 32). From Doc’s response: “Baby, you’ve got to forget those things. That was twenty years ago” (Inge 32) it becomes clear that Doc does not approve of Lola’s reminisces because they are inappropriate for her age and that he himself is uncomfortable with them, possibly because they reflect badly on his masculinity and also bring up painful memories, such as him being forced to drop out of pre-medical courses or him becoming an alcoholic.

Another vicarious pleasure that Lola engages in is watching Turk and Marie being romantic with each other. It is a revitalization of the self-sacrificing maternal attitude that Benjamin identifies and links to female masochism (78), while at the same time, also reflecting the attitude of the avid consumer: someone whose reality is framed and informed by the products of mass media, a media that is also responsible for what Gilbert Seldes calls “the glorification of youth” (241). And so, in explaining to Doc why she enjoys spying on Marie and Turk when the two are kissing, she describes it in a way as if there was no considerable difference between love in real life and love as portrayed in the movies: “You watch young people make love in the movies, don’t

you, Doc? . . . They're both so young and pretty. Why shouldn't I watch them?" . . . I think it's one of the nicest things I know" (Inge 38).

Yet, what Lola sees is only one small fraction of Marie and Turk's relationship—a relationship that is everything but ideal. The most striking example of this is when the two are left alone in the living room of the Delaney's and argue about the connection between intimacy and sex. This is an important scene to examine because it reflects on a gender role dynamic that, again, puts different kinds of pressures on both sexes. Marie is a soon-to-be-engaged, artsy college student, while Turk is a promising young athlete at the same college. According to this, they have to abide by a different set of expectations. To be fair, it is mostly Marie who has to be more considerate about how she is perceived while Turk seems to have zero responsibilities. The only thing perhaps that Turk should keep in mind is how his sexual life affects him being in training, but even this he refuses to acknowledge, again taking up a pose of masculine omnipotence regarding his sexual as well as his athletic prowess: "I can throw that old javelin any old time, *any* old time" (Inge 41)—he tells Marie when trying to talk her into having sex.

In her 1992 study on female socialization during the 1950s, *Young, White, and Miserable*, Wini Breines notes how during this period "[i]t was the girl's work to control the sexual interaction in order to maintain her reputation" (11). During their interaction near the end of "Act One" we can see Marie doing exactly just that when she tells Turk to inhibit his advances: "I think we should make it a rule, every once in a while, just to sit and talk" (Inge 40) or when she specifies that what she means is that "Two people should have something to talk about, like politics or psychology or religion" (Inge 40). Turk mocks her efforts to elevate the relationship to something else than it clearly is—one based on bodily attraction—and finally makes her admit that what she really wants from Turk is the same thing that Turk wants from her. Coming to the realization that they may not

have this opportunity ever again, they decide to have sex later during the night, once Doc and Lola are asleep.

What makes this scene particularly interesting is Marie's efforts to turn the relationship into something that is more socially acceptable. She does this, not so much because she wants to put on a certain image to the outside world, but because she has internalized societal expectations regarding adolescent relationships: that the partners should have something to talk about with each other and not allow lovemaking to be the basis of their relationship. She feels guilty for not doing anything else outside of the erotic while she is with Turk, and thus she wants to put on a façade, meant not so much for other people as for herself. Once she realizes that such a façade does not have much use in this particular situation, she gives it up and utters the following sentence together with Turk: "Tonight will never come again" (Inge 42).

Of course, there are appearances one can leave behind and face no serious consequences—like in the scene mentioned above—and then there are pretenses that the individual, and in the context of the 1950s, the female individual in particular, has to keep up if she is to avoid repercussions. Likewise, Marie can allow herself to have no pretenses when she is alone with Turk, but she feels the need to play the part of the decent girl waiting to be married when her future fiancé, Bruce, visits her at the house of the Delaney's: "Come and see my room, Bruce. I've fixed it up just darling. And I've got your picture in the prettiest frame, right on my dresser" (Inge 52). What Inge is portraying here is not deviant behavior but, on the contrary, the norm that must be hidden. As Breines contends: [d]issemblance, even hypocrisy, were coping strategies for girls engaged in experimentation and rulebreaking. The numerous references to a 'double life' and 'keeping up appearances' reveal much about how life was lived by young women in this period" (90). It is quite amusing, however, that despite the fact that both Marie and Bruce agreed that, in

Marie's words "we weren't going to sit around lonely just because we were separated" (Inge 51), they still feel the need to act as if that agreement never happened.

The ending of *Come Back, Little Sheba* is the most somber scene in tone when compared to the finales of Inge's other major plays. Doc, sober again, returns from City Hospital where he has dried out after his drinking binge. Marie has moved out to marry Bruce, leaving Lola and Doc on their own. Lola, still traumatized by the time when Doc came home intoxicated, is nonetheless happy to see him. Doc, pained by seeing the hurt that he has caused his wife, breaks down in tears and asks for forgiveness while also admitting to his utter dependence on Marie's support. His repentance fills Lola with a "*new contentment*" (Inge 68) for being recognized and, in turn, she recognizes her own dependence on Doc too. This scene undoubtedly has a quality to it that is almost religious, with Marie occupying the role of the Virgin Mary and Doc the role of the sinner. Thus, in the stage directions, Inge writes: [Doc] "*loses control . . . gripping her arms, drilling his head into her bosom*" (*Sheba* 68) and when describing Marie's response, Inge notes: "*She becomes almost angelic in demeanor. Tenderly she places a soft hand on his head* (*Sheba* 68). Here, the idealized madonna image which Doc has previously projected onto Marie, is now transferred onto Lola.

Paradoxically, for all its religious aspects, what is dramatized here stems from a need for each other that could only be this intense precisely because it takes place in such a secularized and increasingly modernized world. According to Chodorow, one of the defining aspects of living in the age of industrial capitalism is that intimate relationships become more essential to the well-being of the individual. She explains that this is due to the fact that the "neolocal nuclear family . . . [is] increasingly physically isolated" and that "[a]t the same time, the public world of work,

consumption, and leisure leaves people increasingly starved for affect" (Chodorow 78). It is within this context that Lola and Doc recognize that all that they have is each other.

Typical of Inge, however, is the fact that the man always needs the woman more than the woman needs the man—Lola is ready to acknowledge her dependence on Doc only after he has admitted his own helplessness and asked for forgiveness. It is exactly this aspect of Inge's work which the drama critic, Robert Brustein so harshly criticized in his 1958 essay, appearing in *Harper's* magazine, entitled "The Men-Taming Women of William Inge". As he insists: "Once [the man] has confessed . . . [his] doubts, loneliness, and need . . . he loses his ogre quality and the woman is able to domesticate him without difficulty" (qtd. in Voss 181). But rather than reading this as a fault in Inge's work, one can see it as a merit too, an illustration that Inge's major plays are, for the most part, surprisingly accurate on a psychological level. Chodorow, for example, would certainly take the side of Inge, based on her observation that "several differences in female and male Oedipal experience . . . make women important on a basic emotional level to men . . . in a way that men are not important to women" (73).

Inge's plays are, of course, more complex than this and his endings do not function merely to point out the psychological assumption mentioned above. Accordingly, *Come Back, Little Sheba* does not simply end with the conclusion that Lola and Doc need each other and Doc perhaps need Lola even more, but instead, what is stressed in the very last scene is Lola's mature understanding that she must accept her current situation, however hard that may be. She articulates this insight when telling Doc about one of her recent dreams, featuring Little Sheba. In brief, the dream is about Lola and Marie going to the Olympics where they see Turk throwing the javelin. Soon, once Turk is disqualified by Lola's father, Doc takes his place, and throws the javelin so high that it stays in the air forever. Then, once the competition is over, Lola starts looking for Little Sheba.

Finding her dead in the middle of the field, “her curly white fur all smeared with mud” she tries to help Little Sheba but is stopped by Doc who tells her: “We can’t stay here, honey; we gotta go on. We gotta go on. (Inge 70).

The dream sequences make this play very inviting for those with an interest in psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, it is fruitful to look at it from this point of view: thus, we can argue that Turk being disqualified by Lola’s father is Lola’s superego rejecting her admiration of Turk and replacing it with admiration of Doc, just like when Doc transferred his idealization of Marie towards an idealization of Lola. Doc’s incredible achievement with the javelin, the phallic symbol, is Lola’s belief in Doc’s struggle and final victory over the strains of being an alcoholic and the death of Little Sheba is the end of Lola’s idealization of youth, including her enjoyment of vicarious pleasures that are meant to recapture the experience of that youth.

Focusing on the major points in the chapter, we can conclude with the observation that Inge undermines gender roles through psychological conflicts in the following ways: Doc’s idealization of Marie prompts him to assume the role of both a platonic lover and a strict father who is completely powerless, finally arriving at the role of a husband who sees his wife as his only salvation; Lola’s need for connection leads her to come into conflict with her role as a housewife, and her longing for youth can only be satisfied by her vicarious pleasure-seeking which involves taking up the role of the self-sacrificing mother; Marie has sex with Turk the day before welcoming her soon-to-be fiancé, Bruce, breaking the rule of premarital purity; and Turk’s masculinity is shown to be fragile through his insecurities while posing, and his authority is revealed to be precarious as Marie bosses him around.

From the list of examples, it becomes clear that Inge was in many ways ahead of his time, dramatizing certain social realities regarding sexuality and gender roles which would only move

to the center of public attention during the early 1960s. *Come Back, Little Sheba* was published and performed as early as 1950, but the themes it examines must have preoccupied Inge even earlier than that. In 1944, for example, while working as an entertainment critic for the *St. Louis Star-Times*, Inge wrote in a review of a film called *American Romance*: "When is the American wife going to be represented as something besides the passive, understanding woman, incapable of registering anything on her face but an insipid sweetness?" (qtd. in Courant). It is by writing *Come Back, Little Sheba*, that Inge seems to have answered his own question six years later when he created the character of Lola Delaney—sometimes lively, at other times depressed or afraid, but always complex and never one-dimensional. And he was to continue creating such three-dimensional characters even after the theatre-going public has lost its interest in him.

4. To "Look Real in the Moonlight"

Women's Desire and Male Rootlessness in *Picnic* (1953)

Inge's dislike of *Picnic*'s ending—the way that it was performed during its original Broadway run—is well-documented. Ralph F. Voss, the author of the definitive biography on Inge, *A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph* (1989), recounts the long debate that took place during rehearsals between Inge and Joshua Logan, the director who signed up to direct Inge's second major play (129). According to Logan, Inge "was afraid of being slick, of pandering to the public with a 'happy ending', so he kept writing [an] endlessly slow dimout [where] everything was negative" (277). Voss, however, is of the opinion that "[b]ecause of his own strong background in romantic comedy and musicals, Logan simply did not realize the degree of dedication that Inge felt towards realistic theater" (131), although he does concede that Logan can hardly be criticized for his instincts regarding public tastes and his insistence to follow those instincts (131). It was this production of *Picnic*, after all, with its modified, "happy ending" that has brought Inge the most critical acclaim as a dramatist, earning him both a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award. Inge could never forgive Logan, however, for making him change the ending (Voss 133), and with his publication of *Summer Brave* in 1962—a rewritten version of *Picnic* that also restored the play's ending as it was originally intended—he made his commitment to his initial vision perfectly clear, once and for all.

Whether the original ending would have made *Picnic* less or more successful, we will perhaps never know. Nevertheless, the text that we will be focusing on is the one that was produced in 1953, not only because of its significance in Broadway history, but also because *Picnic* is, in many respects, a superior play to *Summer Brave*. *Picnic*'s psychological and gender conflicts are

more acutely portrayed, the tensions more skillfully upheld and therefore it is this text that will help us point out Inge's psychological insights the best, and ultimately lead us to a richer interpretation.

The plot of *Picnic* is set on the back porches of two houses and on the backyard that they share together. One of the houses is occupied by Flo Owens, a middle-aged, single mother and her two daughters, Millie and Madge. They also have a boarder, Rosemary Sydney who is a schoolteacher, about the same age as Flo. In the other house lives Helen Potts, nearing sixty, with her elderly mother. Inge uses the old convention of a stranger coming to town to start the action of the play: Hal Carter has arrived at this unnamed, small Kansas town to reconnect with his old college friend, Alan, Madge's boyfriend, and to ask his help in finding a job and in settling down. The three characters that we will be mainly focusing on are Madge Owens, Rosemary Sydney, and Hal Carter. While the central character of *Picnic* is surely Madge Owens, in Rosemary Sydney, Inge has created one his most intriguing female characters. Therefore, an investigation of the dynamics of gender roles cannot be followed through without dedicating a considerable amount of attention to the complex character of Rosemary. Moreover, an analysis of the motivations and internal struggles of Hal Carter is necessary because he is the most vividly drawn male character in *Picnic* and also the one that comes closest to being the second protagonist of the play.

In practice, the analysis will follow the evolution of three psychological models and will trace how those models translate into the characters' relationship to gender roles. Thus, the argument to be made is that both Madge and Rosemary face a psychological crisis which is closely connected to desire, while for Hal, his internal struggle has to do more with his place as an individual within society. To be more specific, Madge escapes the position of the idealized, female object of desire to become an authentic subject who has desire, while Rosemary does just the

opposite, giving up her position as an autonomous subject—which is done through submission—only to be recognized as an object of desire. In the case of Hal, what is at stake is him leaving behind the position of the alienated, masculine subject and, in turn, becoming recognized as an integrated member of the community—an attempt that he fails by the end and must try again, this time with Madge by his side.

It is quite early in the play that we find out about Madge's status as the beautiful girl every boy in town wants to date. Like Marie in *Sheba*, she is on her way to becoming engaged to a man not unlike Bruce—Alan is the typical nice boy of the era: affluent, college educated, with refined manners and an influential father, he is the dream husband whom Madge's mother, Flo sees as everything a woman can ask for. It seems that Madge has certain doubts, however, like when she talks about being out of place among Alan's friends, who all come from upper-middle class backgrounds. In turn, she is scolded by her mother who tells her that "[a] pretty girl doesn't have long—just a few years" and that "[i]f she loses her chance then, she might as well throw all her prettiness away" (Inge, 81). What Flo is articulating here is a common belief of an age where, in the words of Elaine Tyler May, the idea that "[y]outhful attractiveness held the promise of conjugal bliss" (114) was widely accepted.

Madge's apprehensions, however, make more sense when we learn that it is not only the boys of the town that admire her primarily for her beauty. Alan himself, objectifies Madge and sees her as a possession, a status symbol even, almost similar to something like owning an expensive car. This is made quite explicit when Alan jokingly tells Madge: "I want to see if you look *real* in the moonlight" followed by the remark: "I don't care if you're real or not. You're the prettiest girl I ever saw" (Inge 101). Here, we can recall what Frosh says about objectification being the process by which the self "holds power over [the object] through the negation of its inner

life" (29). Despite her being really careful about how she looks and despite her long preparations to make herself attractive, we come to find that Madge actually hates this objectification. Perhaps the most compelling way that Inge reveals this is when Flo teases Madge about how much time she spends admiring herself in the mirror, to which Madge replies: "[i]t seems like—when I'm looking in the mirror that's the only way I can prove to myself I'm alive" (Inge 105).

Benjamin's theory regarding women's desire, partly based on the Eros and Psyche myth as told by Apuleius, perfectly describes what Madge is going through. Interpreting the character development of Psyche, Benjamin writes: "when she was universally adulated for her beauty, Psyche felt as if she were dead. It is only when she is freed from this idealization and objectification that Psyche can experience a true sexual awakening, first alone, and later in her desire to see and recognize her lover, Eros" (129). She specifies that while "[t]he idea that sexual desire arises in a state of aloneness . . . may seem a paradox . . . this state offers an opportunity to discover what is authentic in the self" (Benjamin 123). I argue that this is precisely the journey that Madge takes during the play, first discovering her authentic self in the solitude of her own room and finally finding genuine connection with Hal Carter. The rugged, young drifter of the 1950s, Hal Carter is a person who is as lost as Alan, Madge's soon-to-be fiancé is established, which is another good example of that technique of Inge's which we have previously identified as contrasting. If we see Alan as standing for the 1950s ideal of the dream husband and Hal as the nightmare of every mother wanting the best for her daughter, then it becomes quite easy to see how this contrast is socially subversive.

A recurring symbol in the play is the train whistling in the distance. Not unlike in Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Inge uses a vehicle to stand for some sort of promise, some sort of intangible desire. In the case of Madge, this desire is quite intangible at the beginning—it is a

signifier of something exciting, something different than what is currently mapped out for her. The way she puts it into words is quite humorous and reflects the world of a teenager, someone who does not yet know much about the world outside of her hometown: "I always wonder, maybe some wonderful person is getting off here . . . and [they] decide I'm just the person they're looking for an important job in the Espionage Department. *(She is carried away)* Or maybe he wants me for some great medical experiment that'll save the whole human race" (Inge 79). Again, if we consider the gender roles of the time, where being feminine was strongly associated with not having any kind of a career and the education of girls aimed at preparations for becoming a housewife (Halberstam, "Chapter 39"), we can see how Madge's daydreams—to be something great, to achieve something extraordinary, deviates from this pattern. To be fair, she does have a job at the local dime store, but both she and her mother see that as something temporary. We can also see that these fantasies do not have to do anything with her appearance—the thing almost everyone values in her the most—or her desire for a romantic partner for that matter.

The whistling train that does not signify anything specific, however, soon finds a signified—Hal Carter. The dancing scene in Picnic, besides providing Broadway audiences with their share of entertainment, is more meaningful that it first might seem. There are many ways to interpret it, and critics have done so. In our case, we will again reach for one of Jessica Benjamin's theories in connection to women's desire, more specifically, her theory about the intersubjective mode of desire. First, let us quote Inge's stage directions about how the dancing scene between Hal and Madge should look like: "*(Some distance apart, snapping their fingers to the rhythm, their bodies respond without touching. Then they dance slowly toward each other and* HAL *takes her in his arms. The dance has something of the nature of a primitive rite that would mate the two young people)*" (Inge 120).

Now let us compare this scene with what Benjamin says about the intersubjective mode of desire, a specific mode of women's sexuality that nonetheless can be experienced by men just the same: "the exchange of gestures conveying attunement . . . serves to focus women's pleasure . . . mak[ing] use of the space in-between that is created by shared feeling and discovery. The dance of mutual recognition, the meeting of separate selves, is the context for their desire" (Benjamin 130). What we have then in this dance scene is, indeed, a sort of mating that, again, in Benjamin's words, is a "desire [that] escapes the borders of the imperial phallus" (Benjamin 130). It is a meeting of two subjects in the intersubjective space without the object-subject binary that is inevitably bound up with the phallus as a symbol of desire (Benjamin 132). I argue that this is the scene when Madge's and Hal's desire for each other manifests itself for the first time and the fact that it is a dance based on mutuality and receptivity just goes to show how it also evades the construction of any kind of gender hierarchy.

Inge is not idealistic, however, and he complicates the relationship between Madge and Hal, showing them in a state of confusion, fear, and disarray after their implied sexual encounter during which Madge loses her virginity. Not only did they break the taboo regarding premarital sex, but they have also skipped the dating ritual, an essential institution of the age that worked as "a means of gaining privacy and intimacy before marriage" (May 112). And the fact that their betrayal of Alan—someone who is close to both of them—only dawns on them belatedly makes this scene expose the gap between social norms and reality even more poignantly than Marie's affair with Turk did in *Sheba*. Moreover, the way that this state of panic and shame characterizes the first erotic encounter—in the case of Madge, the loss of virginity—shows Inge's deep understanding of human sexuality and if anything, it places him ahead of his time.

The ending scene of *Picnic*, where Madge packs her things and follows the fugitive Hal to Tulsa to reunite with him, completes her psychological transformation, identified earlier in the chapter: the transformation from object of desire to authentic subject who has desire. Translated into gender roles, this evolution could be described as beginning with the position of the objectified beauty who has her life mapped out for her by social convention and tradition and moving towards a role where she follows her own desire and is ready to confront the hardships and dangers that will doubtlessly characterize her future. With not much money of her own and a lover who is a born troublemaker of whom she also does not know that much about, her prospects for the future are actually grimmer than many may have realized. But is it an ending that is realistic, despite Inge's objections against it during rehearsals?

If we look at it closely, we find that there is, in fact, psychological grounding for Madge's decision to follow Hal. Chodorow stresses the tendency of girls to idealize their fathers and men in general starting from the Oedipal crisis. She explains that this is due to the fact that a girl "does not receive the same kind of love from her mother as a boy does . . . [since] a mother, rather than confirming her daughter's oppositeness and specialness experiences her as one with herself" (Chodorow 72). What this leads to is that "a daughter turns to her father looking for this kind of confirmation and a sense of separateness from her mother, and cares especially about being loved" (Chodorow 72). According to Chodorow, this prepares the groundwork for a woman's idealization of her father in particular, and men in general—an idealization due to which the girl is ready to overlook the faults and shortcomings of the father and later lover "as long as she feels loved" (72). Examining Madge's family background, we find out that Madge did receive confirmation regarding her specialness from her father. In one scene, Flo, Madge's mother, tells her daughter: "You were the first born. Your father thought the sun rose and set in you. He used to carry you on

his shoulder for all the neighborhood to see" (Inge 83). We also learn that Madge misses her father greatly and that, as a consequence of her father not loving her sister, Millie, to the same extent when he was around, her mother has been trying to compensate Millie possibly by acting more affectionate towards her than towards Madge. Thus, the longing from Madge's part for a masculine kind of affection is intensified and it is possible to read this as contributing to her idealization of Hal, resulting in her decision to leave everything behind just so that she can be together with him.

An argument can be made that this ending is, in many ways, similar to the closing scene of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, in that the heroines final courageous act does by no means guarantee her future happiness. We might admire both Madge's and Nora's moral greatness—Madge's will to follow her desire and Nora's bravery to break out of her suffocating housewife role and search for something of her own—but we are nonetheless left in the dark in connection with the actual consequences of those actions. In *Picnic*, Inge even alludes to the possibility that Madge might as well repeat her mother's actions and marry a man who is altogether unfit to take up the challenges of fatherhood. Hal's attempts to fit into the community does fail, after all. But is that really an indication of his true character? And if not, what is it exactly that hinders his integration?

Psychologically, Hal's internal problem is turning from the lone, alienated male subject into a subject who can participate in an intersubjective space with others. To help us understand what is exactly at stake for Hal, we must look at what we find out about his life generally throughout the play. We know about his frustrations as a teenager, about him trying to run away from home by stealing someone's motorcycle. We know that he spent a year in reform school and that when he returned home, his mother, who was by that time living with her new boyfriend, resented his presence. About Hal's father, what we find out is that he was a drunkard, but that, despite all that, he still provided Hal with ideals about what it means to be a man. Hal recounts:

"He says, 'Son, there'll be times when the only thing you got to be proud of is the fact you're a man. So wear your boots so people can hear you comin', and keep your fists doubled up so they'll know you mean business when you get there" (Inge 111). What is implied in these reminiscences is an affectionate father figure trying to provide his son with a model for a positive male identity. The death of the father and the mother's refusal to pay for the funeral and her successful attempt to take away Hal's inheritance from him—a filling station—has left Hal with nothing but deluded dreams of becoming a Hollywood star—the outcome of which was yet another failure. Hal's story about the two women who have picked him up on the road and sexually took advantage of him and then robbed him of most of his possessions—something that took place before the events of the play—is another instance of Inge proving that the objectification of the male body by the desiring female gaze is possible just as much as the objectification of the female body by the male gaze.

At the beginning of the play then, Hal is in a position of alienation and rootlessness, with only unrealistic or vague ideas about what it means to be a functional male member of society. Looking at it from a psychological point of view, he is that which Betcher and Pollack describe as a fatherless male individual, one of those men who "feel deficient and father-hungry . . . [and] suppress it with a macho, false-self façade" (88-89). To put his condition into a larger context, we can also look at it from a sociological point of view, in which case his situation becomes even less uncommon. For example, K. A. Cuordileone describes the crisis of the mid-century American male as the condition of being a member of a "'mass society' in which the individual, unloosened from traditional social, kinship, or spiritual moorings, left rootless and adrift, became ever more overwhelmed by the impersonal, self-crushing forces of modernity" (98). Failing college, being

stripped of his inheritance, his father dying, his dreams of Hollywood falling into pieces, Hal's feeling of being lost is both because of personal and historical reasons.

His first step towards integration is doing different jobs around the yard for Mrs. Potts, a woman past middle age but all the livelier, who takes pity on him and offers him a big breakfast. The integration process then, begins with work. Hal, however, quickly oversteps this role and becomes more involved—playing the part of the protective male, he confronts Bomber, a tough kid of about sixteen who grab's Madge's arm when she refuses to promise him a date. Unfortunately, his heroism is not rewarded but, instead, he is faced with social stigma when Flo pigeonholes him as a "tramp" (Inge 79) even before knowing who he is. The breakthrough for him—the moment where it seems like he has finally gained acceptance—is when it is revealed that he is a friend of Alan's, back from their college days. This inspires optimism in Hal, as he meditates on the many different possibilities that now seem available to him. Typically of Inge, Hal's fantasies reflect an image of the successful man that is most likely inspired by Hollywood and Madison Avenue: "something in a nice office where I can wear a tie and have a sweet little secretary and talk over the telephone about enterprises and things" (Inge 94-95). What Alan can actually offer him is, by stark contrast, a job to work on an oil pipeline.

Hal is not particularly discouraged by this, however and his optimism extends beyond the hope for a job. He wants full integration, wants to become a participant in the town's social and cultural life: to listen to music and read many books like Millie; to join a Bible study group organized for young people, and of course, to go the town's big Labor Day picnic. It would not be right to call him naïve, however, for he is very much aware that he never fully mastered certain social norms and codes of behavior. There is a fear in Hal, that he counters with over-confidence. It is a fear of social determinism; the fear that he can never belong anywhere, that he is, by nature,

unfit for society. He confesses this fear to Alan multiple times, like telling him that he has never been to a picnic, and thus does not know how to behave at such an event: “I wasn’t brought up proper like *you*. I won’t know how to act around all these *women*” (Inge 101) or when he reminds Alan of how he was treated as a social outcast at college because of his inferior social background: “Those other snob bastards always watchin’ to see which fork I used” (Inge 94). For Hal, this fear is not only about belonging, however, but also about self-actualization and the American dream, one’s right to dream and to have those dreams fulfilled: “This is a free country, and I got just as much rights as the next fellow. Why can’t I get along?” (Inge 95). Here, Hal poses a question that resounds all throughout twentieth-century American drama: O’Neill’s James Tyrone, Miller’s Willy Loman, or Williams’ Chance Wayne are only a few examples of characters who have been sold dreams that could never materialize.

As far as Hal’s characterization and the plot of *Picnic* goes, Inge never makes it clear whether Hal is doomed to be alone or not—him being ostracized can be read both as a result of dramatic circumstance or as a result of unbridled desire. I argue for the latter, for the single reason that it fits more conveniently into Inge’s poetics, a set of dramatic techniques that are characterized by the subversion of gender norms and social rules by psychological forces. Clearly, Madge and Hal have a natural attraction to each other so strong that they are willing to give up everything they have so that they can be together. There is an important difference between the situation of the two characters, however. While for Madge, her willingness to give up the safety that Alan offers to her has emotional reasons, for Hal, the decision to abandon his attempts at social integration is initially done much more impulsively, so much so that it easily invites criticism. Indeed, Hal’s final line at the end of “Act Three”, “We’re not goin’ on no goddamn picnic”, with the stage directions “*(Picking her up in his arms and starting off. His voice is deep and firm)*” (Inge 127) suggests a

kind of male desire that is purely sexual and a hostile attitude toward social convention that comes off as antisocial.

Regarding male sexual socialization, Betcher and Pollack do identify a tendency in which "sex [becomes] the only way a man can allow himself to need and to have the need for contact fulfilled" (203) and Frosh talks about the same thing when he mentions a phenomenon where sex is "the only form of intimacy allowable to many men" (115). It is hard to decide whether this is the case, for Inge complicates the situation during the dialogue that takes place after the couple has had sex and returned to the house:

> MADGE. I guess . . . it's no more your fault than mine.
>
> HAL. Sometimes I do pretty impulsive things (Inge 132).

Whichever is the case, what becomes clear during the dance scene as well as the dialogue between Hal and Madge in which we see them together the last time, is that the two lovers do recognize each other mutually, despite their traumatic sexual encounter:

> MADGE. After all, you're a man.
>
> HAL. And you're a woman, baby . . . [y]ou're a real, live woman (Inge 144).

Hal's attempts at integration ultimately fail, but he may have gained something that—it is implied—is more important than being socially accepted: in Madge he has found a true romantic partner.

Next to this genuine connection Inge places the relationship between Rosemary Sydney and Howard Bevans, a relationship that turns into marriage only because Rosemary would rather submit to Howard than to face the terrifying possibility of growing old alone. Her psychological evolution is, I will argue, the exact reverse of Madge's: instead of progressing from the position of the object of desire toward a position of subject who has desire, Rosemary sacrifices her place as the subject who has desire to become, or at least to be seen and accepted as the object who is desired.

Rosemary Sydney, at first glance seems to be someone who is content on her own. She is a schoolteacher, who lives in one of the rooms of the Owens household. She has a few girlfriends who are also teachers and a boyfriend called Howard, a middle-aged businessman, whom she occasionally sees. Gradually, however, her independence is revealed to be nothing but a façade that she puts on to mask her insecurities. One of the first more explicit ways that Inge indicates this is in a scene where some of the characters start to have a couple of drinks. Reminiscing of her youth, Rosemary's insistence that she was once as pretty as Madge and that she too, was the object of desire in the eyes of many men once, reveals internal conflict concerning aging and loneliness:

> ROSEMARY. Shoot! When I was a girl I was just as good-looking as she is!
>
> HOWARD. Of course you were, honey.
>
> ROSEMARY. *(Taking the bottle)* I had boys callin' me all the time. But if my father had ever caught me showing off in front of the window he'd have tanned me with a razor strap. *(Takes a drink)* 'Cause I was brought up strict by a God-fearing man (Inge 117).

The trope of the father who is now absent but whose past behavior influences a character is very common in Inge's work. In *Sheba*, we have seen this in the case of Lola; in *Picnic* this influence can be witnessed in the case of Rosemary as well as Madge and Hal. In the case of Rosemary, what we find is unresolved resentment which adds to her conflicting attitudes towards men: she both wants to be desired by them while at the same time she is unwilling to admit her need for them. As the plot progresses, this tension only tightens, reaching its boiling point in two key scenes that are especially worthy of closer analysis: the scene where her shame of not being an object of desire takes the form of extreme contempt for Hal, and the scene where she completely submits to Howard just so that the businessman will finally agree to marrying her, and thus, in Rosemary's mind, at least, freeing her from her lonely existence as a schoolteacher.

Rosemary's strong verbal attack on Hal takes place shortly after the dancing scene between Madge and Hal. Seeing the young couple dance evokes desire in Rosemary, a desire to be in Madge's place and, just like in the case of Lola in *Sheba*, to be young again. Unlike Lola, however, Rosemary derives no vicarious pleasure from watching the two young people. She desires Hal and wants to be in Madge's place, which is represented by her wanting to dance with Hal. What is fascinating about this scene is that Rosemary's desire for Hal is expressed simultaneously with her devaluing of him as a man which can be read as an expression of her wish to master Hal—to hold power over him by objectifying him. One of her strategies to dominate him is to evoke in him that which, from a psychoanalytic point of view, is one of the greatest masculine fears: the threat of castration. Telling Hal that he reminds her of a statue of a Roman gladiator that stands in the library of the school she teaches at, Rosemary relates how the statue was castrated by the chisel of the janitor after the female teachers made a petition to make the naked figure look more "decent" (Inge 121). Indirectly referring to the fragility of masculinity, Rosemary is also careful to point out how

the only thing that the Roman gladiator had on was a shield which could not defend the statue from it being castrated. Reading Inge's stage directions attached to Hal's reply to Rosemary's anecdote confirms that the story did, in fact, achieve its desired effect: "*(He seldom has been made so uncomfortable)* Ma'am, I guess I just don't feel like dancin'" (Inge 121).

Nonetheless, Rosemary cannot avoid the humiliation of being rejected by Hal: "*She gropes blindly across the stage, suffering what has been a deep humiliation)* I suppose that's something wonderful—they're *young*" (Inge 122). It is no wonder that she jumps at the first opportunity to hurt Hal and accuses him of feeding whiskey to Millie. Quoting Betcher and Pollack we have already noted during our analysis of *Sheba*, the many forms that shame can find expression in in the individual. Then, it was a specifically masculine shame that we were dealing with, but I would argue that Rosemary's attack on Hal can be understood using the same theoretical considerations. Thus, we can read it as a projection of her unbearable feelings of shame onto Hal, channeled through an outburst of intense contempt (Betcher and Pollack 125): "You'll end your life in the gutter and it'll serve you right, 'cause the gutter's where you came from and the gutter's where you belong" (Inge 124). While bringing up the threat of castration was an indirect attack on Hal, conveniently weaved into an anecdote, this insult is as direct as can be. And if we abide by our interpretation stated earlier that Hal's biggest fear is that he is inherently an inferior being who cannot fit in anywhere, then we can say that Rosemary has instinctually found Hal's Achilles heel and thus, has successfully broken through that shield which is Hal's pose of macho individualism.

If this scene has shown Rosemary trying to turn herself into an object of desire by dominating the subject who is meant to desire her, then we can say that the other pivotal scene in her character development—the scene where she begs Howard to marry her—represents her submission to the subject who can either accept or refuse her as an object of desire. This scene

takes place at the opening of "Act Three: Scene One" and directly precedes the conversation between Hal and Madge after they have had sex. Since it is implied that Rosemary and Howard also had sexual intercourse before getting back to the house, the placement of the scenes creates a contrast: first we get to witness a crisis in the relationship of an older, middle-aged couple and then we get to see an equally crucial moment in the romance of Madge and Hal. The way that both these scenes are set during the early morning hours, while "[*a*] *great harvest moon shines in the sky*" (Inge 128) then only underlines their importance and suggests that there are certain truths will come to light, as if illuminated by the moonlight.

Another aspect that is similar in the two scenes is that they are both anticlimactic. What is different is that they are disillusioning in different ways. In the case of the young couple, there is a temporary alienating effect which we can identify as being the opposite of the dancing scene, the implication being that phallic sexuality creates estrangement while the intersubjective mode of desire generates genuine connection. In the case of Howard and Rosemary, however, there is no authentic bonding experience either way: their dancing is unrelaxed and they cannot sustain it for very long; and it seems that it is only Howard who feels rather satisfied after the coital activity while Rosemary has fallen into that which Inge describes as "*a groggy depression* (Inge 128). Seeing her unhappiness and her subsequent desperation gives us solid reasons to think that the only reason Rosemary had decided to have sex with Howard was so that she could get closer to convincing him to marry her. Thus, when Rosemary says: "You can't go off without me. Not after tonight. *That's* sense" (Inge 129), what she means is that, according to social norms, such intimacy must be followed by engagement—which is something that Howard acknowledges when he tells Rosemary: "A businessman's gotta be careful of talk. And after all, you're a schoolteacher" (Inge 128).

However, since it seems that the risk of being exposed is negligible, Rosemary must try harder to make a case for marriage. The role that she must assume to finally get what she wants is the complete opposite of the role that she has been playing up until now. Slowly nearing towards the end of middle-age, the position of the autonomous female subject who has desire is no longer appreciated by Rosemary and she explicitly admits this when she tells Howard: "It's no good livin' like this, in rented rooms, meeting' a bunch of old maids for supper every night, then comin' back home alone" (Inge 130). Instead, her desperation overpowering her pride, Rosemary turns to submission: "*(Desperate)* Oh, God! Please marry me, Howard. Please . . . *(She sinks to her knees)* Please . . . Please . . ." (Inge 131). Despite the status quo that said that women must ultimately be submissive to their husbands, Rosemary's humiliation here is quite unusual if we remember how the act of proposal—bending a knee and presenting the significant other with a ring—is typically a chivalric act that is entirely masculine. Because of this, Rosemary's fear of ending up alone is made all the more apparent—she is ready to do anything just so that she can escape her isolation. But is marriage to Howard really an escape? Based on what we have previously said about their dating relationship—i.e., that it was not very meaningful—then it is hardly the case that their marriage to each other will be any different.

It is important to point out that the difference between the Hal-Madge and Rosemary-Howard relationship is not the only contrast that we find in *Picnic*. For example, critics have generally overlooked how in the character of Madge's younger sister, the sixteen-year-old Millie, Inge has created a character who, if she is to follow her dreams, is to become someone whom social critics would later label as the "new woman" of the 1960s. In contrast with Madge's possible marriage to Hal, Millie imagines for herself a future that is radically different from that of her sister's: "Madge can *stay* in this jerkwater town and marry some ornery guy and raise a lot of dirty

kids. When I graduate from college I'm going to New York, and write novels that'll shock people right out of their senses" (Inge 147).

Another example is the character of Helen Potts whose marriage was annulled by her own mother when she was young. The contrast here is against both the central and the middle-aged couple of *Picnic*: with the sad story of Mrs. Potts who came of age in a time and in a family setting where she wasn't even allowed to follow her own desire, Inge points to social progress in a midcentury setting that, retrospectively, we know see as the age of everything but social change. Despite what must have been a deep humiliation, Mrs. Potts continued to take care of her mother as she grew sick and old, her only rebellion being her keeping the family name of her temporary husband: Potts. Like Lola, Mrs. Potts too, must resort to vicarious pleasure during the play, but unlike Lola, there is the peace of acceptance within Mrs. Potts that not even the sight of young people dancing can disturb. Inge closing with Mrs. Potts being called on by her mother and her following her mother's instructions, makes for a "happy ending" that is put into a larger context. While for such characters as Madge and Hal, the events that took place were life-transforming, for Mrs. Potts, everything that has occurred does not bring much change in her life. Thus, what remains is merely memories of an exciting Labor Day picnic.

As a closing remark, let us look at those psychological conflicts which we identified as well as the gender roles/relations that they destabilized. The three characters that we focused on were Madge, Hal, and Rosemary. Madge's character development was placed on a timeline beginning from her position as an object of desire and ending at her transformation into a subject who has desire, as someone who desires another subject. Accordingly, the great, objectified beauty of the town who was to marry Alan, the dream husband of the age, has discovered a more authentic part of herself and has chosen a romantic partner who is not socially accepted. Moreover, she has

also signed onto a precarious future where she will have to face such threats as poverty and social stigma and has rejected a future that was to provide her with permanent safety. In turn, Hal's main conflict was him trying to fit in amongst the townfolk—an attempt which has turned out to be a failure. Thus, he remained the alienated subject who would have to try again and perhaps, with more success with Madge helping him out. Moreover, during his relationship with Madge and interactions with the other characters, his macho bravado was revealed to be no more than a masculine pose trying to mask his insecurities in the face of an increasingly modernized, alienating world. Finally, Rosemary's transformations were also put under scrutiny. What we found out here is that out of the fear of everlasting aloneness, Rosemary has given up her pose of the kind of individualism that denied the need for other persons for the role of the wife who submits to her husband, though perhaps only temporarily.

5. "Gals Can Scare a Fella": Problems of Male Intimacy in *Bus Stop* (1955)

"I suppose none of my plays means anything much unless seen as a composite, for I seek dramatic values in a relative way" (*Four Plays*, viii)—Inge writes in the foreword to four of his major plays. "That is, one character in a play of mine might seem quite pointless unless seen in comparison with another character" (Inge viii)—he specifies, showing self-awareness about a technique of his that we have identified several times in the previous two chapters as "contrasting" and "paralleling". Indeed, *Bus Stop* is what we might call a play with an ensemble cast of characters placed on a wide canvas—the reason why we can appreciate the distinctness of every color is because each color is placed next to another. The focus of this chapter will be precisely on such contrasts—contrasts that are to be seen in light of the interaction between gender, culture and individual psychology which internalizes both. More specifically, what we will investigate in more detail will be the attitudes of two of the male characters toward intimacy.

The reason for this emphasis is due to the simple fact that Inge presents intimacy as much more problematic and conflicted for the male individual than for the female, and in this, Inge sketches a notion of masculinity that is similar to the masculinity described in the works of the five psychoanalysts on whom we rely on this study. Benjamin, for example talks about "the return to oneness with the mother" that haunts the male during "any profound experience of dependency or communion" (76-77); Chodorow mentions men's repression of "those feelings they experience as feminine: feelings of dependence, relational needs, emotions generally" (109-110); Betcher and Pollack describe how "men may continue to wall themselves off women, [since that is] the only way they know to reassure themselves of their identity ('not female') and to protect themselves from being left again [by their mothers] (39); and Frosh goes as far as to say that "[m]asculinity . . . has no secure base of its own . . . but is rather premised only on the exclusion of the other" (109).

The two characters that will be at the center of our analysis are Bo Decker, the young, macho cowboy of the midcentury Midwest and Dr. Lyman, an aimless and depraved college professor whose life is so filled with regrets and shame that he is constantly trying to dull himself of these feelings by excessive drinking. Since Inge's dramatizations are relational, however, we will constantly try to view them in contrast/parallel with the other characters. Hopefully, the result will be the emergence of a whole palette of characters and their attitudes to intimacy, with these two characters at the center. Our thesis for this chapter will be that the two characters mentioned represent two contrasting stories of male intimacy. From this point of view, what we will see in more detail will be that Bo Decker's character development revolves around the conflict of having to learn to recognize his love interest, Cherie, instead of objectifying her—something that he succeeds at. Moreover, we will also illustrate how Dr. Lyman is an antithesis to this in the sense that his main psychological conflict is coming to terms with a past that is characterized by failures at intimacy. And while by the end of the play he does manage to avoid making another depraved, perverted act, and thus displaying possibility for improvement, what is finally implied is that his deep regrets will continue to haunt him and that his propensities towards narcissism and immorality are likely to remain his negative features.

The play "*is set inside a street-corner restaurant in a small Kansas town . . .* [which] *serves also as an occasional rest stop for the bus lines in the area*" (Inge 155). Due to a blizzard in the area, the passengers of a bus and the bus driver are stuck in the restaurant and have to wait until the roads are cleared. Two waitresses and a sheriff are also present during much of the action. *Bus Stop* is a romantic comedy, which does not mean, however, that it does not have meaningful insights or even some disturbing elements for that matter. Perhaps the first instance where Inge introduces a disturbing aspect is when we meet Dr. Lyman, a former college professor who, when

asked about where he is heading, responds: “I travel around from one town to another just to prove to myself that I’m *free*” (Inge 163). He seems likeable at first, even charismatic and humorous until he starts courting and manipulating the young, 16-year-old waitress, Elma, who is instantly enchanted by his quick-wittedness and his refined, cultured manner.

In order to understand this relationship, it would be useful to introduce Benjamin’s psychological model of domination and submission. According to Benjamin, in a healthy relationship where both partners are truly independent despite their connection, there is a paradoxical tension upheld within the individual (55)—a tension between self-assertion and the recognition of the other (53). In this model, the partners recognize each other as subjects while at the same time asserting their own subjecthood. In an irregular relationship, on the other hand—in relationships that are based on domination and submission for example—this tension that is supposed to be within the individual in the case of a relationship based on mutuality, becomes a tension between individuals (Benjamin 55). What this means is that there is a splitting where one person comes to exercise his/her self-assertion without having to recognize the other as a subject, and the other, in turn, comes to fully recognize his/her partner without the right to claim a subjectivity for himself/herself. I argue that the relationship between Dr. Lyman and Elma, the college professor and the high schooler can be understood in just these same terms. It is not incidental that one of them is a teacher while the other is a student—although their relationship is personal and not professional, these societal roles nonetheless mirror the ways that they relate to each other, with Elma not knowing and Dr. Lyman having the knowledge that his student is hungry for.

Nevertheless, Elma’s fascination with Dr. Lyman—that which keeps her in a submissive position without her realizing it—cannot be explained merely by Dr. Lyman’s charisma or

scholarly brightness. What is most striking in Dr. Lyman for Elma is not so much his knowledge of books and poetry and such, but his knowledge of life. Elma, being at an age where one is trying to define their own subjecthood and their place in the world, is most receptive to any new experiences, even if they are nothing else but mere stories about what adult life is really like. Accordingly, she is fascinated to hear about Dr. Lyman's three ex-wives, about his past as a teacher and, in a rather disturbing turn of events, she even agrees to meet with him the next day and accompany him to a concert. It is an uneven relationship where Elma asks the questions and Dr. Lyman provides the answers, Elma being more of a sound-board for the professor than an actual conversing partner. A part of Dr. Lyman's allure is that he is so casual about his past, which is actually a series of disappointments and failures as we will come to find out. This can be seen as a defense mechanism: Dr. Lyman makes great efforts not to take anything in his life seriously just so that he does not have to face the grim reality of his situation. That Dr. Lyman's inner demons come to the surface during an amateur staging of *Romeo and Juliet* in the middle of the restaurant is a masterful piece of characterization and play with form coming from a dramatist whose work—and we can agree with Christopher Bigsby on this point—is otherwise defined by "an innate conservatism in form and conception" (158).

Indeed, this scene is so revealing that it is a key to our understanding of Dr. Lyman. It comes about after Elma has the idea that since each of the passengers is gifted in some way, they should put on a performance for themselves just so that they can pass the time more easily. One of the acts involves a staging of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, with Elma playing the role of Juliet opposite to Dr. Lyman's Romeo. Inge's stage directions preceding the lines of Dr. Lyman as Romeo are very telling and, certainly, make explicit not only his narcissistic attitude that has come to dominate the relationship between him and Elma, but also the very theatricality of Dr.

Lyman that characterizes his whole selfish, larger than life personality. Inge thus writes: "*He is enjoying himself tremendously. The performance proves to be pure ham, but there is pathos in the fact that he does not seem to be aware of how bad he is. He is a thoroughly selfish performer, too, who reads all his speeches as though they were grand soliloquies, regarding his Juliet as a prop).*" As we can see, Inge emphasizes Dr. Lyman's domineering self-assertion that excludes recognizing the other—indeed, even outside of this reenactment, quite a few lines of Dr. Lyman's are no more than drunken monologues into an abyss, with very little genuine connection to the other characters.

There is more to this scene, however, that needs to be discussed. It is not incidental that Inge chooses the balcony scene to shine a light on Dr. Lyman's true self. Not only is the scene recognizable by everyone—the audience and the readership alike—but it is also one of the great love scenes in the history of English drama. While perhaps the innocent Elma fits the role of Juliet fairly well, Dr. Lyman's impersonation of Romeo is grotesque because of the huge gap between Romeo as a character—Shakespeare's most iconic lover—and Dr. Lyman, Inge's decadent, miserable intellectual.

Besides this, Inge also uses this scene from Shakespeare's play to ignite a realization in Dr. Lyman, writing in the stage directions: "*It is as though he were finding suddenly personal meaning in the lines)* (Inge 198). What we can see here is a sort of intertextual play: in the context of this scene from *Bus Stop*, Romeo's lines gain a new set of meanings that were not there in the original Shakespeare play. Appropriately, Romeo's line about him hating his name, "Romeo Montague", is meant to express the immense self-hatred of Dr. Lyman: "*(Leaving the scene of action, repeating the line dumbly, making his way stumblingly back to the counter)* 'My name . . . is hateful . . . to myself . . . '" (Inge 198). The fact that it is a scene from another play during which Dr. Lyman's remorse resurfaces also poignantly underlines Inge's attitude toward theater and theatricality in

general: the very Ibseneque idea that the theater is meant to confront the audience (or as Stanislavski thought, the actors as well) with unpleasant truths and thus, to bring about a change in perspective. For Dr. Lyman, this results in him abandoning the idea to meet Elma privately the day after, but this is inspired more by a feeling of self-loathing and self-disgust that he already had towards himself but suppressed, rather than by any liberating insight. He may not be able to redeem himself, but he can at least avoid making another mistake and hurting yet another person.

Only a few moments after his failed performance, intoxicated and disturbed by the feelings and thoughts that have suddenly rushed through him, Dr. Lyman has what is perhaps his most revealing monologue about his failures at love and intimacy: "I never had the generosity to love, to give my own most private self to another, for I was *weak*. I thought the gift would somehow lessen *me*. *Me*! *(He laughs wildly and starts for the rear door)* Romeo! Romeo! I am disgusting!" (Inge 202). Before rushing out the rear door to throw up, perhaps, for the first time in the play, he recognizes Elma as a subject, as something else than the innocent other whom he can manipulate to suit his own needs: "In a few years, you will turn . . . from a girl into a woman; a kind, thoughtful, loving, intelligent woman . . . who could only pity me. For I'm a child, a drunken, unruly child, and I've nothing in my heart for a true woman" (Inge 203).

That he gets sick of alcohol at the same time that he becomes disgusted of himself is dramatically poignant—there is a limit to deluding himself just as there is a limit to alcohol consumption, Inge seems to suggest. We have seen the same thing happen in *Sheba* with Doc getting drunk right after his illusion of Marie as an ideal of innocence crumbles and have noted the subsequent feelings of shame that cause Doc to propel himself towards self-destruction and violence. In the case of Dr. Lyman, however, I would argue that there is a different kind of shame that we can notice. For Doc, it had to do more with masculinity and his relation to his mother, but

what is present here seems to be a kind of shame that Judy Jordan describes as a "felt sense of unworthiness . . . [a] deep sense of unlovability, with the ongoing awareness of how much one wants to connect with others . . . [while] one feels unworthy of love . . . because one is defective or flawed in some essential way (qtd. in Betcher and Pollack 127).

Dr. Lyman has never had the courage to recognize the other, but only the urge to assert his will and subjectivity, thus he has been occupying the "master" pole of the master/slave polarity, where there is no mutuality. Benjamin notes how these relationships by their very nature cannot exist for too long, which explains Dr. Lyman's failure at maintaining a relationship: "once the tension between subjugation and resistance dissolves, [emotional] death or abandonment is the inevitable end of the story" (65). She also explains that these relationships based on domination and submission are not really relationships at all, because: "the master is actually alone, because the person he is with is no person at all. And likewise, for her part, the slave fears that the master will abandon her to aloneness when he tires of being with someone who is not a person". Whether this was the exact case for Dr. Lyman's relationships, we never get to know, but by interpreting his relationship to Elma, we can assume that maybe it was.

Dr. Lyman is one of the very few characters in Inge's oeuvre who is an intellectual and, thus more efficient at expressing himself. Inge, however, portrays this as actually worsening his situation. Dr. Lyman, indeed, seems painfully aware of where he went wrong in his life and what he has missed by making the mistakes that he made. His self-torturing, overly self-conscious and self-aware nature make him one of those characters that has only come to be more prevalent in world literature during the early modernity of the 19th century. Not unlike Dostoevsky's underground man in *Notes from Underground*, Dr. Lyman seems to have special insight into the state of the modern world and personal relationships, but despite all his wisdom that should

otherwise be enriching his life, it is instead making him all the more miserable, turning him into a narcissist and a social outcast. Him finally abandoning taking advantage of Elma would be a cause for hope if it wasn't for the final scene where we see him putting alcohol into his morning coffee before his departure with the bus.

Ironically, despite having perverted intentions toward Elma, it is Dr. Lyman who provides the young girl with her first experience of feeling that she can, in fact, be an object of desire—an experience so novel that it overshadows Dr. Lyman's malicious intents. One could go almost as far as to say that Dr. Lyman's advances inspire in Elma a sexual awakening similar to what Madge experienced in *Picnic*. The way that both girls use a mirror for self-definition and to reassure themselves of their own sexuality seems to support this contention. The situation is certainly very similar: in *Picnic*, Madge is telling her mother, Flo about proving to herself that she is real while looking in the mirror, and in this play, Elma is telling Grace, a motherly figure in her life, how "it's nice to know that someone *can* feel that way" (Inge 221), i.e., that someone could wish to make love to her. During this conversation Elma glances at a mirror.

Another relationship that is, initially at least, based on submission and domination is the dynamic between Bo and Cherie. Here, the domination aspect of the relationship is much more explicit and more clearly related to a problematic masculinity. Still, the tone of the play remains comic all throughout and it is in the comic dramatic mode that Inge criticizes the kind of macho, egoistic and performative masculinity that characterized Turk in *Sheba*, Hal in *Picnic* and which also describes Bo in *Bus Stop*. What we have here then is a character type that frequently reappears in Inge's plays—a male character putting on a façade of all-powerful masculine prowess only to be exposed as a confused, insecure or altogether lost individual who is trying to live up to an ideal of manhood that is no more than mere fantasy.

This is revealed gradually, however, and thus, initially, as these macho character types enter the stage, we have no reason to think that they are not really as powerful as they present themselves to be. Maybe this gradual demasking is one of the things that Tennessee Williams was hinting at in his foreword to Inge's fourth major play, *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* when he wrote: "the talent of William Inge . . . is for offering, first the genial surface of common American life, and then not ripping but quietly dropping the veil that keeps you from seeing yourself as you are" (viii). Indeed, when we first meet Bo, we take him to be a rough, fearless, young cowboy who means a serious threat to Cherie and to anyone else who will stand between him and the woman that he has set his eyes on.

The first to enter the restaurant, however, is Cherie, a young, 19-year-old woman who works at a nightclub called the Blue Dragon, where she sings. She introduces the young cowboy who is after him even before he makes an appearance and her comical, but nonetheless nervous mental state suggests that there will be major conflict ahead when we come to learn that Cherie is distressed because she is being abducted by this cowboy and his partner, both of whom she met one night at the Blue Dragon. She tells Elma, the young waitress, that this cowboy is planning on marrying her against her will and wants to take her with him to his ranch in Montana. Cherie's interaction with the sheriff who promises to protect her if what she is saying is, in fact, true, only increases the tension as we are faced with a possible collusion between a cowboy and the town sheriff—a classic scenario of the American Western. Inge's realism, however, is there to correct our expectations conditioned by Hollywood cinema and the Western hero is revealed to be no hero at all, but an inexperienced brat whose confusion deserves our forgiveness and sympathy.

First, however, Bo Decker acts much like a young troublemaker whom, we fear, poses a serious threat to Cherie—the heroine whom Inge introduced first so that the audience will be

anxious for her and care about her fate. Barely does he enter the establishment when he demands that Will, the local sheriff show more respect towards him—a command so bold that Will is initially taken aback by it. Bo's character, in this initial phase, is both threatening and comic. It is comic because what Inge essentially presents us with in the first act is nothing less than a caricature: Bo, for example, boasts his masculinity by ordering such a large amount of food that would feed a dozen people and by wanting his hamburger to be made with raw meat or by introducing himself by loudly enlisting to everyone present, his current living situation as well as his past triumphs and achievements just to prove that he is a man who must be respected: "Yap, I'm the prize bronco-buster,'n steer-roper, 'n bulldogger, anywhere 'round. I won 'em all. And what's more, had my picture taken by *Life* magazine. So I'd appreciate your talkin' to me with a little respect in yor voice, mister" (Inge 172). Already subverting Western mythology by satirizing the figure of the autonomous, young cowboy, Inge perhaps presaged that more radical, postmodern destabilizing of Western myths and archetypes that was to be so prevalent in the family plays of Sam Shepard, during the 1970s.

Besides the comic element, however, there is a disturbing side to Bo as well. Not only does he objectify Cherie, but he views her as a possession that belongs to him, much the same way that Alan thought that Madge was his most precious status symbol. At one point, Bo even refers to Cherie as if she was livestock when he tells her: "I'll fatten ya up. I bet in two weeks time, ya won't recognize yorself" (Inge 173). Clearly, what we are witnessing here is a relationship that is in parallel with the Dr. Lyman-Elma dynamic since it is also a problematic relationship that is founded on a master/slave dichotomy, with Bo denying Cherie her own subjectivity and Cherie constantly trying to resist this objectification. There is a sense of entitlement in Bo based on an idea of manhood where having a relationship with a woman is the same as having possession of

one. Thus, it logically follows that the only way to establish such a relationship is to claim one's ownership of the object and to claim it in a way that is assertive and non-negotiable. Betcher and Pollack describe how some men "have a difficult time inhibiting aggression for fear [that] they will lose their assertiveness. For men, they would rather have angry, hurtful control struggles that alienate them from the other men and from women than to risk the shame of passivity" (130). As long as Bo views his relationship with Cherie along these lines, the more she pulls away and tries to reason with him, the more aggressive he becomes.

The first milestone in the Bo-Cherie relationship is when Bo has to face the fact that Cherie might not like him, despite him liking her—a fact of life that seems absolutely astounding to the young cowboy. This realization comes about near the end of "Act One" and what is striking about it is that it happens only after the sheriff, Will assures Bo that Cherie, does not, in fact, want to marry him. Bo does not attribute subjecthood to Cherie and thus, will not accept her direct refusal of him but only after another subject, Will, the sheriff has confirmed the refusal. That Bo does not look on Cherie as a subject is made explicit when Bo dismisses Cherie's protests and tells the sheriff: "*(To* WILL) You cain't pay no tension to what she says, mister. Womenfolk don't know their own minds. Never did" (Inge 177). The way that this line is phrased underlines Bo's denial of Cherie as a subject, who, according to Bo does not know her own mind. A few lines later, Bo takes this even further; it is not only that Cherie does not know what she wants, and thus has no agency, but that Bo has more insight into her own inner life than she does: "I'm tellin' ya, she loves me. And *I* ought to know". Here we can recall what Frosh emphasized about the process of objectification during the act of looking. Since Bo had met Cherie at a night club where Cherie was performing, his first impression of her was in a setting where Cherie had to play the part of a woman who evokes men's desires. Thus, we can assume that, starting from this encounter, Bo has

projected his utmost desires onto Cherie—a kind of projection which, according to Frosh also involves "the negation of [the object's] inner life" (29).

That Cherie protests against the life that Bo has mapped out for her does not change the fact that, up until now at least, Cherie has been playing the role of the submissive object in this relationship. This is evidenced by her apprehensions about telling Bo how she really feels, fearing not only the repercussions but—in light of later developments—that she will in turn hurt his feelings. She has to be encouraged by the sheriff just to get the words out, which makes for great comedy where a law enforcement official is there to assist a woman who is hesitative about telling a man that she does not want to marry him. Still, Cherie does not seem able to or does not want to tell him that she does not love him and thus, this unbearable truth is revealed to Bo by the sheriff, something that is so shocking to him that he responds with violence, almost attacking Will. From this moment onwards, up until the end of the act, Cherie has only one line and that is to thank the sheriff for his protection. What we can point out then, is that the conversation pertaining to a woman's desire—something that we focused on in the previous chapter—is a conversation among men which highlights Cherie's helplessness as well as the oppression of women in general in a world where a man's word about what a woman is or is not feeling is more valued than her own words about her own inner life. "Act One" ends with Bo's realization that a relationship is meant to be between two subjects—that it is not enough that the man desires the woman, but that the woman has to desire the man also: "Well . . . I just never realized . . . a gal might not . . . love me" (Inge 180).

It is after facing this reality and being pained by it that Bo starts escaping the reckless cowboy stereotype and is gradually humanized by Inge, making a previously two-dimensional character three-dimensional with hidden vulnerabilities and fears. Thus, for example, near the

beginning of “Act Two”, he confesses to his confidante, Virgil, the quiet, fortysomething, peaceful cowboy who is something of a father figure to him, that he feels lonely sometimes and thus, is conflicted about certain codes of masculinity that are based on a “denial of . . . dependence or need for another” (Chodorow 51-52): “Virge. I hate to sound like some pitiable weaklin’ of a man, but there’s been times the last few months, I been so lonesome, I . . . I jest didn’t know what t’do with m’self” (Inge 185). In turn, Virgil also opens up about his choice to remain a bachelor which is the story of yet another failure at intimacy:

> VIRGIL. Well, I was allus kinda uncomfortable around this gal, ‘cause she was sweet and kinda refined. I was allus scared I’d say or do somethin’ wrong.
>
> BO. I know how ya mean.
>
> VIRGIL. It was cowardly of me, I s’pose, but every time I’d get back from courtin’ her, and come back to the bunkhouse where my buddies was sittin’ around talkin’, or playin’ card, or listenin’ to music, I’d jest relax and feel m’self so much at home, I din wanta give it up.
>
> BO. Yah! Gals can scare a fella. (Inge 187)

As we can see, besides possible class differences that had made him feel inadequate, what had probably contributed to Virgil’s failure to get engaged was the segregation of genders more characteristic of Inge’s day than our own times. The problem is not only the fact that this leads to unfamiliarity with femininity in general, but that masculinity itself is defined in ways that reinforce this social segregation. Betcher and Pollack point out how “[f]or boys and men, being masculine is integrally linked with going away from a relationship, and indeed from any aspect of life tinged

with femininity, such as strong feelings, dependency, and openness" (38). Being intimidated by the feminine then is not only due to the fact that it is unfamiliar but it is also because the act of trying to connect to it shakes the very foundations on which a masculinity that defines itself as non-feminine (Chodorow 51) is constructed on.

The influence of the peer group, however, cannot be overlooked. Chodorow contends that while "daughters are likely to participate in an intergenerational world with their mother, and often with their aunts and grandmother . . . boys are on their own or participate in a single-generation world of age mates". What this possibly means is that wisdom cannot be passed down in the same way in the case of boys as it can in the case of girls, and with fathers who "historically have not been very available" (Betcher and Pollack 38) what many men are left with are either their own fantasies of ideal manhood and femininity or stories from their mates that are very often bound to be unreliable, because they are many times used to impress other males. We can see this phenomenon at work in Bo's response to Virgil who advises the young cowboy that perhaps he could be somewhat more courteous:

> BO. You hear the way Hank and Orville talk at the ranch, when they get back from sojournin' in town, 'bout their women.
>
> VIRGIL. They like to brag, Bo. Ya caint b'lieve ev'rything Hank and Orville say. (Inge 188)

In contrast to Bo, we find that Cherie's ideas and expectations about relationships are much more grounded in reality: "I just gotta feel that . . . whoever I marry . . . has some real regard for me, apart from all the lovin' and sex. Know what I mean?" (Inge 190) even if she is rather skeptical

about whether such love exists due to her previous experiences with men: “Mebbe I din’t know what love is. Mebbe I’m expectin’ it t’be somethin’ it ain’t” (Inge 189). What she is yearning for then, is a kind of intimacy where she may play the role of the subject. As we have noted, one of the obstacles to this is men’s objectification of women in general. But there is another element also that obstructs intimacy and Cherie names it when she talks about a “real regard for [her], apart from . . . lovin’ and sex (Inge 190). It is that tendency Frosh identifies as the “splitting off of sex from intimacy which is a crucial element in masculine sexual socialisation” (113). We know that this phenomenon plays a part in the Cherie-Bo relationship when the two are arguing about what their relationship actually consists in:

> BO. But, Cherry . . . we was *familiar* with each other.
>
> CHERIE. That don’t mean ya gotta *marry* me. (Inge 177)

There exists a kind of intimacy grounded in respect and recognition of the other besides the coital encounter—that is one of the things that Bo has got to learn.

Another relationship in *Bus Stop* brings in yet another contrast to the Bo-Cherie relationship. It is the dynamic between Grace, the owner of the restaurant and Carl, the bus driver, a relationship that is based purely on sexual attraction. In this way it is similar to the Marie-Turk affair in *Sheba*, except that the couple is now of middle age. Inge, however, does not portray this relationship negatively but only regards it as one kind of affection that in beneficial to both partners even if it never quite leads to a kind of intimacy where intersubjectivity may emerge. Grace is very explicit about her affair with Carl being based on nothing more than bodily need, as if it was something one had to satisfy every now and then: “I’m a restless sort of woman, and every once

in a while, I gotta have me a man, just to keep m'self from getting' grouchy" (Inge 221). It is not the case, however, that Grace wouldn't like to have a relationship that goes beyond sex—it is just that, unlike Cherie, she has given up any hope for it. Her loneliness is evidenced by the very last scene of the play where she locks all the doors of the restaurant after everybody left, including Bo and Cherie, the now happy young couple, and turns of the lights, just to walk up alone to her apartment—an ending not unlike that of *Picnic*, where Helen walks back to her house, answering the calling of her old, sickly mother, after witnessing the young lovers—Madge and Hal—running off together. That this loneliness might somehow be cured—that does not seem to be an option for Grace, whose ex-husband could not really offer anything more than Carl does and thus left her disillusioned: "I got just as lonesome when he was here. He wasn't much company. 'cept when we were makin' love. But makin' love is *one* thing, an bein' lonesome is another (Inge, *Bus Stop* 157).

Carl, on the other hand, seems very content with his current situation. We never get to know for sure whether he is married or not, but what we do get is Inge's subtle attack or at least provocation regarding monogamy, that no doubt goes against the cherished family values of the time: "what the hell good is marriage, where ya have to put up with the same broad every day, and lookit her in the morning, and try to get along with her when she's got a bad disposition. This way suits me fine" (Inge 216).

In the central romance of the play however, Inge seems to have sketched out a possibility for long-term connection. It is Bo who has to make a major change in his attitude: he has to recognize Cherie as a subject and to treat her as such. Before that, however, his objectification of Cherie has to hit a breaking point for him to believe that what he is doing is not moral or socially acceptable. Toward the end of "Act Two" Bo decides to take what he thinks is owed to him as a man. He is one of those men who was "socialized toward achievement and self-reliance"

(Chodorow 54) and views him marrying Cherie as a challenge to be met, as a goal to be achieved. And from Bo's perspective, all that one needs is skill and willpower, just like as if someone wanted to win a rodeo: "*(Pause. He pays no attention to anyone)* I made up my mind. I told myself I was gonna git me a gal. Thass the only reason I entered that rodeo, and I ain't takin' no fer an answer" (Inge 199). Life is quite unlike a rodeo, however, and Bo is beaten up and arrested by Will, the sheriff, when the young cowboy grabs Cherie, lifts her up and wants to carry her away.

At this point, it seems as though the alienation between Cherie and Bo was complete. Cherie is even asked if she wants to press charges and almost seems like she might when Virgil tells her that she was the first woman Bo has ever had anything to do with. Somehow, this changes Cherie's perception of Bo and agrees to help him get out of jail. This might be explained by the fact that Cherie now sees the situation quite differently and is maybe able to adapt Bo's point of view: the young cowboy is clueless and only acts this way because he does not know any better. At the beginning of "Act Three" Bo, fresh out of jail, depressed and humiliated is made to apologize to everyone in the restaurant, particularly to Cherie. However, it is only after they start sharing their deepest fears and vulnerabilities with each other that Cherie and Bo reconcile and try again to establish a relationship but this time one based on mutual respect and understanding. Cherie confesses to Bo that she has been with many men before, and thus feels uncomfortable because of social stigma, and Bo opens up about his insecurities with women: "I'd live all my life on a ranch . . . and I guess I din know much about women" (Inge 213).

The play closes on Cherie and Bo rekindling their love for each other and going off to Montana together where they will marry. What we are left with then, is a happy ending that is only balanced out somewhat by Inge's portrayal of the loneliness of both Virgil and Grace during the final moments, just before the curtain falls. Virgil, perhaps seeing that Bo has no need for him

anymore, leaves the happy couple and watches as the passengers get on the bus. Asked to leave the restaurant because Grace has to close up, Virgil is left in the cold to wait for a bus that is to come several hours later. Virgil's reply to Grace after she says "I'm sorry, mister, but you're just left out in the cold" is Inge dampening the bliss of Cherie and Bo with a recognition that love is not as common as we think it is: "*(To himself)* Well . . . that's what happens to some people" (Inge 222).

In conclusion, to quote Inge himself, what we have seen during our analysis of *Bus Stop* was "a composite picture of varying kinds of love, ranging from the innocent to the depraved" (Inge viii). In particular, we have identified the problem of two of the male characters with intimacy: Bo Decker has had to recognize Cherie as a subject to be able to appreciate her for herself, while Dr. Lyman has had to face his failures at such intimacy, a realization that was ironically prompted by a reenactment of one of the great love scenes that Shakespeare has ever written. In the end, Bo was forgiven for his transgressions, but in exchange he had to give up the masculine pose that made him feel entitled. Dr. Lyman on the other hand, has found no redemption. He did avoid corrupting the young Elma, but based on Inge's portrayal, it does not seem likely that the professor will abandon his selfish ways. Instead, what is more plausible is that he will continue running away from himself both by traveling the country and by drinking his liquor—a futile attempt at suppressing one's inner demons.

6. "Just Like We Were Sweethearts":

Marital Balance and Mature Dependence in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957)

In his 1988 autobiography, Elia Kazan relates the first time that he had read Inge's fourth major play, *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, which he ended up directing:

> I can't say I was wildly excited about this work. . . . For the hell of it, I showed Barbara [Loden] the Inge play. . . . I wasn't surprised that she found it boring; this ratified my own first reaction. However, I was to learn a lesson as I went on with the play, which is that all Bill's work . . . seemed on first view to be conventional mid-America stuff, with nothing that hadn't been seen and said before. But all of it suddenly, to the audience's surprise as well as my own, would produce scenes of exceptional poignancy—not thunder and lightning, but insight and tenderness, Inge's own gifts. ("Chapter 31")

Indeed, as Kazan points out, Inge's talent does not lie in the invention of anything extraordinary. He rarely writes poetic or elevated dialogue, he operates no great dramatic tensions much less portray their eruptions, and, in his best plays at least, he rarely ventures outside of the place and time that he has considerable knowledge of. Instead, his general technique resides in what I would call a "gradual demasking of the ordinary"—that which includes slow-moving characterization; the reflection of dramatic meaning in a relative way with such techniques as "contrasting" and "paralleling"; and a tendency to provoke and destabilize conventional archetypes and gender roles through psychological conflict. We have already seen many examples for these in our analysis of *Come Back, Little Sheba*; *Picnic*; and *Bus Stop*. In his fourth play, however, Inge shows a more confident mastery of his craft than ever before, and thus provides us with even more striking

examples of how his dramatic tools are used and what these tools are meant to achieve. It is not only because of chronology then that we end our study with an analysis of his fourth Broadway success.

The Dark at the Top of the Stairs invites a psychoanalytical reading perhaps even more than the other three plays that we have already looked at. The reason for that is that *Dark* is essentially an Oedipal drama, portraying at least two Oedipal triangles: the triangle of the daughter—mother—father and the triangle of the son—mother—father. Perhaps due to the play's autobiographical origins, Inge is more fixated on the second triangle, and presents the son's relationship to his mother and father as more problematic than his sister's relationship to their parents. Our focus too will be on this second Oedipal triangle and our main argument for this chapter will be that, during the action of the play the son will have to realize what Ronald Fairbarn calls "mature dependence" (qtd. in Guntrip 291) in relation to his mother and his sister and that the father and the mother will have to find a balance that Benjamin names as the "the essential tension . . . [between] asserting the self and recognizing the other" (53). To be more specific, what this will mean is that Sonny, the son will differentiate from his mother, Cora, prompted by meeting Sammy Goldenbaum, a young boy with whom he can identify, and that Rubin and Cora, husband and wife, will find a new appreciation for and understanding of each other which restores their marriage. In our discussion of the play, we will trace what I would call a series of "negotiations" between genders as well as generations regarding gender roles in order to achieve "mature dependence" as well as "marital balance".

The play is set in the 1920s, in the house of the Flood family, in a small town near Oklahoma City. As soon as the curtain rises, we get an inside look into some of the problems of the Floods. The father, Rubin Flood is a traveling harness salesman and is about to embark on

another trip. His wife, Cora resents his absence from the everyday life of the family and confronts him about it. Thus, a mild argument erupts, during which we learn that Rubin's absence is affecting Cora as well as the children—the ten-year-old Sonny and the sixteen-year-old Reenie—in a negative way: Cora complains that she "live[s] like a widow" (Inge 229), Sonny is bullied by his peers, and Reenie is extremely shy. By making this connection between the daughter's shyness and the father's absence Inge goes against the classic Freudian account of female socialization. We have already speculated that classic psychoanalytic theory is the strand of psychology which Inge must have been most familiar with in the 1950s, yet here we find an example that illustrates that by no means does he take Freud's views for granted. For, as Benjamin observes, "[i]n the original Freudian account . . . [the daughter's] longing to be like the father was . . . a neurotic masculinity complex" (115). Yet, when talking about her daughter, Cora points out how Reenie's "eyes light up like candles every time [Rubin] go[es] near her" (Inge 229) also specifying the gender role that Rubin is supposed to play.

The reason for us bringing up the example above is to highlight the validity of Cora's argument which Rubin finds hard to recognize, upsetting the balance between self-assertion and recognition which would lead to a harmonious relationship that Benjamin calls "true independence" (53) but which we have termed as "marital balance" when applied to the relationship between Rubin and Cora. Rubin too has some valid arguments up his sleeve, however, which Cora must face both about their marriage and regarding her connection to her children. For example, Rubin brings up Cora's over-bearing attachment to her children that made it impossible for him to form a close connection to them both in their early years as well as their childhood in general. To this, Cora replies: "If I kept the kids too close to me, it's only because you weren't there, and I had to have *someone* close to me" (Inge 230)—which is a strong counterpoint. It is

also psychologically grounded. Chodorow for example highlights how in "post-Freudian society . . . [the mother] is isolated with her children . . . [which leads her] to look to them for her own self-affirmation . . . [thus causing] an over-involvement in her children's lives (63).

It is not only the mother, however, who is a victim of this living situation. Chodorow describes the mother-son dynamic in the Flood family perfectly when she discusses how in such circumstances "[a] mother . . . perpetuates her son's dependence" (64). Accordingly, during the first act, Cora chases away Sonny's bullies and later helps him face the darkness at the top of the stairs, a symbol of the terrifying unknow. But how do we account for the fact that Cora, while keeping her son dependent, is actually trying to push her daughter toward separation and lessen her dependence? I would suggest that it is not only because of Reenie's age that Cora is becoming more conscious of the need to raise a daughter who is independent, but also because she identifies with her more. What I mean by this is that she sees herself in Reenie and knows the developmental challenges that a young girl of sixteen has to face while this is not the case with Sonny, whom, because of his gender as well as his uniqueness she considers special—a phenomenon confirmed by Chodorow (72). Moreover, there might be a more intimate connection between mother and son due to these living arrangements where the father is mostly absent—something that we will see in more detail later in the analysis.

Both parties then—the husband as well as the wife—have problems that they want their partner to understand. Their relationship, however, is characterized by each side asserting their own truth without truly recognizing the other. Inge spends much of "Act One" preparing the stage for a conflict that threatens the very foundations of this relationship—at the end of it, Rubin storms out of the house and it is unclear whether he will return ever again. It all begins with a dress: Reenie has been invited to a party at the country club organized by the Ralstons, one of the newly

rich families of the oil boom era to celebrate the birthday of their daughter, Mary Jane. Cora buys an expensive dress for Reenie without telling Rubin, knowing perhaps that he would never agree to it, partly because their own financial situation is precarious. She does this because she sees Rennie's appearance at this party as a crucial part of her social integration and the fact that Reenie has an arranged blind date to take her to the event makes the party all the more important. Rubin finds out about the purchase and confronts his wife after which a major fight ensues which ends with him hitting Cora and running off. Clearly, Rubin sees the buying of the dress as a breach of his authority as the head of the household—a status that he clings to despite the fact that his presence and influence are irregular at best. Betcher and Pollack theorize that "men have commonly abdicated their authority in the family through their absence and by allowing women to run the household while periodically insisting that they are still Head of the Household" (117). They add that "[w]hen fathers take control inconsistently, in a loud voice, or in abrupt ways that are out of synch with the delicate balances built up by day-to-day familiarity, they wind up being feared rather than being respected" (Betcher and Pollack 117).

This describes Rubin's situation perfectly: he is an absent husband and father who still wants to be considered the family patriarch. Moreover, he is also someone who wants his freedom from daily worries while keeping his authority intact. In the lack of a "more confident feeling of authority" (Betcher and Pollack 116), however, Rubin finally asserts his power the only way he knows how: by resorting to physical violence. We would think that such an act could irreversibly alienate the children from their father, but Inge does not think so. Reenie, for example, scolds her mother about the fight and takes her father's side: "Oh, Mom, why did you have to say all those things? I love Daddy. Why do you say those things to him?" (Inge 250). According to Chodorow, something similar to this can happen only because women are the primary caretakers of children.

She explains that "[t]he father and men . . . are . . . idealized . . . [because] the girl's father is a last-ditch escape from maternal omnipotence (Chodorow 71). Furthermore, she adds that as a consequence of this, the daughter "is willing to deny the father's limitations . . . as long as she feels loved, and she is more able to do this because his distance means that she does not really know him" (Chodorow 72). Indeed, little does Reenie know about Rubin's life on the road, about his possible affair with a woman named Mavis Pruitt for example, or his recreational spendings.

The situation with Sonny is quite the opposite, however. Nonetheless, just like in the case of Reenie it corresponds to the inner-workings of the Oedipal triangle, and thus it is easier to understand the different attitudes of son and daughter to the same situation from a psychoanalytic point of view. Grete L. Bibring describes, for example, how in families where the father is (emotionally or physically) absent, the mother "appears to be as much in need of a husband as the son is of a father [and] [c]onsequently . . . concentrates much of her affection and interest on her son" (281). Sonny is quite happy with his father leaving, for now he gets to have his mother's love and attention all to himself, indulging in what Ronald Fairbairn calls "infantile dependence" (qtd. in Guntrip 291). During his interpretation of Fairbairn's theories, Harry Guntrip notes how "*infantile dependence* . . . is characterized by a persistence of both *primary identification* (the emotional state of the infant in the womb) and the *oral incorporative or 'taking in' attitudes* (contributed by breastfeeding) as the infant's chief means of object-relationship after birth" (291). On the other hand, Guntrip continues, "[*m*]*ature dependence* is characterized by full differentiation of ego and object . . . and therewith a capacity for valuing the object for its own sake and for giving as well as receiving" (291). One of our main arguments in this chapter then is that during the action, Sonny will have to make the transition from infantile dependence to mature dependence, thus allowing for the furthering of his own individual development.

In “Act Two” we meet Lottie Lacey, Cora’s older sister and his husband Morris Lacey. Inge’s uses the Lacey couple to form a contrast with the Floods. This contrasting, however, is only a part of that general dramatic technique of Inge that we have called “the gradual demasking of the ordinary” which in turn is meant to shine a light on the marriage of the Floods as well. What is so insightful about Inge’s characterization of the Laceys is his slow revelation of the misery that underlines what Cora herself calls their “almost perfect marriage” (Inge 280). Not only is the marriage of Laceys not perfect, but what we come to find out eventually is that despite its calm surface, the relationship between Lottie and Morris is so flawed that it can hardly be called a relationship at all. We get to find out more details about why this is so and what it consists of during a deep conversation between the two sisters. I do not think that Albert Wertheim is exaggerating much when he proclaims that “[t]he frank discussion of their sex lives between the two sisters is one of the best such discussions the American theater has produced” (“American Theater”). During this conversation what emerges is the picture of a marriage that is more fraught with problems than the marriage of the Floods despite its apparent stability, and thus falls much further from that “marital balance” that the Flood couple seems to achieve at the very end of the play, even if only temporarily.

Applying Jessica Benjamin’s model for relationships based on submission and domination again seems appropriate at this time to further our understanding of the characters in question. If we remember, this kind of relationship is constructed in a way that is the complete opposite of a healthy relationship (in this chapter “marital balance”) based on reciprocity and harmony, because in such a relationship the paradoxical friction between self-assertion and recognition of the other that is meant to be inside the individual, is split as to represent the opposing attitudes of the two partners: one becomes the master who only asserts and one becomes the slave who only recognizes

(Benjamin 73). The result is a relationship that can barely even be called a relationship because once the slave surrenders completely to the master, they evaporate from existence, something that Benjamin calls "the dialectic of control" (53).

Based on what we find out about them, the marriage of the Laceys seems to fit these criteria rather well. Accordingly, we learn that their sex life is non-existent and even while they were sexually active, Lottie has experienced no pleasure at all. Moreover, quite unbothered by playing the part of the henpecked husband, Morris is bossed around by Lottie—something that Lottie attributes to the fact that Morris simply does not care anymore: he has mentally left the relationship and like the slave in Benjamin's model of a domineering relationship, has metaphorically "cease[d] to exist" (53). As Lottie describes it: "something inside him just got up and went for a walk and never came back" (Inge 280). There is a fascinating contrast that appears here between the Floods and the Laceys and it is not only that they have no children who could possibly bind them together. For the major difference between the lives of the two couples has also a lot to do with Inge's understanding of the double-edged nature of passion—something that becomes obvious when Cora reminds Lottie that at least Morris has never hit her to which Lottie replies: "I wish to God someone *loved* me enough to hit me. You and Rubin fight. Oh, God I'd like a good fight. Anything'd be better than this *nothing*" (Inge 280).

What Inge seems to be suggesting here is that the marriage of Cora and Rubin is more alive, even with the violence than the seemingly perfect but quietly suffocating marriage of Lottie and Morris Lacey which, as Lottie explicitly admits, is making her feel dead inside: "I talk all the time just to convince myself that I'm alive" (Inge 281). The reason for this is that at least the Flood marriage involves two partners who exercise their self-assertion as well as occasionally recognizing the other while the Lacey marriage is composed of a master (Lottie) and a slave

(Morris) whose sudden rebellion is an unlikely but a disturbing possibility to Lottie. Thus, she tells Cora: “Morris and I go around always being so sweet to each other, but sometimes I wonder maybe he’d like to kill me” (Inge 280).

The next episode in the development of the Flood marriage is an episode of forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewed understanding. It takes place in “Act Three”. Rubin reappears and confesses that he has lost his job as a harness salesman. From the way that Inge handles this scene, it seems to one as if the real problem of their marriage was largely due to a problem of male intimacy. To be more specific, while it is Cora who needs to recognize Rubin’s insecurities and tendencies in this scene, upon closer examination it also becomes clear that she could not do that before because Rubin would, as men usually do, exercise his separateness through a “subtle withdrawal in which . . . he share[d] little of his inner self” (Betcher and Pollack 37). Now, he opens up however, and articulates that which he experiences as the alienating effect of a rapidly developing, modernized world: “How can *I* feel I’ve got anything to give to my children when the world’s as strange to me as it is to them? (Inge 299). He also tries to make Cora understand those codes of masculinity that he must abide by if he is to have any respect for himself:

> CORA. You go downtown the first thing Monday morning and talk to John Fraser. . . . He’d give you a job in a minute. Now, you do what I say, Rubin.
>
> RUBIN. Don’t you realize you can’t talk to a man like that? Don’t you realize that every time you talk that way, I just gotta go out and raise more hell, just to prove to myself I’m a free man? Don’t you know that when you talk to a man like that, you’re not givin’ him credit for havin’ any brains, or any guts, or a spine, or . . . or a few other body parts that are pretty important, too? (Inge 297)

David Gilmore offers a key to interpreting this passage when he writes about men's almost universal need to constantly prove their masculinity to others as well as to themselves: "[a]mong most of the peoples anthropologists are familiar with . . . true manhood . . . frequently shows an inner insecurity that needs dramatic proof. Its vindication is doubtful, resting on rigid codes of decisive action in many spheres of life: as husband, father, lover, provider, warrior. A restricted status, there are always men who fail the test" (Gilmore 17). Of course, how this phenomenon manifests itself in a society is entirely cultural. Nonetheless, it is internalized by its male members who find it difficult to escape the limits that the codes of masculinity set for their lives, even if they are perfectly conscious of them, like Rubin is in the dialogue quoted above. Betcher and Pollack also perfectly describe the situation that the Floods find themselves in when they state that women "are in constant danger of setting off the tripwire of men's anxiety about losing their self-sufficiency" (40). It is something that the Floods have to try to live with, Inge seems to suggest, and thus Cora understands that Rubin can only change his ways up to a certain point: "I'll remember. . . . When you have fears about things, please tell me" (Inge 300) after which Rubin admits how: [i]t's hard for a man t'admit his fears, even to hisself" (Inge 300).

After Cora's recognition of Rubin's fears, Rubin's apology and their admittance of how they cannot get along without each other, Inge points to sex as the final stage of achieving "marital balance". But even this balance does not mean that there are no fluctuations between how much the man, or the woman assert themselves or to what extent they recognize each other. No relationship is static, and, indeed, during the final scene of the play where Rubin impatiently urges Cora to get rid of the kids and to come upstairs, it does seem like Rubin wants the coital interaction more than Cora does. It is not entirely clear whether Inge portrays Cora as hesitant because she is

apprehensive about sex or whether she is just simply busy with trying to find some sort of closure with Sonny. Nevertheless, the very last moment of the play where Cora ascends the stairs has been interpreted by critics in very similar ways to the point where there seems to be a consensus about why there is now a warm light illuminating the dark at the top of the stairs: it is speculated that Cora and Rubin have now revitalized their marriage, and thus they are not as frightened about the unknown as they previously were.

Sonny Flood's transition from a state of infantile dependence to an existence characterized by mature dependence represents another major developmental arch in *Dark*. Sonny, despite being ten years old, still did not move past the Oedipal crisis—that is, he did not yet replace his primary identification with his mother with an identification with a masculine object (Chodorow 50). This is where the character of Sammy Goldenbaum proves to be of utmost importance for Sonny's psychological development, and thus, Inge seems to imply, to the attainment of a gender role that is more appropriate for his age.

Sammy Goldenbaum is a young boy from a military academy. He is Reenie's blind date and is about the same age as she is. In addition, we also learn that Sammy is from California, that he is Jewish, and that his father died before he was born. His mother, Gertrude is a small-time silent film actress who—at least that is what Sammy claims—is somehow so busy with her career and her life with her new husband that she has no time whatsoever to see her only son, much less to accommodate him, which has led to Sammy having to spend his life in military academies all around the country. Sammy does not blame his mother for her neglect, however, but tries to justify her behavior any chance he gets.

Our main argument regarding Sammy is that he serves as an ideal to Sonny. Secondly, there is a similar phenomenon present here to that which we have identified during our analysis of

Come Back, Little Sheba. In that play, if we remember, we have likened Doc's impulse to exercise his paternal authority on Marie (who is not his daughter) to the way that Lola's father has exercised his authority, first forbidding Lola to date boys and then disowning her, once she got pregnant out of wedlock and married at the age of eighteen. Then we have pointed out how the presence of Lola's father looms over the whole play, his influence made explicit every now and then as if it was something buried deep within the play's unconscious. I term this technique "psychologized paralleling", which is a method by which Inge represents the unconscious aspects of a character or maybe even the whole play itself through the introduction of a character who explicitly embodies meanings that otherwise would remain latent. Although while it would be wrong to say that Sammy the person is nothing more than a mere dramatic device—after all, he is a fully-fledged, three-dimensional character—it can be argued however, that he also stands as a psychologized parallel to Sonny.

In order to better understand this dramatic device, we can mention a similar phenomenon present in world literature, an example where not a character, but a whole play comes to stand for the textual unconscious of another play. In his 1899 psychological study, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud discusses the way in which Sophocles' play, *Oedipus Rex* can be viewed in such terms when placed next to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "In the *Oedipus* the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences" (282). What Freud is referring to here is that while Oedipus does kill his father and has sex with his mother, Hamlet's unconscious wish to do the same is never materialized. Something similar is happening to the character of Sammy in relation to the character of Sonny. The names are already very similar but once we take stock of the many similarities in the life of

the two boys, it becomes clear that Inge is drawing parallels to enhance the play's psychological depth and insight.

One of the most important similarities is in the relationships of the two boys to their mothers, both of which are intimate to the point where they are almost sexualized. In one scene, for example, Cora tells Sonny that he "mustn't come crawling into [her] bed any more" (Inge 290) like he did during the night. Likewise, Sammy, while reminiscing about the two days he once spent with his mother in San Francisco, makes the intimate nature of their relationship rather explicit: "She let me take her to dinner and to a show and to dance. Just like we were sweethearts. It was the most wonderful time I ever had" (Inge 272). Moreover, during more than one scene in the play, we see Sonny busying himself with his scrapbook which he filled with pictures of famous movie stars—something that is somewhat of an obsession for Sonny who is also, of course, an ardent fan of moving pictures. In parallel to this, it is no coincidence that Sammy's mother is herself a silent film actress, for in the character of Gertrude Vanderhof, Sammy's mother, two of Sonny's infatuations are combined: the figure of the mother and the exciting world of Hollywood. We can already see how Sammy is slowly starting to become some kind of an alter ego to Sonny, someone with whom he can identify.

Another crucial similarity better illustrates how the parallel between Sammy and Sonny is similar to the textual parallel Freud draws between *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*. We know that Sammy is Jewish, and therefore a possible target of antisemitism the same way that Sonny is the victim of bullying by the neighborhood children who dislike him perhaps because he is too different from them. Inge seems to suggest, however, that Sonny's alienation from the world outside is something that he can overcome, while Sammy's estrangement from his hostile surroundings and his ensuing loneliness pushes him to commit suicide—something that Sonny merely threatens to do and in a

context that is rather banal. Thus, when his mother takes the five-dollar bill from Sonny that he earned at a recitation and wants to use to see a movie, he protests and tells Cora:

> SONNY. . . . I hate you! I wanta see the movie. I've just gotta see the movie. If I can't see the movie, I'll kill myself.
>
> CORA. Such foolish talk!
>
> SONNY. I mean it. I'll kill myself (Inge 290).

Later in the play, we learn that after being harassed by a woman at the country club dance for being Jewish, Sammy has killed himself—something that comes as a shock to all of the characters. Thus, the parallel becomes increasingly visible to us: Sammy committed suicide while Sonny merely threatened to do so in the same way that Oedipus killed his father and married his mother while Hamlet had merely wished to do the same. The fact that Sonny recites the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from *Hamlet* in the middle of the living room with Sammy in the audience applauding him then not only foreshadows Sammy's suicide but it also supports our argument about Sammy functioning as an alter ego to Sonny.

Now, that we have considered this psychological parallel, we can better understand the actual interaction between the two characters and its significance. Sonny gets to meet Sammy when Sammy and two of his friends, Flirt and Punky arrive at the house of the Floods to pick up Reenie and then to go to the party in the country club. Sammy fascinates Sonny from the moment they meet and even though they do not even get to know each other that well, Sammy has a great impact on Sonny. Their first meaningful interaction is when Sammy offers to play with Sonny: "*He kneels on the floor, permitting* SONNY *to straddle his back. Then* SAMMY *kicks his feet in*

the air like a wild colt, as SONNY *holds to him tight*" (Inge 268). One cannot help but notice the homoerotic overtones of this scene which might account for the quick-paced bonding between the two boys.

In the next scene, Sammy takes out his sword that is a part of his military uniform and "*goes charging about the room in search of imagined villains*" (Inge 268). Not being able to keep still due to the overwhelming excitement, Sonny asks to borrow Sammy's sword, which the boy hands over to him. Once in possession of the sword, Sonny "*imitates the actions of* SAMMY" (Inge 269). When asked about what he wants a sword for, his answer is: "I just want to *show* [people]" and right after this line he simulates a suicide not completely unlike Sammy's: "*He places the sword between his arm and his chest, then drops to the floor, the sword rising far above his body, giving the appearance that he is impaled*" (Inge 269).

Finally, before the company departs for the party with Reenie being Sammy's date, Sonny manages to impress his idol by speaking the famous "To be or not to be" monologue from *Hamlet*. This puts the two boys in especially good spirits and on a whim, Sammy invites the ten-year-old Sonny to accompany him to the party—something that he takes back after he realizes that it is inappropriate for such a young boy to go to a dance in the country club. Nevertheless, Sonny does not want to give up on the offer and throws one of his big tantrums. He can only be calmed down by Sammy, an achievement that amazes Sonny's mother, Cora: "*(Awed as though by a miracle)* You're the first person in the entire world who's ever been able to do a thing with the boy when he goes into one of his tantrums" (Inge 275). Trying to compensate Sonny for his false promise, Sammy pledges that he will collect all the small, inexpensive party accessories that he can find and send it back to him via his sister so that Sonny can have a party all on his own which seems to please the young boy.

One way to interpret this progression of events is to see them as symbolizing Sonny's character development. Accordingly, we can see the sword scene as Sammy handing to Sonny the phallus as a symbol of power not so much to ward off enemies but rather to metaphorically kill that part of himself that keeps him dependent on his mother and the target of the neighborhood children—an act that also foreshadows Sammy's own suicide. Moreover, Sonny's tantrum that he throws before the whole company is meant to symbolize his immaturity, something that he must leave behind—which he does in the end. Finally, I argue that Sammy's seemingly banal promise to send Sonny small party accessories via his sister is meant to symbolize the kind of giving attitude that characterizes the kind of mature dependence which Sonny must attain by the end of the play.

Despite regarded as a dramaturgically conservative playwright, in *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* Inge does experiment with his paralleling technique to give it more psychological depth, condensing Sammy's influence on Sonny into a series of poignant theatrical images. This influence only comes full circle, however, once Sonny learns of Sammy's suicide and is prompted by his loss to internalize him as an ideal to which he must live up to. Nevertheless, when it comes to Sonny's psychological development, the impact of the interaction between mother and son must also be appreciated. At the end of "Act Two", Sonny is still in a position of infantile dependence: when told by his mother that he should go to bed he "*walks slowly . . . to the foot off the stairs and stands there, looking up at the blackness at the top . . .* [while] [*f*]*rom the kitchen we hear* CORA'S *muffled snobs*. SONNY *cries out in fear* (Inge 284). Deserted by her husband and rejected by her sister with whom she was planning to move in with, it would seem that Cora is hardly in any position to offer anyone any comfort. But this is not what Inge insinuates when Cora takes Sonny's hand and starts ascending the stairs "*to face the darkness hovering there like an omen*" (Inge 284). Instead, he portrays the mother-son bond as stronger than either the son's or the mother's

individual fear of the future and of the unknow, symbolized by the dark at the top of the stairs. Again, by Inge's standards who usually insists on photographically realistic set design, the dark at the top of the stairs is a theatrical novelty.

In "Act Three", Cora realizes how her insistence to keep her son close as a way of compensating for her absent husband has been affecting Sonny. She has been infantilizing him and now has to deny her close attachment, something that she still finds hard to do. Sammy's appearance as well as his tragic suicide is then a sort of "deus ex machina" for Sonny which teaches him selflessness and gives him a newfound appreciation of his life. In the very last scene, for example, seeing the emotional hurt that Reenie is in, he becomes kind to her despite being hostile towards her all throughout the play and "*in a heroic gesture of defiance*" (Inge 304) he smashes the piggy bank that contains the five dollar bill that his mother took away from him and takes his sister to a movie, possibly looking to revitalize his relationship with her as well as to distract her from the tragic event that is Sammy Goldenbaum's suicide.

Finally making the transition from an infantile dependence characterized by selfishness and lack of differentiation toward a mature dependence defined by mutuality and recognition of the other as a subject, during the very last scene of the play, before Cora goes up the stairs to join the impatient Rubin in the bedroom, son and mother share a moment together which Inge describes in the following way: "SONNY, *just before going out the door, stops for one final look at his mother, his face full of confused understanding. Then he hurries out to* REENIE, *and* CORA . . . *starts up the stairs*" (Inge 305). Thus, the Oedipal situation is resolved: Sonny understands that he cannot have the same relationship to his mother that he used to have when he was a baby and recognizes his mother as a subject with a private emotional life of her own.

To sum up, there are two main psychological processes that we have identified during this chapter which have also destabilized gender roles. One of these processes was the negotiation between Rubin and Cora, husband and wife towards finding a harmonious balance between self-assertion and recognition of the other—a psychological balance that we have termed as "marital balance". During this negotiation process, Rubin has had to control his masculine pride in order to communicate his fears to his wife while Cora has had to recognize her overbearing attitude towards her children as well as, to some extent, Rubin. The other psychological development that we have looked at was Sonny's inner journey from a state of infantile dependence towards that which Ronald Fairbairn termed as "mature dependence" (qtd. in Guntrip 291). This involved an identification with a boy not much older than he is who provided him with an example of selflessness, but also made him appreciate the life he currently has. His mother's, Cora's encouragement of him to differentiate was also a driving factor in his development. Overall, we can say that Inge's first successful attempt at an autobiographically inspired play resulted in a refinement of his toolkit as a dramatist as well as, to quote Elia Kazan's words again, in "insight and tenderness, Inge's own gifts" ("Chapter 31").

7. Conclusions

During this study our main argument has been that, in his four major plays, Inge destabilizes gender roles presenting his characters with psychological conflicts that prompt them to modify or at least negotiate the gender roles that they currently assume. This has shown that gender roles are flexible and are works of culture which the individual acquires and internalizes during his/her social development. By pointing this out, Inge illustrated that cultural stereotypes and gender norms are not only unsustainable, but also, in some cases hurtful to the individual and those around him/her. With dramatic techniques like “paralleling”, “contrasting” and gender role reversal, Inge achieves that which I have termed the “gradual demasking of the ordinary”—a process by which we become increasingly aware of the fact that social norms and gender roles are not inherent, but largely constructed. We have also noted how, in this way, Inge’s work can be seen as a presage to the cultural and sexual revolution of the 1960s.

In *Come Back, Little Sheba*, we have identified two major psychological problems that upset the inner life of the two central characters, Doc and Lola Delaney. We have noted how Doc’s idealization of their eighteen-year-old boarder, Marie, has pushed him toward a romantic idealism and toward the impulse to protect Marie from the impure world of sex. Since Marie is very different from the way that Doc imagines her, Doc’s ideals are doomed to crumble from the beginning. And when they do, he comes to the realization that he has to continue being grateful for having Lola as a wife who can help him stay sober. Lola’s main psychological problem, on the other hand, was her desperate need for connection and longing for her lost youth—the unmet needs of an isolated housewife who compensated herself by indulging in vicarious pleasures, which we have equated with the attitude of the self-sacrificing mother (Benjamin 79). Similarly to Doc, Lola has also had

to give up an unattainable ideal—that which we might call her youthful exuberance, symbolized by the small, furry dog, Little Sheba.

In *Picnic*, there were three characters that were in the center of our analysis: Madge Owens, Hal Carter and Rosemary Sydney. Madge's character development starts from being the object of desire and ends at the point where she becomes a subject who has desire. In the story, this has meant her refusal of a life of safety and affluence in the company of Alan—who objectifies her—and the acceptance of a precarious future with Hal—who values her as an equal romantic partner. In the case of Hal, the main psychological challenge was his social integration into the community. Hal could not meet this challenge successfully which may be due to the fact that his infatuation with Madge was even stronger than his desire to fit in. Nonetheless, he remained an alienated subject who must try again to gain a foothold in society. Rosemary Sydney's psychological progression was identified to be the complete opposite of Madge's evolution. Thus, fearing a life of loneliness, Rosemary has given up her position of the independent subject who has desire for a state where she is an object who is desired. The manifestation of this transformation in the action of the play was Rosemary's submission to Howard Bevans—a submission that we can also interpret as being merely temporary. Nevertheless, during our examination, it was revealed that this relationship is in contrast with the dynamic between Hal and Madge in that it is not based on genuine connection or healthy, mutual intimacy.

In *Bus Stop*, the main themes of the discussion were regarding problems of male intimacy. Bo Decker, the young, macho cowboy was punished for treating his love interest, Cherie, as an object. His story, thus, was a story of having to recognize Cherie and to love her for who she truly is. Finally, Bo has understood that love was based on a connection between two subjects, and that self-assertion was to be coupled with the recognition of the other in order to make a relationship

work. He has also had to give up his obvious pose of male omnipotence, which Inge has painted as a caricature to begin with. In contrast, Dr. Lyman was portrayed by Inge as a man who has failed at intimacy because he was never able to recognize his partners or to open up to them. During this characterization, Inge has made use of one of the great love scenes in all of literature to portray Dr. Lyman's regrets about leading a selfish life. While this regret did lead to him putting a stop to another perverted act, it was suggested by Inge that that alone cannot lead to his redemption.

In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, perhaps Inge's most complex major play, we have looked at two psychological processes which would destabilize gender roles during the course of the action. One of these was a negotiation process between Rubin Flood and Cora Flood regarding the balance of self-assertion and the recognition of the other (Benjamin 53) in their relationship. This negotiation has involved the taming of Rubin's masculine hubris—something that he had to do so that he could show vulnerability to his wife about him feeling lost in an increasingly alienating, modernized world. In turn, Cora has had to realize how her over-involvement in her children's lives was detrimental both to the children as well as her husband, who was unable to participate in his children's lives partly because Cora had kept them too close to herself as a coping strategy for having an absent husband. The other psychological transition that we have traced during our analysis was the ten-year-old Sonny Flood's evolution from being in a state of "infantile dependence" characterized by a complete reliance on his mother and a kind of self-centeredness where the subject sees the object as existing only for his sake, towards becoming an individual whose existence is predicated on what Ronald Fairbarn calls "mature dependence" (qtd. in Guntrip 291)—a state described by Guntrip as having the "capacity for valuing the object for its own sake and for giving as well as receiving" (291). Thus, Sonny has found his way out of the Oedipal

triangle, realizing that he must differentiate himself from his mother and that he must value her as an individual on her own right.

All in all, Inge's invention of a whole palette of psychological conflicts was shown to upset gender roles in a way that is socially subversive. Psychological conflicts are, therefore, it is implied in our analysis, just as non-static as the gender roles which they destabilize. And therein lies an important aspect of Inge's talent—for it can be said that while the gender roles that he portrayed did indeed, become obsolete, the psychological forces which he so skillfully revealed, did not. Therefore, while it is appropriate to call Inge's plays "period dramas" in the sense that they are set during a specific period, it would be wrong to say that they belong exclusively to a certain period of American history. On the contrary, with such a distance in time, one could even go as far as to say that the contours of his work have become even clearer to us—the revitalization of his work in recent years would certainly prove this point. Whether this is true or not, I think it is safe to say that his plays survive, and as long as theater companies keep performing them, they are continually brought to life.

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