

The Tennessee Williams Annual Review

Tennessee v. John T. Scopes: “Blanche” Jennings Bryan and Antievolutionism

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Number 8

It serves notice on the country that Neanderthal man is organizing in these forlorn backwaters of the land, led by a fanatic, rid of sense and devoid of conscience. Tennessee, challenging him too timorously and too late, now sees its courts converted into camp meetings and its Bill of Rights made a mock of by its sworn officers of the law. There are other States that had better look to their arsenals before the Hun is at their gates.

— H. L. Mencken, July 18, 1925

ARE YOU A MAN OR A MONKEY?
AMEND THE CONSTITUTION—PROHIBIT DARWIN
SAVE OUR SCHOOLS FROM SIN
MY ANCESTORS AIN'T APES!

— Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *Inherit the Wind* (1955)

As theatre critic for *The Nation*, Joseph Wood Krutch penned a 1947 review of Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and in an earlier essay titled “Tennessee’s Dilemma,” Krutch discusses the “vast gulf” separating the “two halves of our population,” pondering “how this gulf may be bridged”:

In the centers of population men have gone on assuming certain bodies of knowledge and certain points of view without realizing that they were living in a different world from that inhabited by a considerable portion of their fellow-citizens, and they have been unconscious of the danger which threatened them at the inevitable moment when the two worlds should come in conflict. In Tennessee the moment has arrived and a single battle will no more settle it than the World War settled the questions from which it arose. (100)

^{¶2} Certainly, *Streetcar* is a tale of two worlds—the Old and the New South—that “come in conflict” when Blanche, the protector of the past, and Stanley, the harbinger of the future, collide. Yet the “Tennessee” of “Tennessee’s Dilemma” is not Tennessee Williams, but the state of Tennessee, and the “vast gulf” cited by Krutch is not the chasm between the respective worlds of Blanche and Stanley but the divide between the religious Fundamentalists and secular Modernists who clashed over Darwin’s theory of evolution in the infamous “Monkey Trial” of 1925.¹ Nonetheless, Krutch’s observations in “Tennessee’s Dilemma” uncannily foreshadow his 1947 review of *Streetcar*—and suggest that the play may be seen as a dramatic echo of the famous trial.

^{¶3} In Krutch’s formation, Williams was no neutral observer. Twice—in the literary surveys *The American Drama since 1918* and “*Modernism*” in *Modern Drama*—Krutch reported that the playwright had once summarized *Streetcar*’s message in the following terms: “You had better look out or the apes will take over” (331; 129). “Despite all the violence of his plays,” Krutch explained, and

despite what sometimes looks very much like nihilism, [Williams] is really on the side of what modernists would call the Past rather than the Future—which means, of course, on the side of those who believe that the future, if there is to be any civilized future, will be less new than most modern dramatists from Ibsen on have professed to

believe. . . . That is, a break with the past as radical as that which much modern thought and much modern drama seems to advocate unintentionally prepares the way for the apes to take over. A civilized man is likely to find it increasingly difficult to live in either the physical or the spiritual world which has *gradually been evolving*. (“*Modernism*,” 129–30, emphasis added)

¶14

Post-World War I America witnessed, in the Scopes trial, a struggle for the soul of the nation between the progressivist Fundamentalists (led by William Jennings Bryan) and the Modernist proponents of scientific secularism (defended by Clarence Darrow), whom Krutch identified as those figures in post-war America who recognized revealed religion’s reliance upon an imaginative past as being counterproductive to the nation’s impending rush toward technological superiority. The religious conflict found renewed spirit in Williams’s post-World War II America with creationism’s continued fight to keep evolution out of the hands of the secularists and science’s to keep Genesis within those demagogues’ church walls.

¶15

Echoing comments made by Bryan a few weeks before the trial, Darrow said in his first major speech of the trial, “I am going to argue as if it was serious, and as if it was a death struggle between two civilizations” (qtd. in Moran 88). Compare Blanche’s observation about her own trial with Stanley: “The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me, unless . . .” (351). Just as Darrow’s comment proved prophetic, especially in light of Bryan’s sudden death five days after the trial ended, so too did Blanche’s comment foretell her psychological destruction. Civilizations did clash in 1925, just as they would again in 1947, and in both trials the “apes” would ultimately win.

“that battle of giants”

Termed the trial of the century, *Tennessee v. John T. Scopes* marked a watershed in American cultural thought and practice. If the nation had committed itself to Theodore Roosevelt’s progressivist platform at the dawn of the twentieth century as a way to curb the political muscle of the robber barons and restore the social democratic principles largely lost during the Gilded Age, that commitment was administered by Protestant practitioners who understood “progress” in social rather than scientific terms. As Robert Crunden writes,

America remained dominated by patterns of religious thought. Some were explicit, giving rise to what became the social gospel movement. Most were implicit, shaping ideas that seemed to be about secular matters. Religion provided the central motivating force behind adventurous thinking, but the sudden secularization of modern culture has obscured the importance of religion in forming the minds even of the most secular thinkers. (40)

While the end of World War I saw the culmination of many of the progressivists’ reforms, including women’s suffrage and prohibition, it also harbingered the beginning of the end of progressivist optimism throughout the 1920s. Few could deny the fact that the nation was then experiencing modernist growing pains which accelerated the migration from rural to urban life, a movement which not only widened the class strata between northern industrialists and southern agrarians but also demarcated the differences religion would play in defining both regions’ antipathetic political agendas.

¶17

Most of what defined these two epochs in terms of politics, class, gender, and race relations met on the legal battlefield in Dayton, Tennessee, during the scorching month of July 1925—a season referred to by Clarence Darrow as “a summer for the gods” (Scopes and Presley 207; Larson, *Summer* 177). The “gods” to whom Darrow referred were not only the ones of the Old and New Testaments, the *Origin of the Species* (1859), and

The Descent of Man (1871); they were also those gods of American fundamentalism and agnosticism, of majority rule and minority liberalism, of agrarianism and industrialization, of revealed religion and scientific inquiry, of southern preservationists and northern reformists, and of the Great Commoner Williams Jennings Bryan and the Great Defender Clarence Darrow—in short, the gods of everything that was left smoldering in the ashes of the Civil War, which southern “[i]solation and poverty” had nourished along (Moran 57).

18

Edward J. Larson, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, refutes the long-standing myth that the trial was simply about religious faith versus scientific theory. Larson asserts that the trial was more about the rights of one part of America (i.e., the secularized North) to enter the home of another part (i.e., the fundamentalist South) and dictate how it should govern itself. The debate over Tennessee's newly drafted antievolution statutes quickly snowballed into larger struggles over the separation of church and state and majority versus minority rule. Like Larson, Jeffrey Moran argues that the trial was not an isolated historic event, but rather the surface manifestation of “tectonic shifts in American culture” (2). Moran writes:

This war between the old culture and the new was also bound up with a growing split between the older rural America and the nation's burgeoning cities, for the new culture was very much a product of city life. The antievolution movement was in many ways an expression of rural resentment toward the rise of the city. Further, in a way that is perhaps difficult to see today, when regional variations in the United States have been mostly ironed flat, the Scopes trial exposed a deep cleavage between the more traditional American South and a North that was rapidly growing more urban and diverse. (2–3)²

So much did geography imbue the trial's subtext that an intellectual collective of “Twelve Southerners” centered at Vanderbilt University drafted a manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), in response not only to H. L. Mencken's polemical essay “The Sahara of the Bozart” (1917) but also to the defense team's northern arrogance and interventionist politics.³ As historian W. J. Cash notes in *The Mind of the South*, the trial became less about the teaching of evolution and more about “the maintenance of the savage ideal, to the end of vindicating the old Southern will to cling fast to its historical ways” (347).⁴

19

In light of this brief socio-political context in America and Krutch's two works cited in the introduction to this essay, it is not difficult to recognize the similarities between the Scopes trial and Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, particularly in their competing geographical visions and interventionist politics. Just as the Tennesseans took exception with Scopes's New York lawyers for having tried to tell them how to keep their provincial southern “house” in order, Stanley resents Blanche's intrusion into the Kowalski home and her imposition of elitist ideologies that start, but do not end, with her alterations to the flat to make it appear “almost—dainty” (382). Both the play and the trial, in fact, document a cultural invasion where the perpetrators are duly dispensed with, which some later observers would feel was an unjust eradication of enlightened sensibility by small-minded bigotry. Hindsight is a luxury, however, and to many historical spectators of both dramas, either in 1925 or in 1947, it was simply a question of perspective. To a Daytonian, Blanche's bringing fundamentalism into the Kowalski household (that bedrock of northern mercantile ethics) would seem a justifiable rejoinder to the northerners' arrogant insistence that Tennessee adopt its secular laws and allow Scopes to teach evolution to his biology students; to a New Yorker, such fundamentalism was not only

moribund but also impeded the natural process which man, city, and nation were then advancing headlong towards.

¶10 Unilateral perspectives that side either with Stanley or with Blanche have historically confounded *Streetcar's* interpretation, just as they had destined the Scopes trial to its legal impasse and bigoted verdict. The New Yorkers (and their Chicago leader) brought with them their unflagging faith in scientific inquiry, one that saw Darwin's theory of evolution, though not irrefutably proven, as highly probable in terms of explaining human development and therefore significant for high-school curricula. Critics like Bryan, however, saw only the dangers of Darwinism: first it denied the evangelical belief in creation and God's plan that accompanied it, and secondly it preached the antithesis of the Christian ethos of pity and care for the weaker part of humanity. Darwinian theory had, after all, steered a Wilhelmian Germany wayward in World War I and would lay the essential groundwork for the Nazis to see their eugenics plan through to its logical Nietzschean end, which is what Bryan and other Fundamentalists had frequently declared. Both sides had their ideologies and their paladins, but while the defense lacked a group identity beyond that which bonds men of empirical science with protectors of individual liberties, the prosecution formed an intimidating lobby under the banner heading of antievolutionism, with Bryan as its silver-tongued crusader.

¶11 Though Fundamentalism began "as a response to theological developments within the Protestant church rather than to a political" crisis in America (Larson, *Summer* 37), it soon became a movement where religion confronted politics, namely with regard to the teaching of evolution in high schools, not just in Tennessee. By 1925, Bryan saw the opportunity to impede those Modernist advances Krutch describes by expunging evolutionary theory—which many Fundamentalists viewed as directly responsible for the secularizing of the nation—from the nation's school curricula, one state at a time. While Bryan was its spokesman, he was not alone in the Fundamentalist campaign. William Bell Riley, creator of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in Philadelphia in 1919, and popular evangelists Billy Sunday, T. T. Martin, and J. Frank Norris all helped lobby state legislatures. Their antievolution campaigns waged in Kentucky as early as 1921, New York in 1922, Oklahoma and Florida in 1923 (Priest 59), and as late as 1947 in South Dakota were so successful that at one point Riley told Bryan that "[t]he whole country is seething on the evolution question" (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 43).⁵

¶12 Specifically in Tennessee, the antievolution march helped push the Butler Act through the state house and senate, with Governor Austin Peay signing it into law on March 21, 1925. Named for its author, State Representative John Washington Butler, the Butler law forbade any "teacher in any of the universities, normals and all other public schools of the state" from teaching "any theory that denies the story of the divine creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals" (qtd. in Moran 74–75). The premise of the Monkey Trial was that Scopes broke the Butler law by teaching the theory of evolution to his high school biology class. Once Scopes was arrested, the ACLU mobilized to defend him on the basis of protecting his right to academic freedom. Led by the circuit's district attorney Tom Stewart and Ben G. McKenzie, the prosecution's case was enhanced when William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic nominee for president and former secretary of state under President Wilson, signed on; the defense's case, led by New Yorkers Dudley Field Malone and Arthur Garfield Hays, was bolstered by the free services of agnostic Chicagoan Clarence Darrow, America's greatest defense lawyer, who had just saved Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb from the Illinois electric chair. While Bryan, called the greatest orator of his day, had wanted to

spread strong Fundamentalist values, Darrow joined the ACLU-backed defense team not just because he wanted to protect individual civil liberties, but also because he wanted to derail the Fundamentalist train that was running roughshod through the states' assemblies.

¶13 The trial began on Friday, July 10, 1925, and concluded eleven days later. Despite a long speech by Darrow in favor of religious liberty on the second day, the trial proper did not really begin until the fourth day, following selection of a jury, the defense's motion to quash the indictment based on the unconstitutionality of the Butler Act, and Judge John T. Raulston's expected overruling of the motion. It was the fifth day, however, that produced all of the trial's major speeches, including Bryan's. Bryan's opening speech was predictable—it repeated ideas he had espoused in such speeches as “The Menace of Darwinism” (1921) and “The Origin of Man” (1922) and in such published works as *In His Image* (1922) and *Seven Questions in Dispute* (1924). Even before the trial, Bryan had declared,

The hypothesis that links man to the lower forms of life and makes him a lineal descendent of the brute—is obscuring and weakening all the virtues that rest upon the religious tie between God and man. . . . [There] is no mention of religion, the only basis for morality; not a suggestion of a sense of responsibility to God—nothing but cold, clammy materialism! Darwinism transforms the Bible into a story book and reduces Christ to man's level. It gives him an ape for an ancestor. (*In His Image* 112)

In the above speech, and the several that were to follow during the trial, Bryan of course defended revealed religion and God's higher plan and lambasted George W. Hunter's *A Civic Biology* (1914), the textbook from which Scopes taught:

There is that book! There is the book they were teaching your children that man was a mammal and so indistinguishable among the mammals that they leave him there with thirty-four hundred and ninety-nine other mammals. . . . How dare those scientists put man in a little ring like that with lions and tigers and everything that is bad! Not only the evolution is possible, but the scientists possibly think of shutting man up in a little circus like that with all these animals, that have an odor, that extends beyond the circumference of this circle. . . .

That Bible is not going to be driven out of this court by experts who come hundreds of miles to testify that they can reconcile evolution, with its ancestor in the jungle, with man made by God in his image, and put here for purposes as part of the divine plan. . . .

The facts are simple, the case is plain, and if those gentleman want to enter upon a larger field of educational work on the subject of evolution, let us get through this case and then convene a mock court for it will deserve the title of mock court if its purpose is to banish from the hearts of the people the word of God as revealed! (Great applause.) (qtd. in Moran 121, 125)

After Bryan's passionate speech and defense attorney Malone's equally enthralling rebuttal, chief prosecutor Tom Stewart's final diatribe summed up the state's opinion succinctly: “It is as absurd and as ridiculous as to say that a man might be half monkey, half man. . . . At what stage in his development did he cross the line from monkey to manhood?” (qtd. in Moran 134).

¶14 In words, intonation, and inveterate passion, Bryan's speech at the Scopes trial adumbrates Blanche's hysterical antievolution speech to Stella in scene 4 of *Streetcar*. Blanche has already told Stanley that he is “simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side” (279), which picks up from an earlier conversation she and Stella had when they first met and foreshadows her later charge that he is an atavistic primate:

BLANCHE. Will Stanley like me, or will I be just a visiting in-law, Stella? I couldn't stand that.

STELLA. You'll get along fine together, if you'll just try not to—well—compare him with men that we went out with at home.

BLANCHE. Is he so—different?

STELLA. Yes. A different species. (257–58)

By the time Blanche confesses her loathing for Stanley in scene 4, he has passed from belonging to a “different species” to being “primitive” to finally becoming “downright—*bestial*” (322):

He acts like an animal, has animal habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's something—sub-human—something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something—ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in—anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is—Stanley Kowalski—survivor of the stone age!... Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella—my sister—there has been *some* progress since then! Such things as art—as poetry as music—such kind of light have come into the world since then. . . . In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . *Don't—don't hang back with the brutes!* ” (323)

¶15 Blanche's comments are most telling when placed against the backdrop of the Scopes trial, during which the majority of Tennesseans in Dayton felt that they were being called primitive, not only because the defense claimed they evolved from apes but also because their fundamentalist ideologies, which Darrow called a “fool religion” (qtd. in Moran 150), made them all “ignoramus[es]” to him (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 190). In the words of acerbic reporter H. L. Mencken:

The Scopes trial, from the start, has been carried on in a manner exactly fitted to the anti-evolution law and the simian imbecility under it. There hasn't been the slightest pretense to decorum. The rustic judge, a candidate for re-election, has postured before the yokels like a clown in a ten-cent side show, and almost every word he has uttered has been an undisguised appeal to their prejudices and superstitions. (1)

Like the Daytonians, whose hostility toward Darrow and his defense team pressured Judge Raulston's steering the trial in favor of Bryan and revealed religion, Stanley's calculated plot that subverts Blanche's efforts to convince Stella of his primitive ways is sparked by his refusal to allow her to dictate “foreign” policy in his house.

¶16 The links between Blanche and Bryan end, of course, where the Scopes trial begins—that is, with her implicit acceptance of the theory of evolution, albeit its more popularized version, through which she denounces Stanley. But we should remember as well that over twenty years of scientific discovery separate Blanche from Bryan, so while Blanche cannot fully deny evolution as Bryan had done, she still can separate herself from it and from those brutes who have carried it headlong apace. For this reason, Blanche does not entirely abandon Bryan's antievolution sentiments in respecting God's divine plan, though her actions—both in Laurel with her sex scandal and in New Orleans with her drinking and cat-and-mouse games with Mitch (and the paperboy)—frequently belie what she preaches, making Blanche one of the most contradictory characters in American drama. This truism does not further distance her from Bryan, however, and if anything it brings them even closer, for Bryan was also a notoriously contradictory person. It was this self-contradiction that led both of them to their demise.

Bryan, for example, was the Great Commoner for majority rule (which Blanche is not), the exciting orator (which Blanche is), and the ardent religious man without compromise (which Blanche has shades of). Yet, as John Scopes would later recall in his memoirs, *Center of the Storm*, Bryan “had been a symbol of the progress he had come to Dayton to stifle” (Scopes and Presley 214). He had begun fighting for progressivist issues such as women’s suffrage, Filipino independence, and a silver standard and progressive income tax, but by “the end of his career he had concentrated on less progressive issues,” such as prohibition and antievolutionism (Scopes and Presley 214).⁶ In short, he had “ceased to grow with the years and in the burgeoning progress of the twentieth century he was a relic” (Scopes and Presley 215). Even during the opening statements of the trial, Malone quipped, “The defense appeals from the fundamentalist Bryan of today to the modernist Bryan of yesterday” (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 172). Much the same has been said of Blanche as well.

¶18

Blanche is the progressivist paragon in principle who preaches temperance in alcohol and sex but who practices both in excess; she is the relic of the Old South who refuses to adjust to Modernism and the New South but has actually adjusted very well, perhaps too well at times, given her ability to manipulate those around her for personal and financial gain, much the way Stanley does; and she is the protector of the truth and the idealistic practitioner of “what *ought* to be truth” (385). Both she and Bryan are divided between two worlds, with one foot in each—a fact which they refuse to admit, even to themselves. As Jeffrey Moran writes, “Whereas the inherited Victorian morality held up the ideals of temperance, gentility, and sexual repression—ideals bequeathed to the nation by Protestant opinion leaders—the icons of the Jazz Age were the speakeasy, the tabloid press, and the sexually free flapper” (8–9). A Protestant Huguenot, Blanche was of course torn between the two epochs, embodying the Fundamentalist ethos but enjoying the liberties gained by the flappers, albeit with a certain amount of guilt. It was this contradiction—duality to some, hypocrisy to others—that has made Blanche, just as it did the Protestant Bryan, a lightning rod of praise and criticism from audiences, critics, and scholars alike. It was also this contradiction that led Stanley to unveil the two Blanches on the night of her birthday, in the same way Darrow cross-examined Bryan on the Scopes trial’s penultimate day.

“It might have been yesterday. It could be tomorrow.”

Joseph Wood Krutch’s July 29, 1925, editorial, “Darrow vs. Bryan,” echoed the sentiments of most of the newsmen covering the trial. Siding against Bryan and the prosecution for their blind faith, neglect of scientific facts, and refusal to allow expert testimony, Krutch praised the defense and particularly Malone, whose speech “taunted Bryan in stinging words with his cowardice in declaring before the world that the trial in Dayton was a duel to the death between science and religion and then refusing to fight the contest which he himself had so loudly proclaimed” (qtd. in Moran 135). Krutch’s loyalties would appear to waver twenty years later, however. Although his 1947 review elevates *A Streetcar Named Desire* above those Modernist plays that explore and even exploit the “baser” themes of human struggle, Krutch acknowledges commonalities among the works. The fact that *Streetcar* “is not merely the ugly, distressing, and possibly unnecessary thing which any outline must suggest,” he argues,

is due . . . in part to its sincerity, even more to the fact that the whole seems to be contemplated with genuine compassion and not, as is the case with so much modern writing about the lower depths, merely with relish. (qtd. in Miller 39)

Unlike the average modern play obsessed with sex and violence, Krutch says, *Streetcar* mires us in the dark reality that “progress” has perhaps brought with it a certain amount of cultural regression. Gone are the backhanded attacks against Fundamentalism and its idealist vision of humankind that had defined Krutch’s earlier editorials on the Scopes trial; gone too is his youthful optimism toward Modernism and the promises it had held for him and the nation. A few years later, Krutch would offer a statement about *Streetcar* that even sounds suspiciously Fundamentalist, almost Bryanesque: “When *determinism*, psychological or economic, has deprived man of even a limited power of self-determination and at the same time denied the validity of any of the ethical beliefs to which he may be attached, then man has *ceased to have dignity*” (“*Modernism*” 131, emphasis added). Somewhere between his 1925 essay in favor of Scopes and evolution and his 1947 review of *Streetcar* (or at least his 1953 interpretation of the play in “*Modernism*”), Krutch seems to have altered directions.⁷

¶20 Much like Krutch, Williams himself probably felt torn by the Fundamentalist debate. A southerner himself, Williams may have been personally affronted by the northern attorneys and newspapermen who descended upon Dayton only to ridicule its conservative values as bigoted and ignorant. Williams, then fourteen years of age, could have understood the struggle the South had against the industrialized North, having often himself been the victim of sectarian snobbery whilst living in “St. Pollution,” Missouri. And yet, he too felt drawn to the dynamic changes taking place in America after the Great War (as did his sister Rose, who imagined herself a flapper) and even admired the northern liberals in their struggle to derail the antievolutionary streetcar. It is perhaps for this reason that Williams, never the majoritarian that Bryan was with his eternal cast of social fugitives, would eventually dedicate his 1937 agitprop *Not About Nightingales*—the individual’s struggle to overcome majority rule in a society that has little patience for trade unionists, communists, or queers—“to the memory of Clarence Darrow, The Great Defender, whose mental frontiers were the four corners of the sky” (xxvii). Perhaps that side of Williams that respected Darrow’s appeal to logic and drive to uncover the truth led the playwright to admire Stanley Kowalski, the stalwart defender of Modernism who is out to rewrite Blanche’s history in his personal Scopes trial.

¶21 Embedded within the structure of *Streetcar* is a courtroom trial, complete with prosecution, defendant, judge, witnesses, evidence, cross-examination, jury, verdict, and finally sentencing. Every character plays a role in the proceedings, either in what they do or say or choose not to do or say, and each is somehow implicated in Blanche’s “execution.” It is not by chance that the first and last times that Stanley addresses Blanche in the play are in the form of a question: “Stella’s sister?” in scene 1 (265), and “You want the lantern?” in scene 11 (416). While I am not trying to suggest that *Streetcar* is a faithful rendering of the Scopes trial, nor that it can be reduced to simplistic jurisprudence or one-to-one historical referencing as Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee’s *Inherit the Wind* can, there are elements that suggest Williams revisits the antievolutionary debate in *Streetcar*, casting Stanley in the role of Clarence Darrow and Blanche as William Jennings Bryan. Twenty years after the Scopes trial, Williams still leaves us with the impression that Darwin and the apes won despite the Fundamentalists’ legal victory.

¶22 Though the Scopes trial was all but over after the great speeches of the fifth day, just as *Streetcar* effectively ends by scene 8 with the revelation of Blanche’s past, there remained one more essential confrontation—the final conflict between the antagonists. After the sixth day of the Scopes trial, even the media for the most part had left Dayton, recognizing that the defense, having been denied the motion to call expert witnesses by Judge Raulston, was “strapped to a board” with only the prosecution allowed to “carry the sword” (qtd. in Moran

130). H. L. Mencken, who like many of the newsmen had left town that weekend, quipped: “All that remains of the great cause of the State of Tennessee against the infidel Scopes is the formal business of bumping off the defendant” (1). Darrow, however, was planning one final assault, which was to call Bryan to the stand as a Biblical scholar and cross-examine him as a hostile witness. It was the seventh day of the trial, and, as history would later bear witness, Bryan would have done better to have rested on that day.

¶23 Bryan knew that he was there to refute the Modernist attacks against Fundamentalism, and could not refuse, lest he appear incapable of withstanding the onslaught of Modernist arguments. He responded, “I am simply trying to protect the word of God against the greatest atheist or agnostic in the United States! (Prolonged applause.) I want the papers to know I am not afraid to get on the stand in front of him and let him do his worst! I want the world to know! (Prolonged applause.)” (qtd. in Moran 156). In words that sound curiously Blanche-like in her final meeting with Mitch, Bryan added, “They did not come here to try this case. . . . They came here to try revealed religion. I am here to defend it, and they can ask me any question they please” (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 187). That final combat between the two epochs could not have ended any other way, with Darrow noting that Bryan had “to choose between his crude beliefs and the common intelligence of modern times” or reveal his ignorance to the world (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 188). Darrow tore Bryan to intellectual pieces with his loaded questions concerning the literal interpretation of the Bible, with Darrow later informing Mencken that he had “made up [his] mind to show the country what an ignoramus [Bryan] was and [he] succeeded” (qtd. in Larson, *Summer* 190).⁸ As Krutch reported in *The Nation*, “under cross-examination the defeated champion provided even a sorrier spectacle as he retreated further . . . into boastful ignorance” (qtd. in Gatewood 365).

¶24 During that cross-examination, for example, Darrow proceeded to ask questions concerning the literal interpretation of Genesis, beginning with questions of Jonah and the whale:

Darrow: You believe that the big fish was made to swallow Jonah?

Bryan: I am not prepared to say that; the Bible merely says it was done.

Q: You don’t know whether it was the ordinary run of fish, or made for that purpose?

A: You may guess; you evolutionists guess.

Q: But when we do guess, we have a sense to guess right. . . . But do you believe he made them—then he made such a fish and that it was big enough to swallow Jonah?

A: Yes, sir. Let me add: One miracle is just as easy to believe as another If the Bible said so; the Bible doesn’t make as extreme statements as evolutionists do.

Q: That may be a question, Mr. Bryan, about some of those you have known.

A: The only thing is, you have a definition of fact that includes imagination.

Q: And you have a definition that excludes everything but imagination, everything but imagination. (qtd. in Moran 145–46)

Earlier in the cross-examination, Bryan arguably held his own, countering Darrow’s damning questions with pithy responses, such as this one responding to Darrow’s inquiry if Joshua could command the sun to stand still:

A: I believe [the Bible] was inspired by the Almighty, and he may have used language that could only be understood at that time—

Q: Was—

A(cont.):—instead of using language that could not be understood until Darrow was born. (Laughter and applause in the courtyard.) (qtd. in Moran 147)

¶25 Soon, though, Bryan began to break under the inquisition, accepting certain “facts” in the Old Testament as interpreted rather than revealed, such as the story of the flood, the precise date of the earth’s creation as 4004 BC, the origin of Cain’s wife, the source of other religions, and finally the notion that the six days of creation may not have been “days” as we count them today. When Darrow asked Bryan if he had never considered these issues before, Bryan remarked:

I do not think about things I don’t think about.

Darrow: Do you think about things you do think about?

Bryan: Well, sometimes. (qtd. in Moran 49)

In the end, Bryan began to reveal to the world his bigotry and his ignorance (for example, he denied that humans were mammals), leaving many to side with Darrow in his final comment of the day: “I am examining you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes!” (qtd. in Moran 160). Though antievolutionism effectively won the trial (given that the jury ruled for the state), it suffered a tremendous ideological setback, one that later saw Scopes acquitted by the appellate court on a technicality that only loosely disguised the court’s shame in the biased verdict.

¶26 Bryan had agreed to take the stand only if “Mr. Darrow can be put on the stand” to be cross-examined, to which Judge Raulston consented: “Call anybody you desire. Ask them any questions you wish” (qtd. in Moran 143). Bryan never got his chance, however, because Attorney General Stewart had reached an agreement to get Bryan’s testimony expunged from the court proceedings.⁹ With no testimony on record, no cross-examination was necessary, and Bryan was denied the opportunity to respond to Darrow and recover some of his lost dignity.¹⁰ His sudden death five days after the verdict was rendered consequently sealed his image in the public’s eyes, for better or for worse. The Fundamentalist sympathizers who held Darrow responsible for having killed Bryan with his humiliating attack during the trial’s penultimate day made the Great Commoner the movement’s martyr; the Modernists simply perceived Bryan’s death as an era laid to rest. And just as Bryan’s death further exacerbated the divisions felt within the nation between those who mourned for his crushed spirit and those who celebrated his final passing, so too did Blanche’s departure at the end of *Streetcar* bifurcate America’s views on its past and present. Audiences then and now have repeatedly seized upon the fact that, for better or for worse, the aristocratic times which Blanche in part represents in the play are forever lost, forced to exit the stage on the arm of a kind stranger. While that doctor may have tried to be reassuring, we know that his kindness will have its limits, too: modern psychiatry is also premised upon notions of control, manipulation, and undesirable penetration (something Williams experienced firsthand with Rose’s lobotomy). In *Center of the Storm*, John Scopes would describe Bryan’s death as “merely another act, a coda, to the incredible tragicomic drama that had unfolded when Bryan had first come to town” (Scopes and Presley 197). Such a comment could readily be applied to Blanche’s arrival and eventual departure.

¶27 Williams’s *Streetcar* in many ways reproduces Darrow’s fatal cross-examination of Bryan, with Stanley justifying his actions when he tells Stella, “And wasn’t we happy together? Wasn’t it all okay? Till she showed here. Hoity-toity, describing me as an ape” (377–78). Blanche, the witness, enters the courtroom at 632 Elysian

Fields, and not a moment passes before Stanley begins cross-examining her. At first, he confronts the witness cordially with a series of questions innocently asked in order to acquire information. In scene 1, for instance, he asks her if she is “Stella’s sister?” (265), as a lawyer would ask a witness to “state your name for the record.” Moments later, his question is aimed, as are many second questions for witnesses, at her establishing her domicile: “Where you from, Blanche?” (265). Need Stanley really ask his sister-in-law such questions, since he already knows who she is and where she is from, despite never having met her before? When Blanche responds, “In Laurel,” all that he can do is parrot her: “In Laurel, huh? Oh yeah. Yeah, in Laurel, that’s right” (266). Stanley knows her response to the questions well in advance of asking them. Then he begins inquiring about her character: “Have a shot?” (266). He will use her response, “No, I—rarely touch it” (266), against her later in scene 10 before the rape, when he accuses her of “swilling down my liquor!” (398). Next, he rhetorically asks, “You’re a teacher, aren’t you? . . . What do you teach?” (266–67). After demanding “How long you here for, Blanche?” and wanting to know if she plans “to shack up here?” (267), Stanley finally inquires into her past, which will be the final piece of evidence used to convict Blanche later: “You were married once, weren’t you? . . . What happened?” (268).

128 Like Bryan with Darrow, Blanche stands up well to Stanley’s questions in scene 1, innocent as they may appear to be at the time. Even during scene 2, when Stanley learns of the loss of Belle Reve and begins to treat Blanche as a hostile witness, she manages to parry his attacks. Stanley’s comment at the beginning of the second scene, “What’s all this monkey doings?” (269), seems almost too coincidental not to be a direct allusion to the Scopes trial and all of the “monkey doings” inside and outside the Dayton courtroom.¹¹ Stanley’s battery of questions continues, not to Blanche at first but to his second witness, Stella. In fact, by the time Stanley asks the question, “Have you heard of the Napoleonic code?” (272), thirteen of his seventeen lines in the scene have been questions. And when he is not asking a question, he is stating a legal point that the question elicits:

STELLA. Stan, we’ve—lost Belle Reve!

STANLEY. The place in the country?

STELLA. Yes.

STANLEY. How?

STELLA. Oh, it had to be—sacrificed or something. . . .

STANLEY. Yeah. I get the idea. Now let’s skip back a little to where you said the country place was disposed of. . . .

. Let’s have a few more details on that subject. (270–71)

Once Stanley “enlighten[s]” Stella “on a point or two,” (272) and discovers the “feathers and furs” (274) that he believes are proof of Blanche having “*swindled*” (273) them, he places Blanche on the witness stand once again.

129 At first, Blanche is playful in her responses, even mocking her inquisitor, again as Bryan had done with Darrow. In response to his first direct question, “Where’s the papers?” (281), she even jokes about Stanley’s “impressive judicial air” (281). His tactics do appear judicial—he will have “a lawyer acquaintance . . . study these out” (284), just as he had told Stella that he will have “an acquaintance who deals in this sort of merchandise” appraise Blanche’s furs and costume jewels. Blanche, of course, attempts at first to skirt around Stanley’s questions until she sees that Stanley means business: “All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I’m ready to answer all questions. I’ve got nothing to hide. What is it?” (280). While Stanley is no Clarence Darrow, he is anything but “simple” or “a little bit on the primitive side” (279) as

Blanche declares. His questions are calculated, direct hitting, and successful in forging evidence that will later turn Mitch (and some audience members and critics) against Blanche. Once Stanley's interrogation grows increasingly more suggestive and accusative, Blanche's coquettish responses no longer carry the same authority they once did and, again like Bryan's, serve to precipitate her contradictory nature, making all of her religious ideals appear affected at best, deceitful at worst.

^{¶30} For example, when Stanley asks Blanche "*contemptuously*" in scene 5, "Say, do you happen to know somebody named Shaw?," Blanche tries to dismiss the question by answering flippantly, "Why, everybody knows somebody named Shaw!" (329). Stanley makes his question more precise: "Well, this somebody named Shaw is under the impression he met you in Laurel, but I figure he must have got you mixed up with some other party because this other party is someone he met at a hotel called the Flamingo" (329). Stanley's inquiries begin unsettling Blanche, who later asks Stella if she has "heard any—unkind gossip" about her (331) and asks Mitch if Stanley has "talked to [him] about [her]?" (349). By scene 7, Stanley finally has "got th' dope" (358) on Blanche and very systematically reveals to Stella the facts against her: "Lie Number One: . . . our supply-man down at the plant has been going through Laurel for years and he knows all about her and everybody else in the town of Laurel knows all about her" (359) and her prostituting herself at the Flamingo Hotel and later being declared "'Out-of-Bounds'" (361). Stanley's revelation of the first lie "brings us to Lie Number Two" (362), the fact that she was fired for seducing a seventeen-year-old boy. As in the Scopes trial on that Friday before the weekend break that sent all the newsmen packing, it coincidentally appears that *Streetcar's* trial is effectively over at this point. All that remains for Blanche to do is to use Stanley's one-way bus ticket back to Laurel. However, just as one final conflict awaited Bryan and Darrow in Dayton, Blanche and Stanley still have their "date" awaiting them in New Orleans.

^{¶31} In many ways, the rape scene that climaxes the play has frequently been read as a "Social Darwinist struggle for survival between two 'species' of human beings" (Burks 37), in which both Blanche and Stanley use language purposefully abstract in terms of defending their turf.^[12] In social terms, "Fundamentalists" (such as Williams critics Jacob Adler, John T. von Szeliski, and Constance Drake, and later *Streetcar* director Harold Clurman) would see Blanche's rape as the epitome of a selfish, pitiless, and cruel Modernism driven by Social Darwinism to smother a genteel past; "Modernists" (such as *Streetcar's* original director, Elia Kazan) would view the rape as the final and inevitable succumbing of an effete past to Darwinian strength and natural selection. Of course, both views are relevant and have led to polarized social readings of the play, which I discuss more extensively elsewhere.^[13] And like all of Blanche and Stanley's scenes together prior to this one, scene 10 is dominated by questions that serve little purpose, just as Darrow's did with Bryan, since the trial was effectively over. As many Fundamentalists said of Darrow's attack, Stanley's questions in scene 10 contain no purpose beyond the simple desire to see his opponent destroyed.

^{¶32} For example, while Stanley appears to be conciliatory at first (he, unlike Darrow, has in fact already won the "trial"), Blanche's antagonism, with her continued lies about the wire to Shep and her "casting my pearls before swine" comment (396), riles Stanley up once more, leading him to berate Blanche with truth-revealing questions, culminating in the one that entraps her: "Was this before or after the telegram came from the Texas oil millionaire?" (397). If Darrow had managed to place Bryan's faith in the revealed word within the light of imagination, so too does Stanley discredit Blanche's claim of having been invited on a cruise by a former beau: "There isn't a goddam thing but imagination!... And lies and conceit and tricks!" (398). Flustered under the

verbal assault and the heft of the southern heat as Bryan had been, Blanche struggles to remain lucid but is prevented by some powerful force (Kazan suggests in the film version that it is Death itself, personified as the Mexican flower vendor) from leaving the flat, just as Bryan was bound by the law to bear the brunt of Darrow's attacks until he was finished. In the end, Fundamentalism and Modernism, religion and science, Bryan and Darrow, and Blanche and Stanley all "had this date with each other from the beginning!" (402), with the "apes" triumphing and Modernism deeming any appeal to the antediluvian days of Fundamentalist progressivism misguided or even foolish.

¶33 The rape scene, then, could also be read as a dramatic revisiting of the climax of the Scopes trial itself, in which the Fundamentalist "Blanche" Jennings Bryan is physically crushed by the more powerful Modernist "Stanley" Darrow. It is only fitting that her gospel of the Assumption in finding "God—so quickly" (356) in Mitch's consoling embrace at the end of scene 6 (which arguably takes place on August 15) should be muted by Stanley's Great Defender agnosticism, encountered in the scene immediately following the rape: "To hold front position in this rat-race, you've got to believe you are lucky" (403)—or at least one of the fittest.¹⁴ And like Bryan's death a few days after the Scopes trial, Blanche's removal to the sanitarium "some weeks later" (403) following the rape symbolically announces the death of an era.

Conclusion

As associate editor of *The Nation*, Joseph Wood Krutch often ruminated on the state of affairs that had preoccupied a divided America, one side firmly entrenched in the moralist imperatives of its past, the other eager to break free from what it viewed as a stifling, even moribund cultural heritage. Though the conflict between the two sides had been brewing ever since the Industrial Age, that they should finally do battle in one of the most unlikely of places—Dayton, Tennessee—seemed to Krutch a fitting end to this "grotesque comedy" (qtd. in Miller 39). A Tennessee native working for an intellectual paper in the North, Krutch was perhaps led by fate to cover the Scopes trial. Perhaps it was that same fate that led him to the Ethyl Barrymore theatre on December 19, 1947, to review a scintillating play that no doubt recalled for him the antievolution debate he had witnessed some twenty years earlier in Dayton, for while his phrase "grotesque comedy" was actually taken from his 1947 review of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, it could have readily encapsulated his overall impression of the Scopes trial.

¶35 Despite the similarities between the Scopes trial and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, evidenced not only in Krutch's phrase but also in the transcripts of *both* events, factual and fictive alike, the question still remains as to whether the similarities were intentional or not. I tend to believe that they were intentional, for Williams's interest in the Scopes trial went far beyond his romantic preoccupation with the singular battle between the Old and New South. First of all, Williams had familial ties to the trial, given that his maternal grandmother's sister, Estelle, had married Judge John T. Raulston. The judge's daughter from a previous marriage, Rose Comfort, even became a close friend of Rose Williams. Williams explicitly addressed this relationship in his story "Grand" (1964):

My grandmother had a sister named Estelle who married twice, first to a Tennessee youth named Preston Faller who died young and then to an older man named Ralston [*sic*], a judge who had the dubious distinction of presiding over the famous "Monkey trial." Once or twice, in the summer, "Grand" took us to South Pittsburgh, Tennessee, to visit "the Ralstons". . . . (402)

In his April 1929 letter to his grandfather Walter E. Dakin, Williams refers to Raulston as “John T.”—the same first name and middle initial of John T. Scopes—which may have been his way of implicating his kin’s infamous ties with the southern “heretic” Scopes: “Of course Grand will be pleased to hear how well she’s [Rose Comfort] getting on. I think it’s nice that she and Rose [Williams] should meet again. Perhaps John T. will invite Rose to visit her sometime” (*Selected Letters* 27).¹⁵ His apparent disdain for the judge is evidenced later in his November 15, 1936, letter to his grandparents in which Williams writes that he hopes “Grand has not sold her farm” as he thinks “that sly John T. is trying to put something over on her” (*Selected Letters* 91).¹⁶

¹³⁶ Williams not only had an indirect relationship to Scopes through Judge Raulston; he also was potentially in or very near Dayton, Tennessee, when the trial was in progress. On their way to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where Rose was to begin attending school at All Saint’s College, the Williamses stopped in Tennessee to visit Cornelius Williams’s sisters (Leverich 69). Edwina Williams later recalled the trip in her memoirs, *Remember Me to Tom*:

We rented a house in Elkmont, a small resort on a mountain that slopes up to the Great Smokies. The Scopes trial was then in progress, creating a sensation. We had more than a perfunctory interest in it, for the presiding judge, the late John T. Raulston, who died eight years ago, was married to my mother’s sister. (Williams and Freeman 44)

Edwina then describes how Clarence Darrow was

staying in Elkmont, not far from us, walking around in galluses, not even wearing a coat for dinner, which startled some of us southerners. But we admired his wit and erudition. He certainly wiped up the earth with silver-tongued Bryan, as he took the heart out of him. I have heard that one of the plays on which Tom is working has to do with the Scopes trial. Tom never lets me read his plays, or tells me about them, until they are produced. (Williams and Freeman 44)¹⁷

We are never told what that play was that Williams was writing about the Scopes trial, but it could have been *This Is the Peaceable Kingdom, or Good Luck God* (1980), which has a character named Ralston, with the same curious spelling that appears in Williams’s letters, and a title recalling the general atmosphere in Dayton around the time of the trial.¹⁸

¹³⁷ Whether or not Edwina’s memories are entirely accurate or Williams actually did write that play she said he was working on, the fact remains that the events of the Scopes trial and the debate between the Old South’s Fundamentalist antievolutionism and the New South’s secular embracing of Darwinism shaped Williams’s thought and are traceable in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche’s famous “Don’t—hang back with the brutes !” admonishment to her sister Stella arguably sheds light on Williams’s views on the subject. Blanche DuBois is a Fundamentalist at heart. But because Williams was a poet searching for truth and not merely a demagogue hedging for celebrity status, he also shows us through Stanley that perhaps the apes, though callous and bestial and dangerous, are our future, politically and humanistically speaking. Not everyone is ready to accept such a verdict, however, as many creationists, or proponents of what is now called “Intelligent Design,” have taken up Bryan’s and Blanche’s cause, demonstrating once again that the battle between the antievolutionists and the Darwinists first waged in a Dayton courtroom in 1925, then on a Broadway stage in 1947, continues to this day.¹⁹

Notes

I would like to thank Thomas Keith of New Directions, whose astute commentary and eye for detail have improved this essay significantly. I would also like to thank editor Robert Bray and reader Jessica Dorman for much needed advice and direction during the writing and revision of this essay.

¹ First in his December 20, 1947, review of its Broadway premiere for *The Nation*, then more fully in *The American Drama since 1918*, Krutch describes the theme of *Streetcar* as “a clash between an enfeebled tradition of gentility and a society which has never known what the term means” (326).

² Moran adds,

Millions of Americans in the 1920s were in revolt against the dominant Victorian morality and took their cues from advertising, Hollywood, scientists, and intellectuals rather than from the nation’s Protestant establishment. . . . The antievolution movement derived much of its moral fervor from the conviction that Darwinism was partly responsible for these Jazz Age rebellions. (2)

³ Though the name John Scopes never appears in the manifesto, not even in John Gould Fletcher’s essay “Education, Past and Present” nor in Allen Tate’s “Remarks on Southern Religion,” Scopes’s presence and that of the “Monkey Trial” are implicit throughout.

⁴ Cash explains how the Scopes trial emerged out of southern fears that the old southern way of life was under attack and that only the Klan and the Fundamentalists were “still committed to the old beliefs and ways and the conviction that absolute conformity to them was necessary to the safety of the South” (335). Yet both movements “carried in themselves the seed of decay and defeat” (347), and it was not soon after the trial that first the Klan, and then the Fundamentalists, lost their influence in the South (347–50).

⁵ In 1977, *Edwards v. Aguillard* threw out the Creationism Act of Louisiana (Priest 82).

⁶ Larson disagrees with Scopes’s assessment, however, finding Bryan’s antievolutionism “compatible with his progressive politics because both supported reform, appealed to majoritarian rule and sprang from his Christian convictions” (*Summer* 39).

⁷ Krutch did say as late as 1967 in his essay “The Monkey Trial” for *Commentary* that “the Bible-belt zealots [including Bryan] were exhibiting themselves as hilarious boobs” (83), which suggests that he might have returned to the faith of Modernism twenty years after *Streetcar*.

⁸ Gerald L. Priest argues the opposite viewpoint, feeling that “Bryan’s statements in both the prosecution speeches and the responses to Darrow” proved that he had held his own, and that it was the reporters, “so biased against Bryan and fundamentalism that their editorials were an unofficial witness for Darrow and the defense” (65), who were responsible for the myth of Bryan’s great defeat.

⁹ With no strategies left open to the defense, Darrow motioned to have the jury find his defendant guilty so that he could pursue the case in the appellate court, where he felt he would get a fairer judge and jury. In nine minutes, the jury returned with Scopes’s guilty verdict (Larson, *Summer* 191).

¹⁰ Bryan’s closing remarks after the verdict was delivered were as follows:

The people will determine this issue. They will take sides upon this issue, they will state the question involved in this issue, they will examine the information—not so much that which has been brought out here, for very little has been brought out here, but this case will stimulate investigation and investigation will bring out information, and the facts will be known, and upon the facts, as ascertained, the decision will be rendered, and I think, my friends, and your Honor, that if we are actuated by the spirit that should actuate every one of us, no matter what our views may be, we ought not only desire, but pray, that that which is right will prevail, whether it be our way or somebody else’s. (qtd. in Moran 167)

Clarence Darrow’s final words were:

I think this case will be remembered because it is the first case of this sort since we stopped trying people in America for witchcraft because here we have done our best to turn back the tide that has sought to force itself upon this—upon this modern world, of testing every fact in science by a religious dictum. (qtd. in Moran 167)

¹¹ As Moran explains:

The only real victors in the Scopes antievolution trial of 1925 were the monkeys. As the state of Tennessee prepared to indict a school-teacher, John Scopes, for violating a new law against teaching evolution, it seemed that everyone in the South who owned a monkey converged on the site of the trial in Dayton, Tennessee, to offer the pet as an exhibit for the prosecution or defense, to pose for reporters, or to parade the primate down Main Street. (1)

¹² In *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, Nancy Tischler even sees *Streetcar* as “a reversal of Darwin’s vision—back to the apes” (146).

¹³ For more on this interpretive division in *Streetcar*’s social message, see my essay “Criticism on *A Streetcar Named Desire*: A Bibliographic Survey, 1947–2003.”

¹⁴ Ironically, Stanley’s pro-Darwinian viewpoint, with its selfish ethos and lack of compassion that epitomized the Fundamentalist’s critique of evolutionary theory in general, is to a great extent the same one used by the German leaders to justify their actions in World War II—the very leaders that Stanley helped fight against.

¹⁵ In their note to this letter, Albert Devlin and Nancy Tischler write:

The “adorable” Rose Comfort (first step-cousin once removed of Rose Williams) was the daughter of John Tate Raulston and his first wife, Comfort Tate, both of Winchester, Tennessee. His second wife was Grand’s sister, Estelle. “John T.” had the “dubious distinction,” as Tennessee Williams put it, of presiding over the famous “Monkey trial” (“Grand”) in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. A lay preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, he was a fierce critic of Clarence Darrow, who defended John T. Scopes against the charge of teaching evolution in his high school biology class. Tennessee Williams would later dedicate the play *Not About Nightingales* (written in 1938) to Darrow. (*Selected Letters* 27–28)

¹⁶ As Williams later wrote in “Grand,” because his great aunt Estelle had died “of asthma and an overdose of morphine administered by a confused country doctor” (403), his grandmother Rose “Grand” inherited the family farm. The estate was “administered by Judge Ralston” (403) after Estelle’s death and eventually fell into ruin, much to Williams’s chagrin.

¹⁷ Lyle Leverich makes no mention of the family ever seeing Darrow and, if anything, suggests that Edwina had misremembered history since the trial would have been over by the time they were in Elkmont. Both Williams (in his *Memoirs*) and Dakin Williams (in his biography of his brother) never mention this summer in Elkmont. Leverich does verify that Cornelius Williams had rented a house for the month of August 1925 in Elkmont and had stopped along the way to visit his sisters in Tennessee. There, the young Tom encountered Isabel Brownlow, his aunt Belle. She was “prominent in Knoxville society because of her prestigious marriage and her church activities,” which included “virtually tak[ing] over the Knoxville Presbyterian Church and ha[ving] had the minister fired because he was short on ‘fundamentals’” (Leverich 69). Darrow did retreat to Elkmont just after the trial, and it was there that he heard of Bryan’s death and anecdotally uttered his “he died of a busted gut” comment, and the Brownlows did own a cabin in Elkmont, so it is possible that Edwina’s recollections are not pure fancy.

¹⁸ Though the play has nothing at all to do with the trial, Williams treats the character Ralston with wry humor in uttering words that many who criticized Judge Raulston felt he frequently espoused:

RALSTON. I—AM—GOD. HERE. TO WATCH OVER YOU! —MY DAUGHTER, LUCRETIA! . . .

LUCRETIA. Too late. If you were God, would I be hungry and thirsty and’ve—wet myself in the chair?

RALSTON. You don’t understand my ways, the ways of God, Daughter. . . .

LUCRETIA. You’re just an old man in a nursin’ home in a wheelchair.

RALSTON. That is just a disguise. I am God, disguised to protect yuh. (360–61)

¹⁹ “Intelligent Design,” a current branch of Creationist thought, continues to do battle against the teaching of the theory of evolution in state-funded high schools. While the defense during the Scopes trial had argued for a “theistic evolution” that would reveal “the working out of God’s blueprint for the universe” (Moran 7), Creationists today still reject the theory entirely. Ironically, Creationism turned toward science for evidence to support the Bible. The battle still rages on, perhaps more fervently than it did back in 1925, with the recent decision in Cobb County, Georgia, to remove stickers from high-school textbooks warning against the theory of evolution discussed in its pages, while less than a week later, on January 19, 2005, the Dover Area School District of Pennsylvania began requiring its students to study “Intelligent Design” as an alternative to the theory of evolution. The Scopes trial, then, seems anything but over.

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