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"The Wilderness is Interior": Williams's Strategies of Resistance in "Two on a Party"

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In a letter to Paul Bigelow dated April 5, 1950, Tennessee Williams expresses his inchoate fears about the growing totalitarianism of American society: "There are sixteen different kinds of 'vagrancy' in Florida. All you have to do is walk down Duval after dark if they are out for you" (*Selected Letters* 2: 86). In addition to violent gay bashing and criminal prosecution for having "a sissy walk," the witch-hunt conducted by the Johns Committee (Schnur 132−63) reached an unprecedented level in Florida. Penalties directed at lesbians and gay men were intensified in the 1950s partly as a reactionary response to the radical gender shifts and new family arrangements that emerged decades before, and partly as a consequence of the conflation of the Red Scare and the Lavender Menace (D'Emilio; Irvine).

¶2 Alarmed by the Fascist dictates of a police state, Williams inveighs, in the 1953 preface to the second edition of *Twenty-Seven Wagons Full of Cotton*, against "reactionary opinion[s]" which descend "like a ton of bricks on the head of any artist who speaks against the current of prescribed ideas" (xi). The playwright demands not only the return of "something wild" which runs counter to, and disrupts, the establishment culture of organized and respectable society, but also the vital necessity of freaks. Only they can instill a new sap into America and enable the nation to overcome the cultural stagnation and the atmosphere of sexual repression into which the country has sunk. "Eliminate them, however—bully them into conformity—and nobody in America will ever be really young any more and we'll be left standing in the dead center of nowhere" (xii). If biology evolves through mutations, maybe, Williams surmises, the natural evolution of society is propelled by the emergence of the so-called freaks, for only they are able to widen the frontiers of American liberty in a direction which favors everything that is "individual and humane and equitable and free. That direction can be confused but it cannot be lost." That Williams is writing this new preface in 1953 to his 1945 play along these lines is historically significant, for the notorious Executive Order 10450 was passed on April 27 of the same year. One of the targets of the Government's personnel security program was the sexual pervert, which, as D'Emilio affirms, was the commonest name used to allude to homosexuals in the fifties (59). Only one year before, in 1952, the first edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defined homosexuality as a sexual sociopathic personality disorder.

¶3 In *Hard Candy* (1954), his second volume of short fiction, Williams contributes, once more, to the construction of an alternative enclave where freaks (the so-called "anomics" of Riesman's classical sociological study) can have their say and thereby expand the limits of an increasingly curtailed liberty. Despite the deprecatory reviews of *One Arm and Other Stories* (1948),a collection that *Time* magazine affirmed "wears the scent of human garbage as if it were the latest Parisian perfume" (Jan. 3, 1955), and the author's qualms that one of the new stories in particular "might precipitate an awful row in the present time of reaction" (*Selected Letters* 1: 473), Williams manages to eschew the editor's suggestion to have a separate limited edition containing the most controversial titles ("Two on a Party," "Hard Candy," and "The Kingdom of Earth").

Instead, he decides to publish the book as it was originally conceived on a single proviso: it must not be distributed anywhere that the writer's mother is likely to get her hands on, for she could be "shocked to death by 'Two on a Party'. Isn't it awful to have conventional blood ties? You just can't break them." (*Selected Letters* 2: 531). Out of the nine stories, "Two on a Party" is insistently mentioned by the writer as his favorite: "I wish [it] were the title story of the book," he confessed in the same letter to the New Directions managing editor Robert MacGregor. Immediately after its composition, in a letter to Maria St. Just, Williams expressedis deep-rooted concern that "perhaps after 'Two on a Party' nobody will publish my stories there" [in Great Britain], although he also hastened to acknowledge that its radical message might have just the opposite response, i.e., arouse an unprecedented interest (Britneva 67). Over twenty years after the publication of *Hard Candy*, in his *Memoirs*, Williams does not hesitate to appraise the story as "the best of the lot" (216−17).

¶4 Why was Williams so powerfully affixed upon "Two on a Party," and simultaneously so disturbed about its subversive potential? Reed Woodhouse classifies it as a proto-ghetto story (2), a central pillar of modern gay fiction (36) antedating *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and superior to Baldwin's work, for it refuses to justify or plead homosexuality, and yet manages to "whisk the reader right by the Cerberus of homophobia" into a world in which "the small, the unimportant, the gay, the female, the alcoholic," "if not absolutely right," are "right in respect to everyone else" (37). Cora and Billy, the protagonists, are morally superior to the "straight" world from which they attempt to escape. In short, this is the blow that Williams strikes against the establishment culture of the 1950s. Similarly, Claude J. Summers regards Williams's short stories as "strong and healthy contributions to the literature of compassion" as well as "the most significant gay fiction of their time" (133−34). In a way, "Two on a Party" encapsulates the writer's rebuttal to the homogenizing tendencies of the postwar era establishment and also articulates Williams's rejection of mainstream norms. Cora and Billy manage to inhabit, albeit temporarily, a "Utopia of misfits and oddballs, in which the constraints for uniformity and conformity have been removed, and human beings grow like plants in a state of nature" (Jameson 99). Thus, "Two on a Party" can be read as an anticonformist narrative which to a large extent foreshadows, in its attempt to construct an alternative space where dominant values are contested, the centrifugal flight of the Beat generation.

¶5 My contention here is that Williams uses the frontier mythology of the American tradition, set against the backdrop of the Puritans' providential destiny, to create a story that both rewrites, though parodically, the topoi of the subgenre, and debunks the gender binaries and power relations of American society and history. Ultimately, the countercultural space is based upon the normal/deviant opposition, and the marginal values will continue to exist only on the margins. But on mapping a utopia of difference, Williams destabilizes the dominant/subordinate binary by presenting the "deviant" option incarnated by Billy and Cora—"a female lush and a fairy and a lush who travel together" (*Collected Stories*302)[1]—as morally right and superior in a world made of frauds and contemptible institutions.

"Nothing wild or honest is tolerated here!" (*Camino Real* 473): Rebels on the move

> I was once asked why I travel so much, and I said,
> "Because it's harder to hit a moving target." (Devlin 341)

As migratory birds "flying together against the wind," Billy and Cora cover, in their constant travels, much of the United States, from Broadway bars in spring to Miami clubs and the Dixie-circuit night life in winter,

"nothing real but the party, and even that sort of dreamy" (*Collected Stories* 302). The protagonists reproduce the classic itinerary of the American hobo in his quest for an easy life on the fringes, away from harsh weather conditions. The moment they meet and decide to team up to cruise, the story brings together the ingredients of the frontier mythology. Billy and Cora are two trappers who are looking for "good trade," two "kids playing cops and robbers" (292), a couple of roughnecks who only find cruising entertaining because of "the thrill of something lawless," two desperadoes on "a fast-moving train" from which you can't jump off (293). "Their outlaw existence" becomes meaningful insofar as it is "a never-ending contest with the squares of the world" and "the phony rules of convention" (292).

¶7 Edwin Fussellefines the frontier metaphor as an imaginary vehicle that channels "the inconsistencies and contradictions which inhere in the American's paradoxical views about himself, his country, and his destiny": a fable that can help him redefine "what the American experience should be" (26). Since the closing of the frontier in the last days of the nineteenth century, and Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 1893 lecture, the frontier space has become the locus of American individualism and exceptionalism in a hostile environment; an imaginative safety valve which, in James K. Folsom's words, "represents a force which constantly rejuvenates an American society that, left to itself, would become constantly more over-refined and decadent" (Mogen 92). In other words, by mapping an imaginary frontier myth the writer revalidates his "belief in the possibility of regeneration, a conviction that it is always possible to escape the restrictions imposed by a given environment by lighting out for a new territory" (Mogen 32).

¶8 The constraints for individual expression in Williams's story are imposed by "the squares who have such a virulent rage at everything not in the book," (*Collected Stories* 292). In Williams's conception, "square" is a term that alludes to:

> hotel clerks and house dicks and people in adjoining hotel bedrooms, the specter of Cora's family in Alexandria, Louisiana, the specter of Billy's family in Montgomery, Alabama, the various people involved in the niggardly control of funds, almost everybody that you passed when you were drunk and hilariously gay on the street, especially all those bull-like, middle-aged couples that stood off sharply and glared at you as you swept through a hotel lobby with your blushing trade. . . . (292)

¶9 If individualism has been stigmatized by a standardized society which wipes out any difference, the only chance to survive for anomics is, as Slotkin observes, "immersion in the native element, the wilderness" for it provides "the solution to all problems, the balm to all wounds of the soul, the restorative for failing fortunes" (*Collected Stories*263). As Hans Peter Duerr points out, crossing the boundary between wilderness and civilization allowed "the archaic mind" to be fully aware of the limitations of culture and to envision the multiple prospects of unfettered individualism. Modernity and homogenization, the repression of our possibilities of self-expression, go hand in hand (Dollimore 221−2). By reinscribing the new boundaries of an imaginary frontier, Williams manages to carve out a space where alternative values can find an outlet of expression. If Fredrick Jackson Turner defined the frontier as "the meeting point between savagery and civilization," (3) Williams relocates this boundary to the subculture of sexual practices and drug addiction defined by squares as deviant and outlaw. In 1957, three years after the publication of "Two on a Party," Norman Mailer insists on the same polarity in his celebrated essay "The White Negro": "One is a Hip or one is a Square . . . One is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of the American night life,

or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed" (313). Again, becoming a sexual outlaw is the only alternative to staying both physically and mentally healthy in a civilized world. In Mailer's words, "exploring all those wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt" (292) can save the American citizen from his/her existentialist vacuum.

¶10 Wilderness becomes, in Williams's words, an interior condition, a dangerous passage between "vines and brambles," "a broken terrain which is possibly even wilder than childhood was," "an ascent to unknown hills" that "take the breath and bewilder the vision" (*Collected Stories* 272). Williams's immersion in the wilderness (Billy and Cora have "made a departure and a rather wide one," 301) necessarily entails the appropriation of the motifs of the frontier mythology and the set of opposing values encompassed by the dichotomy of civilization versus nature, or the corrupt east versus "the rough but virtuous 'west'" (Slotkin 352). The borderline is always understood as a space between an older world which is seen as "known, oppressive, and limiting, and 'a new world' which is rich in potential or mystery, liberating and full of opportunity" (Slotkin 351). The frontier heroes must be restless questers (Billy and Cora are constantly looking for ideal sexual partners), undoubtedly superior to the "East coast stay-at-homes" (Mogen 27), and in the pursuit of a new vision of the self and society they must escape from oppressive traditional social and cultural roles. Not surprisingly, Billy and Cora defy the gender roles they are expected to fulfill. Cora is far from embodying the new, self-assertive woman, autonomous and liberated, of postwar America: "She had none of the desire to manage and dominate which is a typically American perversion of the female nature" (*Collected Stories* 289). Much unlike the courageous American woman performing multiple social roles and "tak[ing] on jobs and problems that her ancestors never dreamed of" (Lerner 607), she lacks willpower. In fact, she is absolutely passive ("a big piece of seaweed washing this and that way," *Collected Stories* 289) and epitomizes "a vegetative existence." This is precisely one of the qualities which Williams envied about Marion Vaccaro, the friend on whom the character's portrait is based (Kolin 23). Billy, of course, is the antithesis of the rugged masculine ideal of the frontier scenario. (Billy is most probably modeled after Williams's close friend Oliver Evans.) Yet both he and Cora contest the mainsprings of the dominant culture from which they escape through a travel narrative that gradually debunks the apparatuses of the dominant order: family, work, and the ubiquitous mass media.

¶11 Family operates as a repressive institution that threatens to thwart Billy's and, more decisively, Cora's forays into the wilderness. Dependent upon her family funds, Cora fears that her brother will exert his patriarchal influence by shutting off her income when the news of her debauched life reaches her hometown. Williams often revealed his dissatisfaction with the nuclear family as a reliable source of emotional support for the individual: "What tragic messes these bourgeois families are! Even we who don't fit anywhere are happier and better off" (*Collected Stories*113). As D'Emilio and Freedman explain, the gay subculture contributed to undermining the strength of "another prop of Cold War society, the family" (294), for despite social prejudices and widespread taboos gay couples demonstrated that there could be other organizational forms beyond the traditional model. If, as Eribon holds, "normality" relies on the family unit to advance itself (282), Williams's primary goal is to show that Cora and Billy's double arrangement provides superior advantages—both economic and emotional—to those found in conventional marriage. The narrator informs us that "solitary cruising had been lonely" and that "the timid and tender values that can exist between people, began to come

shyly out and they had a respect for each other . . . , as neither had ever respected another person" (*Collected Stories* 291, 292).

¶12 Billy and Cora's continuous quest for sexual pleasure, the pursuit of the "lyric quarry" as Billy puts it (286),[2] entails the utter rejection of work, the squares' first and foremost concern. Lacking "a provident nature," they rarely stop to "consider much of the future" (290). On the contrary, Cora's "Oriental attitude toward life" (296) is incompatible with "the ordinary resumption of the daytime life in a city" (302). After some meditation in bed the only conclusion is to "turn your cheek to the pillow" (302), for nothing much can be done. The squares' world is defined as a meaningless space, "something like you see through a powerful telescope trained upon the moon, flatly illuminated craters and treeless plains and a vacancy of light—much light, but an emptiness in it" (301). These empty signs of civilized life manage to intrude upon their alternative enclave through the radio, the newspaper, and the TV (or "Tired Vaudeville," in Billy's words), which never fail to convey an impression of exhaustive knowledge and accurate language ("everything that is known is known very fully and very fully stated," 302). Cora's maladjustment is, however, evident in her admission that she is "a comprehensive and unabridged dictionary of human ignorance on nearly all things of importance" (298). Whereas they realize that they live in "a mechanical age" (294), the coming and going of trade in their bed is compared to the movement of the sea waves, a continual yet changeless tempo that gives order and stability to their otherwise erratic lives. Williams's seaweed metaphor operates as the counterpart image of a mechanized society, and is reminiscent of the Emersonian notion that true life and enjoyment are defined by such inconsequential transits. "Everything in the universe goes by indirection. There are no straight lines. . . . There can be no greatness without abandonment," affirmed Emerson in "Work and Days," apropos of savages playing with the surf and being tossed by the waves for hours (404).

¶13 Following C. L. R. James's analysis of postwar America, Robert J. Corber argues that one of the major sources of frustration and anger with the dominant order was the unbreachable chasm between the traditional idea of America as "a nation of unlimited economic opportunity that was more appropriate to the days of the frontier" (24) and "the mechanized life of work [and] mechanized forms of living" which convert the individual into a citizen who aspires towards "compulsive adjustment" (Riesman 260). Mass culture, either in the shape of *film noir* or westerns, emerges as one of the most powerful vehicles of antagonism toward social conformity insofar as it allows the spectator to question the regulatory fictions that dominate the social fabric and gender and sexual identity. The *film noir* hero now "lives in a world of his own according to ethics of his own" and is "in constant warfare with the police, sometimes in danger of arrest, imprisonment and the chair" (Corber 127). James Cortese argues that the progressive takeover of the *film noir* ingredients in the westerns of the 1950s jeopardizes "the myth of social cohesion," for it subverts the traditional dichotomy of moral choices and makes the identity of the enemy a controversial issue. Thus, the nonconformist often becomes the hero, and those "too closely aligned with the law" prove morally dubious. (C. L. R. James, qtd. in Corber 27).

¶14 In "Two on a Party," the gay writer—who may also be "a clear surrogate for Williams" (Spoto 88)[3]—and his debauched female companion travel by motor in "a '47 Buick convertible with a brilliant new scarlet paint job" (*Collected Stories* 294) along the Camino Real from El Paso to Key West. They resist the allure to go west because the engine tends to get overheated, and after a trip to Corpus Christi in a failed attempt to locate a legendary tearoom with seven connecting glory-holes, they stop in New Orleans to repair a blowout. They are "on the Wild West kick": Cora buys Billy a pair of fancily embossed cowboy boots; she wears "a cowboy shirt

with a bucking broncho over one large breast and a roped steer over the other" (294−95). While they are in the Florida Keys, the wheel bearings fail, and the convertible stops dead in the middle of the highway on a hot-as-midsummer spring morning. Stranded in the middle of nowhere, they are finally rescued by a blond youth on a motorcycle with whom Billy becomes enchanted. After getting a tow truck, the three check into a tourist cabin, Billy excited with the prospect of seducing the guy, who eventually knocks him out after his insistent sexual innuendoes.

¶15 Williams's subversion of the frontier formula implies not only the interruption of the trip to the west to go east. The victory of the motorcycle-riding blond (significantly called "the Indian") over the emasculated cowboy marks the final inversion of the expectations of the frontier story: the discourse of masculine superiority is cancelled out and so is the alleged racial supremacy of the white over the native American. Furthermore, the story is also teeming with iconoclastic reverberations: the crusaders' quest for the Holy Sepulchre, signaled by the name of the city (Corpus Christi), has now been transformed into a search for a legendary tearoom that is never found. The sexual deviation is similarly present in the color of the car, scarlet, which converts Cora into a replica of the Mother of harlots of the Book of Revelation, "sitting upon a scarlet colored beast," "drunken with the wine of her fornication," glittering with gold and stones, and "having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications" (Rev.17.4). Cora, bedecked with "multiple slave bracelets, three of them real gold and two of them only gold-plated, and hundreds of little tinkling gold attachments, such as tiny footballs, liberty bells, hearts, mandolins, choo-choos, sleds, tennis rackets, and so forth" (*Collected Stories* 294), looks "a noticeable person especially at the wheel of this glittering Scarlet Roadmaster" (295), and if she does not hold a golden cup like the biblical incarnation of evil, she always keeps a thermos of dry martinis in the dashboard. In any case, she resorts to "the type of flirtation that even most queens would think common" (298). Furthermore, Cora's excessive apparel is a clear infraction of Puritan social decorum (Vaughan 180). Her strong sexual appetite, along with her continuous drunkenness, makes her a spitting image of the prevalence of Paganism which Puritans so explicitly condemned because they created, as Samuel Danforth put it in 1710, a "World turned Upside Down" (qtd. in Gildrie 78−79).[4] Likewise, Bill's homosexuality is an abominable sin punished with death in *The Book of Laws and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of Massachusetts* (1644), for it goes against Leviticus 20: 13 (Vaughan 167).

¶16 Stephen J. Whitfield (1991) persuasively holds that one of the most defining features of the Cold War was an unprecedented upsurge of piety and a widespread belief in the need to save America from Armageddon and the Antichrist, now indentified with Communism (82−83), gross materialism, and sexual profligacy. Americans were now chosen, once more, "for a spiritual mission among the nations," not very different from the Puritans' original plan (81−82), in order to vanquish moral sickness and spiritual emptiness (Graham 4−8). Not in vain, by infusing the story with biblical underpinnings Williams manages to reverse the Puritans' "errand into the wilderness," i.e., the idea that the pilgrims' exile was "a task force of Christians" aimed to complete the reformation abandoned in morally corrupted England (Miller 11). Since from a Puritan point of view the salvation history is just a journey "between Egypt and the Promised Land, or between Babylon and New Jerusalem" (Zakai 8), their migration to America is fundamental to achieving the procrastinated victory of a new moral order over the old, superstitious, and debauched world depicted in the Revelation of St. John the Evangelist. By contrast, Cora and Billy's "errand" counteracts the Providential design of the Puritan exodus. Both their departure and their final destination is the triumph of the sins of the flesh over any moral restriction,

the restitution of Babylon, the glorification of the Mother of harlots and the complete abandonment of the oppressive constraints of the "city upon a hill." In "Answer to Job," Carl Jung interpreted the Whore of Babylon as "the counterpart of the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Psychology* 446). If the destruction of Babylon represented "not only the end of fornication, but the eradication of all life's joys and pleasures" (*Psychology* 446), it is not surprising that Williams inverts the direction of the biblical narrative. His final blow against the suffocating moral order is struck by reaffirming the protagonists' moral superiority at the end of the story when we see them wake up in the fleabag hotel room, refreshed and satisfied with the morning discovery of "being together no matter what comes, and the knowledge of not having struck nor lied nor stolen" (*Collected Stories*302). If the Puritans' "city upon a hill" was shown to the eyes of all the world as the elevated repository of salvation, an emblem of the new Eden on earth, now Cora and Billy are, curiously enough, above the city, which they look down upon from their lofty perspective, i.e., from a "bird's-eye situation" (302).[5]

¶17 The ironic rewriting of the Puritan pilgrimage (the road no longer leads away from but to Babylon) and the restoration of the frontier myth through the search for an imaginary territory defined by the expansion of sexual liberties may be seen as Williams's strategies to undermine the smothering cultural tenets of the McCarthy era. The result is, using Foucault's term (101), a "reverse" narrative which relies on the same principles of the dominant discourse but turns them around. The reappropriation of the Puritan salvation history and the counter-vision of the frontier allow the writer to transform the course of American history by mapping new possibilities for marginal values which are now voiced and legitimized within the structure of the hegemonic system.

¶18 To conclude, if Williams defined the world as "a funny paper read backwards" (*Camino Real* 544), then it is not surprising that the only way to restore meaning and coherence implies a reversal of direction. The dominant reading method caused a distortion which could only bring insanity and unhappiness. By changing our visual perspective and forcing us to follow the lines of the text against the grain, i.e., by revising the two major master narratives of America from a new angle, the writer is contributing, if not to the overthrow, at least to the erosion of the hegemonic ideologies which, like a "monolith with a deathwish" (Williams, *Moise* 169), irrevocably aim to suppress alternative values and differences. "[D]eviation [is] the course of my life," the narrator of *Moise and the World of Reason* affirms (63). By defining the boundaries of the territory where the outcast and the deviant live, Tennessee Williams shows us some of the fault lines of the gender binaries during the paranoia of the 1950s, and thereby helps us understand its fragility and inconsistencies.

Notes

[1] In his monumental America as a Civilization, Lerner classifies homosexuals as sexual deviants, although he also mentions the most widespread term in America at the time, "sex perverts" (683). In his account of the morality-breaking codes, he also includes the habit of strong drink as one of the "strands of social inheritance": "[F]rontiersmen prided themselves on their drinking excesses: the isolation of life, along with its rigors, led to a plentiful consumption of homemade spirits" (661). "America today, as in the past, presents a picture both of a lawless society and an overlegislated one" (661). The departure from norms "may shed extraordinary light on the inner nature of culture" (663); "the forms of American disorganization arise from the more naked drives within the culture itself." (664).

[2] Billy and Cora build up their lives on the quest of sexual pleasure partly as an antidote to loneliness and partly as a transgression of the law. The text explicitly mentions that Cora depends on the family funds and Billy desperately waits for his remittance letters to be able to continue with his morally anarchic existence. Cora is not then "the proverbial whore with the heart of gold," as Sklepowich affirms (535), and the story cannot be defined as "a truthful portrait of people who must hustle for a living," as Draya holds (661).

[3] Billy is modeled after Oliver Evans, the poet and college teacher, who frequently cruised along with Marion Vaccaro and visited the "bus depot at odd moments when classes are not in session" (Selected Letters 2, 304). Margaret Bradham Thornton points out that the close friend's name was also used for the protagonist of stories such as "One Arm" and for the central character of early drafts of Camino Real (Notebooks 232). There are, however, some features of the male character of "Two on a Party" that are unmistakably the author's, such as his occupation ("a hack writer of Hollywood film scenarios," Collected Stories 285).

[4] Carl Jung describes the case of a white girl brought up in Java who got "the barbarous civilization" and "the inferior ways" under her skin, and as a result began "to paint and powder herself in a rather conspicuous fashion," and to wear "big ornaments" and "terrible colors" in order to seduce all men. Her nickname was "the great whore of Babylon" (Symbolic 145−6). Cora's lack of taste is also due to a primitive nature which makes her combine a scarf of magenta chiffon, black and white checked slacks, a cowboy shirt, harlequin glasses with false diamonds on the rims, and all kinds of mismatched ornaments. Williams was familiar with Jung's work as early as the 1940s as can be noted in the letter sent to Donald Windham in 1943: "I am reading Jung now, the man with the cosmic-unconscious theory—you should try him—and I think he explains logically what Lawrence felt intuitively (Letters to Donald Windham 113). Cora symbolizes the Jungian triumph of the unconscious over the dreadfully conscious civilization. Not in vain, her name is a version of Kora or Kore, "the name by which Persephone, the goddess of the underworld, "was most commonly known among the Greeks" (Louis 13).

[5] In 1957 Max Lerner defined "[t]he American society that Kinsey studied" as "half Babylonian and half Puritan" (686) since it was characterized by both "an explosiveness of release of the older taboos" and a "reversion to a new form of the Puritan codes." Americans are "engaged in a complicated struggle in the building up of definitions as to what is permissible and truly expressive in the area of sexual behavior" (688). Williams's Puritan education is a well-documented fact (Tischler 1961) and so is his rebellion against the Puritan constraints that could lead, in Lerner's words, to "repression, hypocrisy, frustrations, and neuroses" (687). Not in vain Lerner quotes Mark Twain apropos of the Puritan taboos: "We have no real morals, but only artificial ones—morals created and preserved by the forced suppression of natural and healthy instincts" (671).

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