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The Gnädiges Fräulein: Tennessee Williams's Southernmost Belle

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Dislocating the Belle

Tennessee Williams's drama *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, first published together with *The Mutilated* under the title *Slapstick Tragedy* in 1965, is referred to by Philip Kolin as one of Williams's "least understood and most denigrated" (3) plays. Indeed, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* receives a small share of the extensive criticism conducted on Williams's drama as a whole. The bewilderment with which critics and audience alike greet Williams's later plays is, according to Annette Saddik, rooted in "nostalgia for the 'poetic realism'" ("Inexpressible" 6) of Williams's most famous plays. The unusual style of these late plays, however, is not "bad" playwriting nor a failed attempt at poetic realism. In 1975 Williams comments: "I'm quite through with the kind of play that established my early and popular reputation. I'm doing a different thing, which is altogether my own" (Ruas 284f). He describes his style of the 1960s and onwards as "less naturalistic" and part of a new form of theater "where everything is very free and different" (Gaines 218). From this perspective, it is clear that "what has been characterized as a failure is actually a conscious departure from the early dramaturgy that had established Williams' reputation" (Saddik, *Politics* 12).

¶2 When commentators do not dismiss *The Gnädiges Fräulein* outright as a failed play, they often equate it with Williams's personal life. The story of a woman who has to support herself by competing for fish against the ferocious cocaloony birds is seen by Williams's brother, Dakin, as a "self-mocking" (255) play. Harold Clurman writes in his review of a performance of *The Gnädiges Fräulein*: "I was too conscious that its author was in pain" (221). Assuming that the play's action is a dramatic reflection of Williams's biography, critics also describe the play's protagonist, the Fräulein, as a representation not only of Williams, but also of the struggling artist in general. Allean Hale describes the play "as an allegory on the subject of the artist as such, the human costs involved in the creative act, the destructive power of the critics" (43). In the same vein, Clurman equates the Fräulein's difficulty getting fish with the artist's trouble achieving "prestige, status, success" (221).

¶3 This essay aims not to approach *The Gnädiges Fräulein* as another metaphor for the aging Williams as an alienated artist, but to separate the play's text from the playwright's experience. Although Williams uses a style that differs greatly from his earlier works, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* is part of a long line of works that deal with southern society and its punishment of those who do not conform to its norms. Williams's southern women—most prominently Blanche, Amanda, and Alma—are often cited for their difficulties in enduring a harsh environment different from the genteel dream world whose loss they lament. These famous plays' portrayal of southern women goes beyond nostalgia: critics have traced the ways in which Williams exposes the southern belle ideal as an unrealizable myth. In this analysis, I argue that *The Gnädiges Fräulein*'s protagonist is part of the same tradition. The Fräulein, then, is not a representation of Williams, the artist, but an allegory about the southern belle. In this late play, Williams uses "an altogether different register of expression, another set of voices" (Chaudhuri 60) to symbolize a failed attempt to live up to an unattainable ideal. Thus the Fräulein

becomes a condensed version of all that the southern belle symbolizes—or, more precisely, of what the *failed* belle symbolizes for Williams.

¶14 I begin this essay with an analysis of the name: *The Gnädiges Fräulein* indicates that the belle is not a realistically drawn character. She has become so abstracted that she no longer carries a personal name. With the impersonal address that has replaced her proper name, the Fräulein becomes the personification of Williams's failed southern belle.

¶15 Dislocation is also a crucial notion: the play is dislocated from conventional representations of the southern belle theme on several levels. The belle's formally realistic environment is now a "fantastic area" (Saddik, "Inexpressible" 10) that Williams describes in the play's stage directions as resembling a Cubist painting. Several aspects of character constellation and plot development also invoke Cubist techniques of displacement. A very clear distortion lies in the fusion of humanity and animality: Southern culture and the animal world are practically indistinguishable in *The Gnädiges Fräulein*. The play's male characters also comprise elements of disruption. However, as dislocated versions of traditional southern men, they ultimately remain incontestable patriarchs. Using these distortions, Williams succeeds in creating an altogether new approach to a traditional topic. Bizarrely larger-than-life as it is, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* brings new intensity to Williams's southern belle theme.

The Belle Ideal Personified

¶16 Before *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, Williams's southern women were realistically drawn, unique characters with individual case histories. Unlike Blanche, Amanda, and Alma, however, the protagonist of *The Gnädiges Fräulein* does not have a personal name; she is always merely "the Fräulein." Considering its German connotations, this strange sounding, impersonal name alone makes her an outlandish version of the failed southern belle. The fact that the name doubles as the play's title indicates that it carries significance for the work as a whole.

¶17 "Gnädiges Fräulein," a (now outdated) German address for unmarried women, translates roughly to "gracious miss" or "honorable young lady." Any address that uses the word "gnädig" is a sign of respect; it asks the person addressed to be so gracious, or merciful, as to give her attention to the undeserving speaker. It implies that either a young lady of high social standing is addressed or that the addressee is meant to feel a (true or false) sense of superiority over the addressant. The proposition that the woman in question is "gnädig"—an honorable member of society that others meet with gallant admiration—links this foreign address to the refined, quasi-aristocratic figure of the southern belle.

¶18 The second part of the protagonist's name, "Fräulein," is a diminutive of "Frau." In German, "Frau" means both woman and wife; "Fräulein," on the other hand, was used in the past to address unmarried women of any age. It translates to "Miss" or, more literally, "little woman." The term implies that a woman's marital status helps shape her identity. There is no equivalent for males; a man is always addressed as "Herr," whether or not he is married. The term "Fräulein" suggests that a woman is not fully a woman if she is not married; as the diminutive "-lein" denotes, she is a minor woman, less-than-a-woman, almost childlike. It signals that an unmarried woman has not yet found a man to make her whole: only a wife ("Frau") is a woman ("Frau"). Taking these explanations into account, it becomes clear that the protagonist's name translates into a definition of the southern belle: a graceful young woman whose fundamental objective in life is marriage.

¶9 By using a language not easily understood—rather than, for example, simply calling his protagonist the “young lady”—Williams codes the belle’s name. This is not the first time that he uses coded language for a title character. Much easier to decode for English speakers, “Baby Doll” is another “Fräulein.” She is not regarded as a full person but as a child: a pretty doll but not an autonomous woman because her marriage has not been consummated. While her nickname is effortlessly interpreted, American audiences may not at once recognize all of the implications of the Fräulein’s name. Only if the German name is fully understood does it show its potential; only then does it become clear that the Fräulein’s destiny as a southern belle is already written in her name.

A Mirror Mosaic of the South

¶10 *The Gnädiges Fräulein* depicts Williams’s traditional southern belle theme in a radically new way. The style employed to accomplish this end is contained in Williams’s stage directions. The *Gnädiges Fräulein* does not employ the realistic southern background—New Orleans or the Mississippi Delta—of earlier works, but rather a grotesque version of a southern landscape: Cocaloony Key, an imaginary island off the coast of Florida, which may represent Williams’s beloved Key West. The stage directions indicate that the scenery comprises “[a] totally unrealistic arrangement of porch, steps, yard, and picket fence” (4). What makes the scenery unrealistic is its broken-up character. The porch is set up downstage “with maybe the yard displaced to the upper right” (4). To make the desired effect clearer, Williams indicates that the scenery should look “*like Picasso designed it*” (4, emphasis added). This instruction is the starting point for analysis.

¶11 When Picasso developed Cubism, John Richardson writes, “it was the real rather than the realistic that [he] was out to capture” (103). Williams, too, voices a preference for the “real” over the “realistic”: “Sometimes the truth is more accessible when you ignore realism, because when you see things in a somewhat exaggerated form you capture more of the true essence of life” (Brown 264). This study emphasizes that, in the case of *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, Williams’s new, unrealistic style is noticeably influenced by Cubism. The playwright’s allusion to Picasso indicates an awareness that realism is not bold enough, stylistically, to capture the “true essence” of the southern belle.

¶12 Richard Hayden Axsom describes Picasso’s Cubism in the following words: “[M]undane objects, people, and events are pictorially distorted so as to assume a high level of allusiveness and to garner new and unexpected connotations. The set of meanings things display is characterized by ambiguity, paradox, and irony” (177). Rosalind Jeffrey adds that “Cubism is a mirror mosaic of the traditional” (1). It is not simply the inversion of traditional standards, Jeffrey points out, but instead “takes the forms of diction and dislocates them” (1). These characteristics of Cubism are reflected in Williams’s allusions to Picasso’s style in *The Gnädiges Fräulein*. Williams takes a traditional topic—the theme of the southern belle—and creates “a mirror mosaic” that dislocates its parts. The incoherencies this technique creates are immediately visible in the defragmented scenery. The dislocation widens the context of what is pictured: it seems to show multiple angles of the same matter, suggesting multiple viewpoints of the object/person/theme in question. A realistic technique cannot create this haunting effect. Nearly all elements of *The Gnädiges Fräulein* are characterized by an intensity created through this alienating and distancing effect.

¶13 A literal dislocation takes place in the relocation of the scene of action. The imaginary island of Cocaloony Key is not merely in the South, it is “Southernmost” (5), a term repeated perpetually throughout the

play. By dislocating the scene from a realistic South to a bizarre “Southernmost” island, Williams creates a background for his dislocated southern—or, rather, southernmost—characters. Most obviously, various features of the southern belle are dislocated from their traditional context. The Fräulein is a southern character (because she lives in the South) and no southerner at all (because she is originally from Europe). Not being a southerner by birth does not save her from the societal forces of the South; she is immersed in Cocaloony Key culture as much as its other human and animal inhabitants. Her looks and actions seem bizarre, almost animal-like at times, but on closer inspection they turn out to be pathetic attempts to fulfill the ideals prescribed by society. Through her dislocation, she is a grotesque, dislocated hyperbole, an intensely drawn version of Williams’s failed belle.

¶14 The Fräulein’s first lines are heard from inside the boarding house. In order to wake the other residents, she sings: “*Open wide the windows, open wide the doors, and let the merry sunshine in!*” (11). This wake-up call instantly connects her with Williams’s most prominent would-be belle, Amanda, who wakes her family with cheerful “*Rise an’ Shines*” (*Glass Menagerie* 34). Another connection to Williams’s southern belles is her heritage. Suggesting the old southern pride in aristocratic European ancestry, the Fräulein “comes from Middle Europe and . . . genteel circumstances” (12). Throughout the play, the Fräulein’s appearance and demeanor link her even closer to Amanda, Blanche, or Alma. Like the slanted scenery of this play, the Fräulein reflects Williams’s earlier belles like the contorted image of a splintered mirror. Their psychological fracturedness, brought on by a life shaped by dreams of an irrevocable past and repressed sexuality, is represented by her deteriorating appearance and by the physical wounds the Fräulein suffers from the cocaloony attacks. The Fräulein’s pathetic retreat into her old showgirl role and her violent struggle for fish represent Blanche’s, Amanda’s, and Alma’s flights into memories of the past and their fight to survive in a harsh environment.

¶15 When the Fräulein first appears on stage, “[h]er hair is an aureole of bright orange curls, very fuzzy” (13). She is hard of hearing (12) and “[o]ne eye is covered by a large blood-stained bandage” (13). Her clothes are “the remnants of her theatrical wardrobe” (13); she wears “a curious costume which would not be out of place at the Moulin Rouge in the time of Toulouse-Lautrec” (13). She carries a scrapbook full of memories, which she enthusiastically presents to everyone who is willing to look. Reviving a miserable image of her days as a celebrated performer, she can sing romantic tunes on command from a program “too faded” (14) to be deciphered. This brings to mind Amanda in her “yellowed” (*Glass Menagerie* 55) frock, talking with “*girlish Southern vivacity*” (63), only “*nearly*” (55) reviving the image of her youthful self. Like a bizarre exaggeration of Amanda’s behavior, the Fräulein’s artistic performance of outdated songs stands in stark contrast to her situation.

¶16 When the cocaloonies pick out her eyes, the Fräulein’s appearance becomes more bizarre. Her eyes are covered with a blood-spattered bandage which is, in another cruel allusion to carefree southern girlhood, “*tied in back with a large butterfly bow*” (23). Her skirt is “spangled with fresh drops of blood” (23). Brutally evoking a lady’s finery, these blood drops “glitter like rubies” (23). Even now, without eyes, she “reads” the newspaper clippings on her career. When she can no longer recite the articles by heart, she utters a “*dismal soliloquy of one vowel, prolonged*” (26). This howl is “expressing the inexpressible regret of all her regrets” (25); it laments the irrecoverable loss of that dream of life, and love, to which she has been clinging. Bringing to mind Blanche’s unheard voice after Stanley’s rape, Amanda’s quiet crestfallenness after all attempts to secure Laura’s future have failed, and Alma’s psychological and physical breakdown when her love is unrequited,

words can no longer represent the Fräulein's pain. Like these women, however, the Fräulein is not completely overcome by her grief. Although it seems nearly impossible for her to go on, she does not give up. When she comes back from her last hunt for fish, "[a]ll her costume has been torn away" (33), she is missing patches of hair, and her legs are "*streaked and dabbled in blood*" (33). Despite her physical destruction, she comes out of this hunt triumphant: she catches a fish and successfully defends it against the cocaloonies.

¶17 The Fräulein's dislocated southern belle identity is reflected by other elements that bring to mind Cubist distortion techniques. Molly and Polly are peculiar one-dimensional figures, not the "complex human beings with intricate psychologies" (Saddik, "Inexpressible" 7) Williams draws in his earlier plays. As characters, they are completely interchangeable. However, Williams employs this Picasso-esque double to create a dislocation of southernness in general. Through Molly and Polly, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* perpetually proclaims stereotypes of Southernness only to immediately negate them. Like the scenery and the Fräulein's character, Molly and Polly's discourse on southernness is defined by disruption and contrast. True to her role as a southern lady, Polly opens the play by proudly announcing her position in society: "What is my position? Why, I'm the southernmost gossip columnist *and* society editor of the southernmost news-organ in the Disunited Mistakes" (5). The mocking tone of this statement is satirized by Polly's actual position at the moment of her first words on stage: she is crouching away from the cocaloony birds flying above her. She comments: "I might as well remain in this [crouched] position if it wasn't so inelegant for a lady in my position" (5). She picks up the topic a few seconds later, telling the audience: "My mother said that the way you tell a lady is that a lady never steps out of her house, unless her house is on fire, without a pair of gloves on, and that's how you tell a lady" (5). Polly's statement is again reminiscent of Amanda's claims of southern elegance. Yet Polly immediately undermines the role: "Have I got my gloves on? No! And I didn't hear the fire engine" (5). Thus sardonically abandoning her claims of southern sophistication, Polly opens the scene for the continuing disruption not only of southern culture, but of civilization as a whole.

¶18 Throughout the play, the praise of southernness is also interrupted by pauses. Characters "*stare out blankly for a couple of moments*" (5) before they are able to resume their conversations. This caricatures the unstoppable flow of southern memories from Williams's southern women, particularly from Amanda. In *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, Polly tells the audience: "Everything's southernmost here because of a geographical accident making this island, this little bit of heaven dropped from the sky one day, the southernmost bit of terra firma of the—OOPS! I've lost my concentration!" (5). When she has gathered her thoughts and continues her description of the "southernmost" quality of life at Cocaloony Key, Polly evokes the euphemistic parlance employed by Amanda, Blanche, or Alma to gloss over subjects they consider crude. More often than not, these topics concern "unseemly" matters of sexuality. For instance, Blanche describes sexual affairs as "epic fornications" (140) or "intimacies with strangers" (205). Amanda and Alma, on the other hand, dodge these topics entirely and instead speak of "[s]uperior things! Things of the mind and the spirit!" (*Glass Menagerie* 39) and of an "aspiration for more than our human limits have placed in our reach" (*Summer and Smoke* 612). In *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, Polly, the self-declared southern lady of high social standing, speaks very differently: "[T]his morning, I did the southernmost write-up on the southernmost gang-bang and called it Multiple Nuptials which is the southernmost gilding of the southernmost lily that any cock-eyed sob-sister and society editor . . . ever dreamt of" (5f). Unlike Williams's earlier southerners, nobody in *The Gnädiges Fräulein* ever gilds the lily.

Polly introduces the play's other southern lady, Molly. She calls her neighbor "a vulgar, slovenly bitch with social pretensions . . . she fancies herself highly as the social leader of Cocaloony Key" (6). That this "social leader" is not only on her porch "with mop and bucket like a common domestic" (7), but mopping up human blood, obliterates her cultured-ness immediately. Molly refuses to share with Polly why there is blood on her porch and claims that she does not fear a negative article in the newspaper: "When a lady's sure of her social position as I am, she don't concern herself with gossip columns" (7). Yet she relaxes her stance when she sees Polly take "*a suspiciously thin cigarette*" (8) out of her bag. Smoking the joint together, they talk about their "girlhood romances" (9). Again oddly evoking—and dislocating—Williams's earlier southern women, the two do not wallow in nostalgia but coarsely joke: "One of your girlhood romances is still in traction, ain't he? . . . That's a lie, he gets around fine!—On crutches" (9). Rather than stress the innocence of their romances, they accompany their conversation by rocking in their chairs "*with pelvic thrusts as if having sex*" (9). Only when Polly falls out of her chair does Molly remind her neighbor of southern etiquette: "Let's have a little propriety and some decorum on the front porch" (9).

¶20 In his earlier depictions of failed southern belles, Williams presents southern society as a sterile, normed culture that strictly condemns all physical impulses. To borrow Una Chaudhuri's words, a society of this kind is based "on a compulsive silencing of the animality around us and within us, wresting preeminence for culture by making nature mute" (59). In *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, Williams takes this conflict between culture and nature to the extreme by breaking down the boundaries between humans and animals. In this play, the cocaloony attacks represent the punishment of those who do not conform to society's rules. These animals are not the Fräulein's lone adversaries. Rather, the birds are an extension of human society; the Fräulein's neighbors are no less animalistic than the birds. The boundary between human and animal is in effect nonexistent; the cocaloonies are as much a part of Cocaloony Key society as the self-identified southern ladies Molly and Polly. After all, the humans named their island after the birds.

¶21 The Fräulein is one of "the discards, the re-jecks" (6) of this society; she "has degenerated to where [she] could be justly described as a parasitical creature" (6). This image brings to mind another animal comparison, namely, Amanda's description of unmarried women: "I've seen such pitiful cases in the South . . . little birdlike women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!" (*Glass Menagerie* 24). Like these spinsters, the Fräulein struggles to maintain an acceptable position in Cocaloony Key society but is unable to do so without the support of others. Her grotesque fight against the cocaloonies and "the cruel disintegration of the Fräulein at the hands of the brutal birds" (Chaudhuri 57) stands for the societal struggle these women face.

¶22 The interplay of the animal world and human culture becomes even clearer when one considers the fact that although the Fräulein finally triumphs over the cocaloonies, she remains a victim of her society. It is, after all, Molly—a member of human society—who brings on the Fräulein's physical destruction by forcing her to compete with the cocaloonies. After their attacks, the Fräulein resembles a bird more than she does a human being, let alone a gracious lady. She is "*flapping her long, thin arms*" (26) like a bird and is not walking but "*waddling very rapidly like a cocaloony*" (26). The cocaloonies' cry, "AWK" (17), inspires Polly to compare the birds directly with the Fräulein: "Awkward, an awkward creature" (17). The Fräulein's scream is "still human" (21), but at the same time just "another outcry" (21) among the bird's shrieks.

¶23 The Fräulein's position in Cocaloony society, straddling human and animal, emphasizes her outsider status. She is accepted neither by the humans nor by the birds. Polly and Molly's behavior toward the Fräulein shows

society's inhuman(e) treatment of this woman who has—by her own claim—gone from renowned star to social outcast. They talk in front of the Fräulein as if she “were a dumb object” (Hale, “Clown” 42). When they are fed up with her, they consider hitting her with a baseball bat, but then decide to put her back into the house: “Turn her, she can be turned, then shove her, she can be shoved” (15). To Molly and Polly, the Fräulein is a freak, and a good topic for gossip. Despite their behavior, the Fräulein remains “pathetically anxious to please” both women (Hale 42). This does not affect Molly and Polly's derision; they show no compassion for her situation. “She's lost porch privilege. . . . She's lost yard privilege, too” (12), Molly states when the Fräulein cannot deliver the fish. After the Fräulein has lost her eyesight, Molly immediately orders her to “COME ON OUT HERE AND REPAIR THIS FENCE, FRÄULEIN!” (23), and Polly coldly comments on the blind singer's voice: “She flats a little in the top register” (23). When the Fräulein comes back from her last hunt successfully, they suddenly declare their admiration (32). Only a moment later, however, they revert to their old ways. Molly announces that the Fräulein can no longer stay at the boarding house because, with only one fish, “she ain't even paid for kitchen privileges yet” (33). In a crowning act of disregard for the Fräulein, Molly and Polly confiscate her catch. This act represents a crucial turn in the action—for the fish claimed *by* Molly and Polly is soon claimed *from* them by the play's only male character, Indian Joe. Like Molly and Polly, Indian Joe forms a tandem (with the absent Viennese Dandy). Furthermore, he embodies a dislocated version of the ideal southern gentleman.

¶24

The Fräulein's earlier career as a performer in front of aristocratic audiences mirrors the belle's representative function in southern culture: the “circus” of being presented and presentable in front of the gaze of gentlemen, performing a “show” of feminine charms in order to secure a husband. Or, as Amanda remarks in *Menagerie*: “All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap” (54). Like all belles, the Fräulein is always dependent on a man. Her show act, after all, is not her own but that of a seal trainer: Toivo, the Viennese Dandy (20). Although Toivo is “connected collaterally, with the House of Habsburg” (29), he is not presented as a nobleman but as a snob with aristocratic pretensions. The southern glorification of feudal values is reflected in his “waxed blond mustache” and “signet ring with the Habsburg crest engraved on it” (29). His figure is “[s]uperb,” his uniform “immaculate,” his eyes “brilliant,” his teeth “[p]erfect” (29). The Fräulein's love for this dazzling image of an aristocrat evokes the southern belle's romantic reveries of a chivalrous suitor.

¶25

Yet despite his gentlemanly exterior, Toivo does not repay the Fräulein's admiration in a courteous manner. He barely notices her existence, merely giving her “an insincere smile, just that, a sort of *grimace*, exposing white teeth and pink gums, while clicking his heels and bending ever so slightly in an insincere bow” (30). Molly tells Polly: “He couldn't stand her because she adored him. . . . He regarded her as a social inferior” (30f). The Fräulein loses even this pitiful position by his side in society when she changes her act. Yearning to be acknowledged, “[s]he suddenly felt a need to compete for attention with the trained seal and the trained seal's trainer” (30). The Fräulein intercepts the fish that the dandy throws to the seal and catches it in her mouth. She is the star of the show until the seal rebels and knocks her teeth out with his flippers during a performance “before the crowned heads at the Royal in Copenhagen!” (31). This marks the end of her career: the Fräulein is now a disgrace in aristocratic European society. Resemblances to Blanche's situation after she has stepped out of line in her society are clear: both women now “drift” (*Fräulein* 31) in the world, one ending up in New Orleans, the other in Cocaloony Key. Although their environments have changed, their behavioral repertoire has not. Knowing no other way, the Fräulein has to perform her animal act of catching fish over and over again:

“The Fräulein’s current method of survival—*acting the animal*—is actually the final stage of a process that began during *an animal act*. . . . having allowed herself that one desperate act of animality in the past, the Fräulein now performs it routinely, as a very means of survival” (Chaudhuri 63, 65). This pattern again recalls Blanche and her “animal act” of having sexual relations with several men; in both cases, socially unacceptable behavior is the only means of survival for a failed southern belle. Blanche and the Fräulein—both formerly well accepted—become social outcasts though their acts of animality: Blanche is psychologically shattered and sent to an asylum; the Fräulein is physically wounded by the cocaloonies and faces eviction from the boarding house.

¶26 However, both Blanche and the Fräulein remain reliant on those who have done them harm—namely, men. The Fräulein’s impulse to serve the fish to Toivo mirrors Blanche’s insistence that she will have a future with Shep: although whatever meager relationship the Fräulein has had with Toivo “quickly disbanded” (31) when their show ended, her life is still centered on him. She no longer realizes that Toivo is not there, nor that he has never loved her. She takes Indian Joe to be Toivo and offers him the fish she has caught. While her utterances are usually very short phrases, inane show tunes, or wordless outcries, she gives a coherent speech when she serves him: “Is it alright? I can’t imagine how I happened to catch it, it was so dark at the fish-docks. It just landed in my jaws like God had thrown it to me. It’s better to receive than to give if you are receiving to give: isn’t it, Toivo, mein liebchen? . . . Watch out for the bones in it, darling!” (34). Having found a way to please a man, normalcy is momentarily restored for the Fräulein. When there is no fish in the skillet, Indian Joe scolds the Fräulein and walks away from her. The fact that both Indian Joe and Toivo betray the Fräulein, despite all that she does for them, is reminiscent of Blanche’s—or Amanda’s, or Alma’s—disappointment in the men they love. Her moment of interpersonal purpose is gone. Taking Indian Joe’s shouting as a show tune request from Toivo, she immediately falls back into song.

¶27 Despite their surface differences, the Fräulein, Molly, and Polly show the same absolute obedience to Indian Joe; pleasing him is their only objective. When they are about to eat the Fräulein’s fish, “*Indian Joe pushes one lady to the L. and one lady to the R. and seats himself at the table picking up the fish*” (35). The women willingly leave the fish to him: they make no protest, and they offer him a drink to accompany his meal (35).

¶28 Although Molly and Polly dominate the Fräulein, Indian Joe controls all of them. As the play’s sole profiteer and only source of authority, he represents the same type of despotic power Stanley embodies in *A Streetcar Named Desire*—and, in a broader sense, the power of patriarchy in the South. Indian Joe is, after all, a stock American character. He has as little in common with an actual Native American as the clichéd southern gentleman has with European aristocrats. The male stereotype—whether it is the Hollywood Indian, the Southern Gentleman, or the Viennese Dandy—is based on admiration for and domination over women. In *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, the (thoroughly American) Indian Joe and the (quasi-aristocratic European) Viennese Dandy merge into one and represent the belle’s misty-eyed dream of an ideal southern gentleman. Molly confuses the two men (20) and later tells Polly: “Imagine the Viennese dandy like Indian Joe” (30); the Fräulein, in turn, repeatedly calls Indian Joe by the Dandy’s name (33). It is not their individual character traits but their social superiority as men that makes them desirable. Yet in one respect, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* differs markedly from other Williams studies of the southern belle. While Blanche, Amanda, and Alma look to men not only for romance, but also for security and stability, the women of Cocaloony Key are attracted to Indian Joe by sheer sexual desire—reintroducing the notion of the blurred lines between human and animal behavior:

Indian Joe: I feel like a bull!

Polly: MOOOO! MOOOOO! (27)

Indian Joe's presence wakes the women's animalistic nature; he is an "erotic fantasy" (4), physical instinct personified. In contrast to the strict moral codes of southern society, humans are mere animals in the dislocated southernmost culture of Cocaloony Key.

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