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“Seven Card Stud”: The Royal Flush of White Masculinity

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How have socially constructed notions about ideal masculinity come to exist in America? What is white masculinity and what is its connection to race politics? Scholars such as Elaine Tyler May and David Savran have pondered these questions for years. “Seven Card Stud”: The Royal Flush of White Masculinity,” a chapter in a larger thesis, attempts to pick up the pieces of knowledge put forth by these scholars and better understand why men are drawn to toxic versions of masculinity in American society, through the analysis of three dramatic works. This chapter focuses on *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams, exploring the character Stanley Kowalski’s self-presentation and the manner by which he has sculpted his performance of masculinity according to what was regarded as desirable for males in 1940s America. Stanley must keep his social circle tightly bound to him and his viewpoints, in order to keep those around him blinded to his lack of true whiteness (he is a Polish immigrant) and to persuade them of his hyper masculinity. At the same time, Stanley’s nemesis Blanche Dubois has been erased from her former plantation home, Belle Reve, resulting in an erasure of her possession of whiteness. Hence, she attempts to retain her claim to whiteness through the use of fake pearls and white dresses (which we can read as a performance of hyper femininity), whilst simultaneously using color in order to fit into her new surroundings in Elysian Fields. Stanley strives to strip Blanche of her whiteness, reminding Stella and the

audience over and over that “Sister Blanche is no lily” (Williams, 119), as a strategy to reassert his own whiteness and the primacy of masculinity.