True *Camino Real*: notes on Tennessee Williams, Elia Kazan and playwriting[1]

O verdadeiro *Camino Real*: apontamentos sobre Tennessee Williams, Elia Kazan e dramaturgia

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Abstract

This article sets out to analyze Tennessee Williams' play *Camino Real* regarding its writing and production process with specific attention to the director Elia Kazan, who frequently collaborated with Williams at the time. Moreover, our aim is to point out formal features as well as subject matters which indicate its relevance seventy years after it debuted.

Keywords: Writing process; American history; Imperialism; Theater and politics.

Resumo

O presente artigo pretende elucidar apontamentos de análise acerca do processo de escrita e realização da peça *Camino Real*, de Tennessee Williams, particularmente em relação a Elia Kazan, diretor da montagem original e parceiro frequente de Williams na época. Além disso, através de uma breve análise, é objetivo apontar características formais e temáticas que sinalizam a contemporaneidade da peça, setenta anos após sua estreia.

Palavras-chave: Processo de escrita; História estadunidense; Imperialismo; Teatro e política.

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In keeping with this opportune dossier, besides Tennessee Williams's 40th passing anniversary, 2023 marks other important commemorations. It has also been 70 years since the author's play *Camino Real* debuted, as well 20 years since Elia Kazan's death – who directed the opening production on Broadway. This article will focus on this trinity. At large, and also noteworthy, the year also marks 20 years since the beginning of the Iraq War and 70 years since a coup d'état overthrew Iran's then-government and allowed the Shah's rise to power. These facts may seem disconnected from each other, but as we hope to point out, the historical period that the world was going through in 1953 is refracted and detectable in Williams' play – a moment which, in many ways, has shaped the way American foreign policy and global dynamics are played out to this day.

Along this essay, we will explore Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan's artistic partnership from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, with a specific focus on the production of *Camino Real* (1953) which, as we will see, took place over the course of at least two years, between which Williams rewrote several versions. This will be intertwined with the historical and political process. In addition to contributing to documenting the play's creative process, the ambition is to explore which choices both Williams and Kazan made considering what was effectively staged and later published. With a brief literary analysis of the play, we will also consider possible implications resulting from those choices.

Origins: One-act

Between 1946 and 1947 Tennessee Williams wrote a one-act play called *Ten blocks on the Camino Real: a fantasy*, which was published in the collection *American blues* (1948) – no official translation to Portuguese or professional staging in Brazil is known to date. "A strange little play" is how Williams (1975, p. 394) himself defines it. Among the anecdotes about the author's career, this is one of the best known: in 1946, when Williams sent the play's first draft to his agent Audrey Wood, she replied: "put [it] away and [do] not let anybody see it" (Williams, 1975, p. 394). From the beginning, negative criticism shaped this play's reputation.

Then in 1949, Elia Kazan was using two scenes from *Ten blocks...* in workshops with members from the Actors Studio, and upon hearing about this, Williams was thrilled (Kazan, 2014) and suggested to the director that they staged the play in a full-

length version. Kazan seemed to like the idea and agreed to stage it, but later postponed these plans, explaining to Williams' agent that the "'scenes' at the Actors Studio 'never got far enough to even think about or contemplate or imagine' a production" at that moment (Kazan, 2014, p. 532-533). Years later, Williams (1975, p. 581) wrote in his autobiography about his disguised satisfaction upon learning that the project Kazan had chosen instead of *Ten blocks...* had not been successful.

Researcher Brian Parker (1996) attempted to thoroughly map out the origins of *Camino Real* by proposing a stemma of the play based on multiple drafts found in archives. Parker points out that after plans to stage the full-length version did not come to pass, in 1951, Williams and Kazan then decided to stage a double-bill production of *Ten Blocks...* and *27 wagons full of cotton.* That idea also never came to be. Still, as both ideas coincided chronologically at some point, it is very likely that Tennessee worked on both projects simultaneously (Parker, 1996, p. 333).

Meanwhile, between plans and actual premiere, Cold War was making the bigger picture even more heated both domestically and internationally. "Each time I return [to the U.S.] I sense a further reduction in human liberties, which I guess is reflected in the revisions of the play," Williams reflected in an interview with Henry Hewes in 1953 (Devlin, 1986). This is crucial in the case of *Camino Real*, as the play is set in an unnamed location with elements of Central America, Asia and North Africa, and which is controlled by the military associated with local economic power. Globally, the U.S. extended its influence as much as it possibly could in this period, ranging from the political-military sense to propaganda inserted in cultural products produced at the time, with special attention to Asia and Latin America (Purdy, 2007; McCormick, 1995).

Such attitude was not new: since the 19th century, American foreign policy had been shaped by ambition to expand political and economic power. But after World War II and the onset of the Cold War, and the struggle between communism and capitalism, "[the U.S.] developed the permanent ideology of national security presiding over the American empire to this day. […] But the ideology of national security, US-style, was inherently expansionist" (Anderson, 2015, p. 34). What this means practically is that, in order to maintain what it understands as security and ensure its global hegemony, there would be essentially no limits. That includes coups d'état which would give power to governments of their choosing – as the coups in Iran,[3] a few months after the premiere of

[3] Documents made public only in 2013 confirmed the CIA's role in the Iranian coup. (Byrne, 2013). And as

Camino Real, and in Brazil, years later in 1964. This attitude was to guarantee that the U.S. controlled regions in which any possible communist – or the least left-leaning influences – could prevail. Those had to be, according to this logic, contained. Containment, it must be pointed out, and according to Perry Anderson (2015), was one of the main policies in Harry Truman's administration (1946-1952) and of all American presidents who followed during the Cold War. This is embedded in anticommunism. Roots of this ideology go so deep and grew so wide, that it would not be an exaggeration to state that it still shapes the course of world politics to this very day, as we witnessed in the last Brazilian election for president, for example. We must emphasize the connection to our present, since the dimension of said ideology was articulated and put to test immediately prior to and during the production of *Camino Real*.

Domestically "this dark period in history made it extremely difficult to criticize the American government, […] cementing an official culture of social conformity" (Purdy, 2007, p. 230). Stubbornly guided by containing the "Red Scare,"[4] the Truman administration launched an actual hunt, in order to combat any remnant of the Left in the country and doing so by the most sordid means. One of the tools to carry this out was the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which had originally been created in the 1930s. Later, HUAC became the stage for public hearings aimed at "witch-hunting."[5]

Tennessee & Kazan

Both Elia Kazan and Tennessee Williams were already working in the 1930s, when the economic recession devastated much of the world and when more radical alternatives began to appear as solutions to difficulties imposed by the crisis.

recently as last year, the CIA publicly admitted its involvement in it, as CIA spokesman Walter Trosin spoke in a podcast about clandestine forces acting at that time. Though Malcolm Byrne warns in an article for *The Guardian* (2023) that "it's wrong to suggest that the coup operation itself has been fully declassified. Far from it. […] Important parts of the record are still being withheld."

[4] Red Scare is how the persecution of people considered to be subversive, or left-leaning, thus the red in the expression. This led to mass firings, prison sentences and even executions, in the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (Purdy, 2007).

[5] Metaphorical allusion to the 17th century, when Church members in the United States feverishly persecuted women who were tried by courts for committing crimes of witchcraft.

> The **1930s are often called the 'Red Decade'** and for good reason. The persistent efforts of unions and radicals, especially the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), inspired a big part of the population. The growing influence of left-wing intellectuals and artists, evident in many European and Latin American countries, was an **expression of many people's desire for an alternative to the horrors brought about by the economic crisis** (Purdy, 2007, p.211, emphasis added).

In the 1930s, Williams studied at the University of Iowa while also working in a shoe factory. He was already writing at the time. His career's first highlight was arguably when he submitted a collection of short plays called *American blues*[6] for a Group Theater contest[7] in 1939, which he ended up winning. He had financial difficulties and short-lived jobs in the following years until 1943, when his agent told him he had been hired by the Metro Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studio, according to Murphy (2014). His first success in the theater would come with *The glass menagerie* premiering on Broadway in 1945. That very first play already put him in a celebrated position in American Theatre, which he never left since.

This leads us to a brief retrospective about Elia Kazan. He worked with Group Theater during the 1930s, first as an actor and then directing some productions (Clurman, 1983). All his subsequent work was intensely influenced by the experience there, as he himself attested (Ciment, 1974, p. 21). To a certain extent, the group's working method aimed at political radicalization and that also influenced directing procedures which he would later use. The Group Theater's work dynamics altered the traditional director-actor relationship in the United States by "[including] the playwright in the production process, extending his collaboration to the director and actors, opening the script up to revision by the author well into the rehearsal period" (Ardrey, 1939 *apud*[8] Murphy, 1992, p. 2). This meant plays were not viewed as closed objects or as manuals simply with instructions to be followed. That is key to remember because collaboration was at the center of Williams and Kazan's artistic relationship (Murphy,

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[6] According to Fulvio Torres Flores in his doctoral thesis (2013) focused on this collection, it is difficult to precise which plays actually composed were actually in it, as there are at least three hypotheses. The fact is that in 1948, an edition of *American blues* was published with: *Moony's kid don't cry, The dark room, The case of the crushed petunias, The unsatisfactory supper or The long stay cut short* and *Ten blocks on the Camino Real*.

[7] For the history of the famous Group Theatre, founded in 1931 by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg, cf. CLURMAN, Harold. **The fervent years.** Boston: Da Capo Press, 1983.

[8] ARDREY, Robert. Writing for the group: In which Mr. Ardrey explains a mode of unit theatre life. **New York Times**, 19 nov. 1939. Available on: https://www.nytimes.com/1939/11/19/archives/writing-for-the-group-in-which-mr-ardrey-explains-a-mode-of-unit.html?mwgrp=c-dbar&hpgrp=c-abar&smid=url-share. Accessed on: October 10 2023.

1992).

As Zaniolo (2021, p. 12) reminds us, after the war ended and Nazis were defeated, "the United States found a unique opportunity to establish their empire as a nation who could rule the global market once and for all." As we stated previously, to execute this rule, there were virtually no limits. "So long as the conflict between [Capitalism and communism] lasted, the hegemony of America in the camp of capital was assured" (Anderson, 2015, p. 50). Elia Kazan had been affiliated to CPUSA for nineteen months between 1934 and 1936, according to the director himself.[9] Years later, in 1952, with the containment policy in full effect, HUAC summoned Kazan to testify: first in January, behind closed doors, and then, in April, publicly. This was the most infamous moment in his career, which followed him to the grave, when he "named names" and told on eight former Group Theater colleagues who also had been members of the party. In total, he named seventeen names, as can be seen in the documentary *None without sin* (2003).

We do not intend here to make a second inquisition and pass judgement on his choice. As also exposed by the documentary, the director did have in fact a disagreement with the party which had made him leave. But Kazan also recalls in his autobiography (1988) that he had contacted some of the people he named prior to his deposition and even agreed with playwright Clifford Odets that they would both name each other. Odets also testified and named names. Circumstances of political repression such as this are carefully premeditated by the establishment in order to break any possibility of questioning its hegemony, which cultivated and propagated anti-communism as rhetoric before, during and after the fact (McCormick, 1995). Permanent surveillance – because at any moment one can be accused – is only one of the tools devised so that the hegemonic system remains intact. So, in 1952, Elia Kazan found himself under crossfire and chose to tell on his colleagues, many of whom never forgave him.[10] This is the context immediately prior to *Camino Real*'s production process. According to biographer John Lahr (2014, p. 253), this was not a problem for Williams: "two days after [Elia Kazan's] HUAC testimony, [he] sent him an expanded version of

[9] BENTLEY, Eric; RICH, Frank (Org.) **Thirty years of treason:** excerpts from hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968. United States Congress. New York: Viking Press 1971. Available on: https://www.laweekly.com/statement-of-elia-kazan. Accessed on: July 20, 2023.

[10] Decades later, the 1999 Oscars ceremony became infamous because as Elia Kazan received an honorary award, great part of the audience clearly refused to applaud him, while others did so standing, which is also documented in the film *None without sin* (2003).

Camino Real."

When plans to stage the play effectively were put to motion during 1952, Tennessee went to Europe and worked on the play from there, corresponding with Kazan. In letters between them, part of the artistic provocations the director made can be seen, which included suggestions to develop the plot, cuts and the play's tone in general. He also had various levels of brutality in his criticism: "I told him [Tennessee] [that the play] was unproducible as was. […] But I think the […] play is now going to work. I am cautiously optimistic. But I am optimistic – but cautious", wrote the director in August 1952 in a letter to his wife (Kazan, 2014, p. 737-738). The process was not exactly smooth either. "I have fallen off remarkably in the esteem of coworkers when they start dictating my work to me" (Williams, 2006, p. 557), the playwright reflected in his notebooks about Kazan's, his wife's and the producers' thoughts on the play. Still, during that year, author and director corresponded with the goal of having a draft good enough to begin rehearsals in December of that year, with the premiere being in March 1953.

Notes on the process

By use of a writing procedure which could be considered collage,[11] in which one transfers entire excerpts from different sources, Tennessee drew on elements from at least three of his earlier works[12] in readaptations and/or direct transpositions. For example, the subtitle of the play *Stairs to the roof* (1941),[13] "*A prayer for the wild at heart who are kept in cages*" appears paraphrased as a line in *Camino Real*, "There are no birds here, except wild birds that are tamed and kept […] in cages[14]" (Williams, 2008a, p. 8). The speech is said in the prologue published by New Directions.[15] In this case, as in others, the excerpt has an effect of reiterating the broader content of the play: Williams (1953) himself attests that the themes of the two plays are parallel: "a prayer to wild hearts kept in cages."[16]

[11] Procedure which derives from visual arts. In writing "the playwright pieces together fragments of texts from different parts [that are added to the play]" (Pavis, 2015, p. 52).

[12] *The purification* (1942), *Lord Byron's love letter* (written before 1946) and *Stairs to the roof* (1939).

[13] *Stairs to the roof* had a small production at the Pasadena Playhouse in 1947 (Devlin, 1986).

[14] "There are no birds here except wild birds that are tamed and kept in cages."

[15] The prologue was created by Williams specifically for the New Directions published edition. The staged version was never published, but there is an important difference between them: Don Quixote's entrance in the play took place at the beginning of Season 3 and not at the opening of the play, as it is in the published version. The draft with the staged version is owned by a private collector from Texas (Parker, 1996, p. 337).

[16] In the interview with Howard Hewes (1953), available in the collection edited by Devlin (1986).

There is also the formal influence of the so-called *Stationendrama*. The 1941 play shows a series of situations on the theme of the reification of relationships in a repressive work environment, from which the protagonist wants to free himself. The *Stationendrama* structural influence can also be seen in both *Camino Real* and the one-act play that originated it. That means:

> The *Stationen* technique [dissolves] the continuum of action [that would be dramatic] in a series of scenes. Different scenes are not structured with a **causal relationship, do not engender, as in the drama, each other**. Rather, they seem to be isolated stones, lined up in the thread of the progression of the self (Szondi, 2001, p.60, emphasis added).

The pattern of utilizing and reworking excerpts, themes, characters, or even entire works as another genre was never rare in Tennessee's career (e.g., short stories became plays, short plays were expanded, characters used in more than one work, etc.). Still, it is noteworthy in this case because that appears to be an attempt to radicalize the episodic and symbolic characteristic already seen in the one-act play *Ten blocks on the Camino Real*. Williams seemed to be actively seeking to escape from any naturalistic convention. Parker (1996) documented some of the earlier drafts of both *Camino Real* and *Ten blocks...*, which had a subtitle reading: "a work for the plastic theater".

The author coined the term "plastic theatre" initially in a manifesto years earlier,[17] which stated "the plastic Theatre […] must take the place of exhaustive realistic conventions, if the theater is to resume its vitality as part of our culture." According to Lahr (2014, p. 254), for Williams the project was precisely this, "[*Camino Real*] is an extension of the free and plastic turn I took with [his previous play, *The rose tattoo*]."[18] Elia Kazan seemed to understand this venture: "[the play] is completely unrealistic - a fantasy, it is called. […] It is also absolutely new stylistically speaking, and gives you and I a problem that neither we nor anyone else has faced before", in a December 3, 1952 letter to set designer Lemuel Ayers (Kazan, 2014, p. 774). One of the issues Kazan had in mind was the transition between the remote, forbidden location seen in the play and the direct contact with the audience. There are formal contradictions at play here which structure the epic-lyrical form of the work – requiring scenic strategies which would be able to formalize them, such as using theatrical space beyond the stage.

[17] The manifesto was written to *The glass menagerie*, 1944) and "for other texts." Although Williams did not officially refer to the manifesto after it was published in the 1940s, he did mention it in letters about his plays and his creative process.

[18] "An extension of the free and plastic turn I took with Tattoo" (Lahr, 2014, p. 254).

Regarding such strategies, we must mention the process via which they were staging the play. *Camino Real* had *tryouts* in Philadelphia and New Haven, with Williams, Kazan and cast, in which the play was still open, being tested with the public, and would continue to be reworked until its finished version. Brenda Murphy (1992, p. 2-3) writes in detail about the collaborative process in the plays Williams and Kazan worked together. As could be expected by the very creative nature of the job, the process produced eventual friction between the two – a fact verified in the letters exchanged between them at the time.[19] Furthermore, in the stemma put together by Parker (1996), he demonstrates that *Camino* had several drafts altered, in dialogue with Kazan, during rehearsals and in the Philadelphia and New Haven *tryouts* before the official Broadway premiere.

This information, that the play at that time was still a work-in-process, is corroborated by the interviews in Henry Hewes' article for the *Saturday Review* (March 28, 1953), during previews. David Richard Jones (1986) also wrote about the production of *A streetcar named Desire,* and how the process between director, playwright and actors took place during rehearsals led to changes in the original text, some of which came from the dynamics tested on stage. Since tryouts, according to Hewes' article (Devlin, 1986, p. 33), there were reports that audience members seemed to be having a hard time understanding the play and general a tone of "concern with the success [of the play], [but also an] infected with the wild spirit of anarchy in the play."

This highlights the complexity of transforming a *one-act play* into a so-called *full-length* one. As Peter Szondi (2001, p. 110) points out, the one-act "shares with the drama its starting point, the situation, but not the action, in which decisions made by the *dramatis personae* continuously modify the original situation and lead to the denouement." Williams explored this genre like few others in the 20th century, having produced many one-act plays, some of which would be expanded into longer versions, as is the case with *Ten blocks on the Camino Real* which became *Camino Real.*

Analyzing the play, as we will do in the next section, we must note that, even though the play is divided in *blocks*, it is also separated in three parts by two intermissions. That structure seems to emulate the three-act division, typically seen in classical drama, which is divided into three or five acts (Pavis, 2015). This is a good example, though there are others, to illustrate what seems to be a structural contradiction in the writing process, between formal experimentations which Williams calls "plastic theater" and elements

[19] Cf.: Williams (2004); Kazan (2014).

making the play more palatable to the general public. This tension could be interpreted as a reflection of its own time: with political and historical complexities formalized in the very structure, as well as theme, of the play. A *New York Times* article (published in December 1952) reported that Williams and Kazan had agreed to receive less royalties to pay for the remainder of the production, indicating that it was becoming more expensive. In addition to Kazan's testimony, which left part of the artistic milieu against him, budgetary pressures were yet another factor which made the production's success crucial. In the country of *studio system*, even on Broadway, there is pressure from sponsors, producers, critics linked to the *establishment*[20] as well as the general paying audience in terms of cementing how an artistic work is received. Pressure which is even higher when it comes to one of the country's greatest playwrights collaborating with one of its greatest directors.

Figure 1 – "Williams to take lower royalties",
New York Times, December, 1952

WILLIAMS TO TAKE LOWER ROYALTIES

Elia Kazan Also Agrees to Cut for Directing 'Camino Real'— High Production Costs Cited

By LOUIS CALTA

Source: Calta (1952).

[20] The prestigious Tony Awards took place for the first time in 1947, when Elia Kazan coincidentally or not won two trophies for Best Direction, for *All my sons* and *Death of a salesman*, both plays by Arthur Miller. In addition, John Lahr (2014, p. 248) and the documentary *None without sin* (2003) remind us of the 1952 Oscars, when *A streetcar named Desire* was nominated for no fewer than 12 categories, including Best Picture, Best Direction and Best Screenplay. The awards were given out in March – after Kazan's first testimony to HUAC, where he **denied** naming names. Came Oscar night, the film lost, among others, the main prize and both the awards for which Kazan and Williams were up for. The establishment's message in a way it was made clear: for fear of public outcry due to rewarding someone with Communist ties and/or the institutional political pressures brought about by the ongoing witch-hunt. Less than a month later, Kazan would testify and give them names.

Analysis

We will now turn to a brief analysis of *Camino Real*'s main characteristics. The play is divided in sixteen so-called blocks, taking place in a single place: a *plaza*, typical of Hispanic countries, around which is the road called Camino Real.[21] Real and fictional historical characters appear as allegories. Among those who might be familiar are Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (from Miguel de Cervantes), Esmeralda (from Victor Hugo), Baron de Charlus (from Marcel Proust), Marguerite Gautier (from Alexandre Dumas Fils), Lord Byron and Giacomo Casanova.

Comparing selected excerpts from the two plays (one-act and full-length), it is interesting to note some strategies chosen to be "expanded." In the letters exchanged between Kazan and Williams, the former makes it clear that, for him, it is important that "[the first act] should have a sequence an audience can and will follow. And I think it should come to a climax […] and one that calls for act two" in a letter dated December 10, 1952 (Kazan, 2014, p. 786). Perhaps worth noting once more, the version analyzed for this article was the one edited by Williams for New Directions. If the abundance of characters and blocks may seem confusing at first, it is because there is in fact a sense of anarchy and freedom proposed by Williams. The typical disorder seen in dreams is one of the elements being formalized in *Camino Real*.[22]

In the prologue, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza enter to introduce the situation: the dream of Quixote, as *pageant*,[23] in a repressive country controlled by the manager of the luxury hotel Siete Mares, named Gutman.[24] Enter Prudence Duvernoy, from *The lady of the camellias*, and Giacomo Casanova, who introduce the Marguerite Gautier – whose appearance will take place only in the second part; there is then a symbolic scene, with the religious figure called *Madrecita de los perdidos* [loosely translated as Mother of the Lost

[21] This was how the Spanish Crown named the Royal Roads via which they traveled as they colonized the land. They were also important during the march to the West, during the 19th century, having been the routes via which the American colonizers marched. *El Camino Real* is a road which still exists today in California, through which catholic colonizers conducted the so-called 21 California Missions to convert Native peoples. The play's name thus carries a strong historical content linked to the colonization process.

[22] One of the play's influences is *The dream,* by August Strindberg (1901), a play that also presents a dreamlike universe in its theme and structure.

[23] About the medieval theatrical genre of *pageant.* Cf. BERTHOLD, Margot. **História Mundial do Teatro.** São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2011. p. 228-233.

[24] Tennessee Williams wrote this prologue only for version published by New Directions. It did not exist in the staged production (Parker, 1996).

Ones] and a dying man next to the Fountain who utters a word that is forbidden to be spoken: *hermano* [the word for brother in Spanish]. In block 3, Kilroy appears, a character who could be considered a mirroring of Don Quixote (the alliteration of the names marks the link between the two[25]), who is a former boxing champion and has no resources.

Kilroy is the main character we will follow throughout the course of the first part before intermission. That part consists of introducing the place, showing how inhospitable it is, and that anyone there is subjugated to political oppressions and threatened by the militia of street cleaners, an imminent danger to anyone and everyone. Kilroy is then robbed and left out in the open. In block 4, Baron de Charlus appears, Marcel Proust's gay character, who flirts with a male figure named Lobo, and is killed by the local militia of street cleaners. In block 5, Casanova explains to Kilroy about the dangers of the place. In a way, they somehow bond on how miserable they are. At the end of the first part, in block 6, Kilroy tries to escape repression by way of invading the theater space, shattering the stage-public relationship. He is then chased and ends up being forced by Gutman to wear a blinking clown nose for humiliation. Intermission.

There is a contradiction observed in this expansion process so far. *Ten blocks...,* the play which originated *Camino Real,* is an epic-lyrical one-act play. The figures in the scene are allegorized, just as in the full-length play. But for the expansion, Williams attempts to explore what could be a kinship between characters such as Casanova and Marguerite, whose love relationship is developed in the second part. Such an attempt takes form in dialogue and small events in each of the blocks. This presents a formal tension: an intersubjective relationship via dialogue cannot be deepened enough to be decisive for the progress of the play due to its very epic-lyrical structure. It is almost as if what is being said loses importance since it is not *about it*. Speeches vary between a nostalgic past and the suffocating present, from which one wants to escape. For instance, when Casanova says to Kilroy: "before the final block, we'll find some way out of here! Meanwhile, patience and courage, little brother!" (Williams, 2008, p. 45). In terms of plot being presented here, cause and effect lose their force, since before the end, in fact, there will be a way out and thus that conflict will be resolved. What would be considered the surprise element of drama (Szondi, 2001) is already presented from the beginning. In addition, Casanova somewhat demonstrates awareness of the play itself, referring to its structure: "before the final block." Among so many elements to which we are exposed, however, this

[25] Williams referred to Kilroy as "poor man's Don Quixote" in 1946 (cf. Kazan, 2014, p. 782).

information might not be retained in a first reading. In any case, the excerpt highlights just how complex the play is, which Kazan (2014, p. 774) called "a problem" that no one had ever faced before.

After intermission, the focus is directed away from Kilroy. Block 7 mainly shows the next string of relationships, between Marguerite and Casanova. A courtesan and the popular lover. They reveal, among reminiscences of a lyricized past, some of the next sequences: there is a table reserved for Lord Byron (who will appear in the next block) and there is a rumor of a plane called Fugitivo which could be a way out of there (appearing in blocks 9 and 10). Lord Byron is in fact in the following block. His scene reiterates the symbolism of freedom and poetry in the play. He crosses the archway at the back of the stage, setting off into the unknown. The plane Fugitivo leaves during block 10, which is quite action-packed. There are many lines not assigned to specific characters, illustrating the collaborative and scenic characteristic of its conception. This is representative of a play built in dialogue with actors and director. The stage direction explicitly states that the scene is "for improvisation." How to stage collective speeches like that if not by understanding collaborative process? This excerpt testifies to the relationship with the mis-en-scène during the writing process, also attested in the article by Henry Hewes (Devlin, 1986).

In block 11, Kilroy returns in disguise and tries to escape again. Before a ritual to restore Esmeralda's virginity takes place, Casanova is elected the "King of Cuckolds"; Kilroy is chosen as hero by Esmeralda and must collect the prize: namely her virginity – which is arranged by her mother, who is also her madam. There's another intermission. During block 12, the Gypsy interrogates Kilroy about his motivations, an allegory which mirrors the political climate of interrogations and persecutions in the U.S. at the time. Kilroy pays what she asks for in hopes of receiving change. Afterwards, Esmeralda and he figuratively have sex. Esmeralda then says she is offended by the way he treated her, and he is kicked out of the Gypsy's establishment. She does not give any change, leaving him again without resources and out in the open during the night. In block 14, Kilroy is desperate to get out of there and begs Gutman to be the clown with the blinking nose again in exchange for money. He denies it. Kilroy then sleeps out under the stars. Marguerite returns and warns him of the approaching street cleaners. Kilroy calls them to fight, and they kill him. In the next block, the play's most surrealist and symbolic moment,

transferred directly from the one-act *Ten blocks...*, a group of medical students operate on Kilroy post-mortem to have his heart of gold removed. At the same time, Kilroy's body sits on the lap of La Madrecita de los perdidos, who has returned, evoking the religious iconography of *Pietá*. After a few moments of simultaneous scenes, La Madrecita resurrects Kilroy, just in time for Quixote to wake up. The Spanish knight questions him if he wishes to follow along the unknown desert, just as had been announced in the prologue. The two exit through the archway in downstage and Gutman announces the end of the play: "the curtain line has been spoken. Bring it down!" (Williams, 2008, p. 114).

Due to their structure, the blocks are somewhat independent from each other, as they are literally announced with Gutman's narration. What we aim to highlight here is how the play's structure becomes formally contradictory. On the one hand, there is an arbitrary separation of scenes announced by Gutman; on the other, there are attempts at creating cause and effect through somewhat deepening of relationships between characters, dialogue and climax. Therefore, the relationship between what sets out to happen in each block and what in fact *happens* (in structural terms) in the play points to an interesting formal tension.

For example, these two excerpts uttered by Gutman, respectively in the prologue and in the second block: "I **must** go downstairs to announce the beginning of that old wanderer's dream" (Williams, 2008a, p. 10) and "we have entered **the second in a progress of sixteen blocks** on the Camino Real" (Williams, 2008a, p. 16). The highlight is ours. Gutman's organizational role accentuates three points: one, more obvious, is organizing the action per se, since it is a play within a dream, whose nature already tends to chaos. In other words, because the structure is not necessarily linked by cause and effect, that may have been a formal necessity. The second is the fact that this organization is made precisely by the one who represents economic and military power in the play. This is significant, given the historical moment of repression that the United States were going through and, also, the country's imperialist attitude internationally.

And the third one illustrates what we could say triggers the sequence of blocks. The fact that we are informed, and repeatedly reminded of, the number of blocks until the end in itself creates dramaturgical tension. That is, the sequence of blocks announced is what *must happen* in the play. If we were to use David Ball's terms again (1983)[26] regarding the

[26] Even though David Ball specifically addresses dramatic forms of writing, we quote him due to the didactic and direct way in which he isolates elements of drama, making it possible to apply to other

structure of a traditionally dramatic play, the clearest trigger to the audience would be Gutman's announcements, as narrator, of each block. And they all are within, we must reiterate, Don Quixote's dream. As wild as it is, events are still introduced and somewhat organized by the narrator. Note to Gutman's words in the prologue: "I must announce the beginning of the dream." That logic of necessity denotes the play's line of action in which the dream is inserted. What needs to happen to move the sequence of actions thus seems to be less so what happens between the characters and more so the *very structure of the play*, organized by Gutman. But the question remains, if he *must* announce whatever, whom would he be serving? Would it all be a burlesque show to the invisible Generalissimo who controls the place and with whom he communicates? Williams's writing is "oblique" (Paller, 2008, p. 157), as he himself defined it, when asked if he addresses social and political issues in his plays.[27]

In the 1948 one-act play, Quixote appears only in the last station and asks Kilroy to leave along with him towards the unknown, to which he agrees. As an allegory, his character appears symbolizing (in one sense) the spirit of freedom, without thematic motivation or concern with explanation of cause and effect. Don Quixote simply appears. In the 1953 full-length play, which was revised after the premiere (Murphy, 2014), Quixote appears in the prologue, coming from the audience, indicating a logic of action/consequence in terms of plot.[28] After all, it is about his dream being presented at the very beginning. Furthermore, Quixote states why he is there: "when I wake up from this sleep […], I will choose one among its shadows to take along with me in place of Sancho" (Williams, 2008, p. 9). This is in line with Kazan's (2014, p. 774) letter to Williams, in the sense of developing "a sequence" which the audience would be able to follow – however chaotic the attitude which still prevails in the reception. But it is curious to note that he chose to organize the sequence with a minimum of logic to the audience. In a way, that slightly nods more to the dramatic genre than Williams seemed to desire when proposing plastic theater. Still, at least some level of order in chaos seems to be necessary.

forms as sources of identification of writing procedures. Cf. Ball (1983).

[27] This means that he did not intend to write directly all the time but rather "allude" to such issues. "If *Camino Real* purported to deliver a message, I would have had to be clearer, but it doesn't, and I don't think the people who find it confusing in its present form would like it any better if it were clarified," stated the author at the time tryouts were taking place (Devlin, 1986, p. 32).

[28] Parker (1996) documents that this moment was placed in at least two other points of the play in earlier drafts.

Final block

Years later, in hindsight, both Kazan and Williams reflected on the choices made in *Camino Real*. The former said he infused the play with "too much realism" (Murphy, 1992) in the acting. The latter somewhat regretted that he did not dare more, classifying it as "striking but flawed" (Williams, 2006, p. 395) in his autobiography, and admitting that he could have made it "very, very beautiful", had he not been prevented from it and discouraged. The actor who played Kilroy, Eli Wallach, testified in favor of this hypothesis, that the play took a toll in the expansion process and lost power due to aspects that were chosen to be expanded (Murphy, 1992).

Regardless of the opinions in hindsight, what we aim to point out in this article is a latent tension seen in the play's dramaturgical fabric – one that reflects the historical moment of its production. As stated in the beginning and repeatedly during the article, this is important because it was when a big part of world geopolitics was engendered and that has consequences which affect us to this day. In that sense, there is arguably no more poignant image than Quixote and Kilroy exiting side by side at the end.

There is a will to move into the future. But not only an internal future related to fiction, which will be realized within it, but an external sense of movement produced by the effect of the play itself. "I was thinking of – going on – from here" Kilroy says at the end of the play to Quixote (Williams, 2008, p. 112). In 1970, the playwright introduced *Camino Real* as a play which "presented the dilemma of an individual caught in a fascist state and was an expression of his belief in the difficulties of romanticism in a predominantly cynical world" (Balakian, 1997, p. 72).

Fascist control is expressed in the play both in its theme, notably in the repressions and humiliations to which Kilroy is subjected, but also in its form: since the order of the sequence of seasons is dictated by the representative of the repressive state. Even though Quixote utters his last line with a poetic and idealistic tone: "the violets of the mountain have broken the rocks!," (Williams, 2008a, p. 114) it is Gutman who in fact closes the play, addressing the audience: "the curtain line was spoken. Bring it down!" (Williams, 2008, p. 114). This, in the context of American imperialism spread during the decades that followed the play, on the one hand, and its legacy of colonization, on the other, reveals even deeper layers of historical contradiction. What can be seen as formalization in the

play thus is: a violent westward expansion in the nineteenth century, a violent expansion of power in the early twentieth century, a violent global expansion in the Cold War – as we said at the beginning, months after the premiere of the play, seventy years ago in 2023, the CIA conjured a coup d'état in Iran and the U.S. was already involved in the Korean War with similar objectives (Anderson, 2015). Maintaining this hegemony is a process which lasts to this very day. With this in mind, we recall Peter Szondi (2001, p. 25) when he says that "form is precipitated content."

The fact that Quixote and Kilroy, now free, go out into the unknown at the end of the play has in fact an energizing idealistic and even utopian tone about what this freedom would be, far from repression. But it also contains a tone of the colonization process, just like their ancestors, whether Spanish or English, of "discovering a world" that was not known and that in the play is called Terra Incognita, just like in the maps of the sixteenth century. The play's very name repeated constantly evokes the historical content of the road traveled on by the colonizers. There go the characters in search of freedom. Individual freedom, also, is at the heart of American ideology, forged in the 19th century in what became known as Manifest Destiny, a term coined by John O'Sullivan, which implied the glorious destiny of the United States, divinely appointed. To do so, they had to spread their political-economic ideals across the continent, and later, the whole world. As *Ten blocks...* closes, after the departure of the other two from the scene, there is a key moment to understand this contradiction. Sancho Panza staggers out of the Hotel. It is worth noting he is Quixote's *servant*. The play ends with him obeying his master: "*Sí, Señor... Si Señor... Me voy, Señor – Me – voy...*" If Kilroy is his new partner, would he also be the Spanish knight's servant? In between the fractures of the monuments erected in the names of great victors, or conquerors, history can read against the grain. That is the essence of the true *Camino Real.*

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