

## Trying to understand Camino Real: an Adornian analysis of Tennessee Williams's play

### ABSTRACT

My essay focuses on one of Tennessee Williams's least critically analyzed play and probably his less staged one, Camino Real (1953.) The play has often been interpreted as an expressionist and/or an existentialist play. Moreover, it was mostly rejected by critics and audiences alike when he was first performed in the 1950s, mostly due to its unrealistic quality. Remarkably, some of the attributes that the critics used to describe the play are the same used to describe absurdist dramas: "anti-drama", "anti-theatre." The reason for the failed success of Camino Real lies precisely, in my opinion, in the lack of recognition of the absurdist element in it: the "organized meaninglessness" (ADORNO) that allowed Williams to represent the irrational quality of the modern human condition. Using as critical tool Theodor Adorno's essay "Trying to Understand Endgame", my aim will be to show that the play is successful in taking on the themes and techniques of absurdist theatre in the manner of Samuel Beckett. In "Trying to Understand Endgame" Adorno mentions Camino Real and identifies the motif of rubbish as central in both Beckett's Endgame and Camino Real underlying in this way a sort of continuity between the two plays. In my contribution I am going to analyze Camino Real using some of the tools Adorno applies to his study of Endgame and I will try to show the characteristics that in my opinion make Camino Real an absurdist play.

**KEYWORDS:** Tennessee Williams. Camino Real. Theodor Adorno. Samuel Beckett.

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"The misery of the participants in *Endgame* is the misery of philosophy" states Theodor Adorno in his seminal essay written on Samuel Beckett's 1957 acclaimed play (ADORNO, 1982, p. 130). It is indeed a miserable condition the one in which the four characters in *Endgame* are trapped: Hamm is confined to a chair while his servant Clov cannot sit down and the two are totally dependent on each other. Hamm's two parents, Nagg and Nell, are trapped in trash-cans after having lost their legs years before. The play is set in a bare room from which is impossible to escape, given that outside everything has been destroyed and no one survived. The four survivors in the shelter have no present but only their memories to look back on. Consequently, the action is static and nothing really happens but endless repetitions of the same actions.

Beckett's *Endgame* is a primary example of what Martin Esslin called the "theatre of the absurd", a label that he used in his 1962 book to describe the plays by a group of European playwrights whose aim was to bring audiences "face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation" (2004, p. 198), especially after the tragedy of World War II. In the same book, Esslin affirms that absurdist drama "has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (2004, p. 25). I will argue here that the same argument can be used to analyze Tennessee Williams's play *Camino Real*. As a matter of fact, at the time of its first staging in 1953, Williams's play was described by one critic as a "kind of cosmic fantasy", a "mirror of Mr. Williams's concept of life – a dark mirror, full of black and appalling images" in which the playwright "told his version of the truth about human destiny. Although it is horrifying, it is also pathetic. For it is a world surrounded with death and inhumanity, and decked with the flowers of evil." (ATKINSON, 1953.)

Indeed, despite the fundamental differences between the two playwrights – first and foremost the fact that Williams wrote in 1950s America whilst the theater of the absurd is a specifically European movement – both plays seem to present the condition of humanity in the face of "permanent catastrophe" (Adorno, 1982, p. 123). Moreover, in both *Endgame* and *Camino Real* trash-cans that contain human beings and street cleaners who dispose of corpses are the concrete images in which the "misery of philosophy" is presented. The plays show a post-war universe in which "humanity vegetates along, crawling, after events which even the survivors cannot really survive [...]" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 122). Specifically, for Adorno, the Second World War and Auschwitz meant "the crumbling of the whole edifice of knowledge predicated upon reason that had been erected throughout the past centuries" (BIRGY, 2011). In "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" he identifies the motif of rubbish as central in both Beckett's *Endgame* and *Camino Real*, underlying in this way a sort of continuity between the two plays. In my contribution I am going to analyze *Camino Real* using some of the tools Adorno applies to his study of *Endgame* and I will try to show the characteristics that in my opinion make *Camino Real* an absurdist play.

Tennessee Williams wrote the one-act *Ten Blocks on the Camino Real* in 1947. Two years later, the American theatre and film director Elia Kazan staged Williams's play during a workshop at the Actors Studio (SADDIK, 1999, p. 37n77). Inspired by the results, Williams decided to develop the material into a full-length play which he entitled *Camino Real*, and that premiered on Broadway on March 17th, 1953, directed by Elia Kazan. Unfortunately, the play went on only for sixty performances, marking a commercial failure. One of Williams's least critically

analyzed play and probably his less staged one, *Camino Real* has often been interpreted as an expressionist and/or an existentialist play. Jan Balakian is to my knowledge the first scholar who defines it as a "most overtly absurdist play" (1997, p. 78), although her essay fails to deepen its absurdist quality and focuses instead on those which, in her opinion, make it an allegory of the political situation in 1950s America. I argue here that the play is successful in taking on the themes and techniques of absurdist theatre in the manner of Samuel Beckett.

In "Trying to Understand Endgame" Adorno affirms that while in existentialist drama content is still an essential tool for interpretation, form is crucial to understand Beckett's works. In Adorno's view, Beckett refuses the possibility of a philosophical investigation of his works and instead presents philosophy as "culture-trash" (1982, p. 119). The rejection of interpretation is shared by Williams: in the foreword that he wrote to the published edition of *Camino Real* he affirms that the play's appeal lies not in its philosophical import, but in its freedom which, far from being chaos or anarchy, comes instead from carefully constructed design: "in this work I have given more attention to form and construction than I have in any work before" (1990, p. 420). The rejection of a philosophical interpretation, as well as his dismissal of the critics' desperate attempt to make sense of its innovative elements, indicate that the playwright was moving towards a drama that opposed ontology (ADORNO, 1982, p. 148) and that would be fully exemplified in the plays of the latter part of his life<sup>1</sup>. *Camino Real* can thus be as a turning point in Williams's oeuvre: from the first phase marked by the poetic realism of plays such as *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), to a later phase characterized by a large but almost ignored number of experimental plays written during the 1960s and the 1970s<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly to Beckett, in *Camino Real* Williams offers a philosophy reduced to "trash" in the way of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Like Adorno, Eliot and the modernists cast doubt on whether it still makes sense to produce art in the modern world. It seems that all is left for the modern writer is to gather the "residues of education" to which culture turned into (ADORNO, 1982, p. 119). This resembles very closely what Williams does in *Camino Real*: the huge number of characters that populate the play are those taken from the literary world of Dumas, Proust, Cervantes; others are historical characters; the remaining ones represent types within society, such as the capitalists (the Gipsy, her son, the Loan Shark), the outcasts (drunks, street people) and the tyrannical authorities (Gutman, who also acts as the narrator; his soldiers and the Street Cleaners) (BALAKIAN, 1997, p. 73). Delving into tradition to pick out characters and creating a symphony out a multitude of voices contribute to make the play a reflection of cultural and spiritual fragmentation in a post-atomic, post-industrial, godless world. Furthermore, in choosing to stage these characters, Williams connects with Eliot's interest in comparing a mythical and historical past to a squalid and lifeless present (BALAKIAN, 1997, p. 73, 89.)

The action of *Camino Real* takes place in the square of an unspecified Latin American town. Upstage, a flight of stairs leads to an archway, the only way-out of the camino, that leads to the "Terra Incognita": a "wasteland" between the walled town and the distant mountains, where "there is nothing...and there more nothing. And then [...] mountains. But the mountains are covered with snow" (*Camino Real* [from now on CR], p. 475)<sup>3</sup>. The image of the snow that "covers" linked with the one of the wasteland is once again a reference to T.S. Eliot's poetic and in particular

to *The Waste Land* and to the "forgetful snow" that comfortably numbs the consciences modern humankind. Eliot's poem revolves around the theme of emptiness and the spiritual dryness of modern life compared to a rich cultural past. In *Camino Real* the same theme is presented: the sterility of the place and its inhabitants is vividly indicated by a dry fountain in the center of the stage: the world presented is, like in *Endgame*, one "in which 'there is no more nature'" (BECKETT, *Endgame*, quoted in ADORNO, 1982, p. 122.)

Stage right is occupied by the "Sietes Mares Hotel", which hosts wealthy people; on stage left is the cheap and shabby hotel "Ritz Men Only". Accordingly, the residents of the camino are divided into two main classes: the outcasts, poor and desperate, and the rich and wealthy, equally wretched. The "harmony of despair" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 141) here, like in *Endgame*, is conveyed by not properly functioning bodies: the clients of the Sietes Mares Hotel suffer from extreme fatigue, they have "a degree or two of fever" (CR, p. 445); Casanova is mortally ill; Kilroy, the protagonist, suffers from an "enlarged heart" condition. Everybody, like the characters in Beckett's *Endgame*, exists in a realm between life and death that seems to perpetuate the agony in a universe in which "the spring of humanity has gone dry" (CR, p. 434). The Seven Seas Hotel is built over the only water source, owned by the despotic ruler Gutman: he represents both capitalism and totalitarianism, he owns the military that protects his property and suppresses all revolutionary expression, and the Street Cleaners, who dispose of corpses. The "camino real" is, in fact, a police state, ruled by a ruthless totalitarian leader and the only way out is represented by death, but death itself is not even an option as resurrection is forced upon various characters in the play and it does nothing but lengthen "the escape route of the subject's liquidation to the point where it constricts into a 'this-here'" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 124): the inescapable "camino real". At the beginning of the play the narrator, Gutman, announces: "It's morning and after morning. It's afternoon" (CR, p. 438). Thus, similarly to what happens in *Endgame*, it is not just time, but the temporal itself that is damaged: saying that it no longer exists would be comforting but Williams, like Beckett, does not allow comfort to his audience – the temporal, like life, "is and it is not" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 124).

I argue that the key to understanding *Camino Real* as a real absurdist play lies precisely in Williams's employment of the technique of reversal that is acknowledged by Adorno as being woven into Beckett's *Endgame* (1982, p. 138). The use of this technique is evident from the very title: "camino", which in Spanish means road. Yet the "camino" of the title is not a road but a "terminal point in it" (CR, p. 419), a totalitarian state from where it is impossible to escape. Moreover, realism is immediately rejected as the play stages a dream with an enormous variety of characters who mingle on stage in a series of surreal situations. The reversal technique can be noticed even before that the action starts in an element of setting:

Upstairs [the Sietes Mares Hotel] is a small balcony and behind it a large window exposing a wall on which is hung a phoenix painted on silk [...] (CR, p. 431)

The phoenix, traditionally a symbol of resurrection is contained in the palace of power that represses every form of free expression, suggests that we are confronted with the devastation of the post-world war period, when "even

resurrected culture is destroyed and even the survivors do not survive" (ADORNO, p. 122): the first block opens with the arrival of a man, "a figure in rags, skin blackened by the sun" (CR, p. 444), anonymously called "the Survivor", who desperately searches for water, in vain. Rosita, a prostitute, points him to the only water source in the Sietes Mares hotel, but Gutman has him shot by one of the military officers. The harsh truth that even the survivors cannot survive in the post-apocalyptic world of Camino Real is communicated through a concise as well as ironic military report:

GUTMAN [into the phone]

Generalissimo, the Survivor is no longer surviving. (CR, p. 444)

The first character who shows signs of a non-functioning body is Don Quixote: the play starts precisely with his arrival in the camino real, together with his faithful companion Sancho Panza, who decides to go back to La Mancha. Left alone, Quixote falls asleep and dreams the play into action:

QUIXOTE [arranging his blanket]

Yes, I'll sleep for a while, I'll sleep and dream for a while against the wall of this town [...]— And my dream will be a pageant, a masque in which old meanings will be remembered and possibly new ones discovered, and when I wake from this sleep and this disturbing pageant of a dream, I'll choose one among its shadows to take along with me in the place of Sancho ... (CR, p. 437)

Dream is one of the aspects that Martin Esslin identifies as characteristic of the theatre of the absurd: "In these plays [...], it is often unclear whether the action is meant to represent a dream world of nightmares or real happenings. Within the same scene, the action may switch from the nightmarish poetry of high emotions to pure knock-about farce or cabaret [...]" (Esslin, 2004, p. 3). The description fits perfectly Williams's play, in which tragedy, comedy, farce, and grotesque intersect in a seamless succession of scenes. Moreover, Esslin explains: "dreams do not develop logically; they develop by association. Dreams do not communicate ideas; they communicate images. [...] It is in the nature both of dreams and poetic imagery that they are ambiguous and carry a multitude of meanings at one and the same time" (2004, p. 4.)

Although linked to the symbolic language of the play, Williams seems to move on and attach a "multitude of meanings" to the same images, in a continuous flow of apparently never-ending cross-references. In doing this he shows an awareness of what Adorno calls "the ridiculous nature of pan-symbolism" (1982, p. 137). It is because of, and through this awareness that Williams manages to use this pan-symbolism to achieve the absurd in the same way as Beckett does: in Camino Real, as in Endgame, "everything and nothing is symbolic, because everything can symbolize everything" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 137). "Camino" is a road and at the same time the end of it; it is a place without exit and progression, but it also features "blocks". Moreover, the camino is real and unreal; royal (real in Spanish) and not royal. The situations that come out of Quixote's mind seem indeed "wrested from the flood of schizophrenia" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 131): farce, tragedy, comedy, grotesque elements interlace seamlessly in what looks like an outpour of hysteria. Finally, when Quixote wakes up at the end of the play, he sees the water coming

out of the fountain; immediately afterward, he chooses a new Sancho to bring with him and proceeds towards the "Terra Incognita" and a very probable death. That the escape of the camino is impossible for Quixote is indicated by the insistence on his madness, as well as by the fact that he doesn't know where he is going:

KILROY: Well, I was thinking of – going on from – here!

QUIXOTE: Good! Come with me.

KILROY [to the audience]: Crazy old bastard. [Then to the Knight:]  
Donde?

QUIXOTE: [starting from the stairs]: Quien sabe! (CR, p. 159.)

Similarly to the madman whose story is told by Hamm in *Endgame*, Don Quixote is blind to the rebirth of nature (LEEDER, 2015, p. 142) – the fountain's renewed flow of water – and the only distance he has yet to go is represented by the devastation of the wasteland beyond the wall that surrounds the town. Williams here subverts the original Don Quixote: the knight does not recover his reason, he does not want to retreat. The subversion of the main character of a story that satirizes chivalric romances leads to a parody of a parody: laughing at something that was in itself a parody produces only the lessening of laughter (RADA, 2015, p. 153). This is what happens with jokes in *Endgame*; and this is what happens with the character of Don Quixote in *Camino Real*. As Adorno affirms, in *Endgame*: "Humor itself has become foolish, ridiculous - who could still laugh at basic comic texts like Don Quixote or Gargantua – and Beckett carries out his verdict on humor" (1982, p. 134). So does Williams. Humor in *Camino Real* is obsolete and even a character like Don Quixote is "not harmless enough to be laughed at" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 134).

The figure of the clown, embodied by the character of Kilroy, also plays a big part in the portrayal of humor in *Camino Real*. A former boxing champion, Kilroy arrives in the camino after his body has failed him: he was forced to leave boxing because of a "bad heart" condition that also led him and his wife to grow apart and finally to Kilroy leaving her. Gutman recruits him as "the Patsy", forcing him to wear a clown's outfit with a "red fright wig", "the big crimson nose that lights up", and "horn-rimmed glasses" and "a pair of clown pants that have a huge footprint on the seat" (CR, p. 479). Thus, Kilroy embodies the clown as well as the servant to his master, Gutman, who makes him to light up his nose at command:

GUTMAN: Hush! The Patsy doesn't talk. He lights his nose, that's all  
(CR, p. 484)

Kilroy is the perfect candidate for being transformed into a clown, because he is already one: in his first appearance on stage he is immediately compared by Gutman to Pulcinella, the mask of the *Commedia Dell'Arte*<sup>4</sup>: Pulcinella is a clown but also a servant, who usually manages to outsmart his masters using his uncommon wits. Once again, the traditional character is reversed: not only he is not able to rebel to the despotic power represented by Gutman, but when in the end, after having been killed and having witnessed the dissection of his own body, he is finally resurrected, he chooses to go with Don Quixote in place of Sancho to the Terra Incognita: Kilroy is and he is doomed to remain a slave. Similarly to Clov

in Endgame, he "cannot even depend on freedom unto death"(Adorno, 1982, p. 145). One of Kilroy's most repeated lines indicates his childlike, innocent quality: "My heart is as big as the head of a baby". Another line points to his idealism: "I don't feature that, I have ideals." What these ideals are, it is not clear; it is tough to believe he has some, for he is a man who left his wife for apparently superficial reasons and for whom money and success were the only reason to live. As a consequence, Kilroy's attempt to free himself and to fight for his rights result in the opposite, generating the absurd condition he finds himself in. Talking about the image of the clown in Endgame, Adorno explains that "psychoanalysis explains clownish humor as a regression back to a primordial ontogenetic level, and Beckett's regressive play descends to that level" (1982, p. 134.) In his use of the figure of the Patsy and of Pulcinella connected with Kilroy, Williams is apparently pointing in the same direction. The childlike quality of Kilroy is neither a positive trait nor he leads him to reflect upon himself and his own condition. This prevents Kilroy to become a free man and doesn't allow him to reflect on the morality of his choices: he accepts to have, after payment, an intimate encounter with the Gypsy's daughter, Esmeralda, who has just had her virginity "restored" during a rite of fertility, the Fiesta.

Esmeralda is the emblem of frustrated love, she is the personification of the loss of identity in the modern world and, above all, she is trapped in a circle of repetition: she has been offered by her mother to other men as merchandise before, and she will be "restored" and sold again in the future. For her, as for Kilroy, escape is not possible. The character she is associated with, from the 1831 novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo, was linked to innocence, generosity of spirit and the supernatural; in *Camino Real*, the figure of Esmeralda is degraded: she is just a girl that watches too much television, neither spiritually nor morally mature enough to be able to oppose to her mother's manipulative power, who turns her chosen lovers in a source of money. The reification of the body, an all-pervading theme in the play, arrives at its climax here.

The impossibility of sincere love and real communication between people is introduced by the non-sense repetition of words in sentences that end up looking like tongue-twisters:

ESMERALDA: Everyone says he's sincere, but everyone isn't sincere. If everyone was sincere who says he's sincere there wouldn't be half so many insincere ones in the worlds and that there would be lots, lots, lots more really sincere ones! (CR, p. 561.)

Furthermore, the whole scene of the encounter between Kilroy and Esmeralda is marked by the impossibility of communication between the two. This is transmitted in the very clear image of the veil that covers Esmeralda's face: the "other", the person one interacts with, cannot become anything more than a stranger. Both Kilroy and Esmeralda talk endlessly and repeatedly about being sincere, but in fact, they remain distant and cynical. Moreover, when Kilroy finally lifts the veil from her face, with a gesture that alludes to the recognition of the partner's true identity, he feels immediately tired and full of regret. In staging a young couple's impossibility to talk to each other and to have a meaningful relationship, Williams points to the lack of communication and lifeless love between women and men in the modern world. As Adorno points out: "when conversing, people remain hopelessly distant from each other no more reaching

each other than the two old cripples in the trash bins do. Communication, the universal law of clichés, proclaims that there is no more communication" (1982, p. 139).

The central scene of the Fiesta encloses in itself all the other scenes in that it refers to all the themes present in the play, first and foremost the opposition fertility/sterility. After the Survivor has been killed, Gutman proclaims:

GUTMAN: I think we'd better have some public diversion right away. Put the Gypsy on! Have her announce the Fiesta!" (CR, p. 452).

The Fiesta, a "sort of seriocomic, grotesque-lyric "Rites of Fertility" with roots in various pagan cultures"(CR, p. 533), is everything but a ritual of regeneration. As Philip Kolin points out, here the popular spectacle is turned by Gutman into "a propagandized sideshow deflecting attention and anger away from the harsh reprisals against the exercise of human rights" (1999, p. 42). Thus, the Fiesta fits Walter Benjamin's definition of the "aestheticization of politics" that Fascism produced. According to Benjamin, the way fascism preserves its power is to give to the masses "not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property" (2010, p. 35). It is precisely what the Fiesta is about for Gutman and the Generalissimo, an unknown leader Gutman talks to on the phone and that is never seen on stage. The Fiesta is a chance given by Gutman to the people to express themselves, but it is also a confirmation that he, and the Generalissimo, are the ones that decide what happens and how.

While Kilroy is forced to renounce to his rights as a freeman and to play the part of the clown, Casanova is chosen by Gutman to be crowned "King of Cuckolds": once again, the literary character is presented here in a debased version. Casanova is no more the historical eccentric that refuses to join society and can observe it – and make a parody of it – from his detached point of view. The refusal to conform, and the spirit of adventure that was proper of the historical character Giacomo Casanova, has been replaced with fear:

MARGUERITE: [...] You really don't want to leave here. You think you don't want to go because you are brave as an old hawk. But the truth of the matter – the real not the royal truth – is that you are terrified of the Terra Incognita outside that wall.

JACQUES: You've hit upon the truth. I'm terrified of the unknown country inside and outside this wall or any place on earth [...] (CR, p. 400.)

The Gypsy is the tool Gutman uses to control the population. She presents herself as being able to respond to the camino inhabitants' deepest fears and anxieties:

GYSPY: Are you perplexed by something? Are you tired out and confused? Do you have a fever? Do you feel yourself to be spiritually unprepared for the age of exploding atoms? Do you distrust the newspapers? Are you suspicious of governments? Have you arrived at a point on the Camino Real where the walls converge not in the distance but right in front of your nose? Does further progress appear impossible to you? Are you afraid of anything at all? Afraid of your



heartbeat? Or the eyes of strangers! Afraid of breathing? Afraid of not breathing? Do you wish that things could be straight and simple again as they were in your childhood? Would you like to go back to Kindy Garten? (CR, p. 458.)

Balakian underlines that the one used by the Gypsy is the language of capitalism (1997, p. 89): she is the modern Cuman Sybil, Williams's Madame Sosostriis, the fortune-teller who gives card readings in place of true spirituality to the people of the camino, who are affected by a "profoundly ontological and existential malaise" (Ibid.) Obviously, she is not able to help. On the contrary, the Gypsy even manages to be a debased version of the already debased M.me Sosostriis in Eliot's Waste Land: her cards are not even tarots, but mere playing cards. Furthermore, she keeps her daughter in handcuffs like a prisoner. Once again, a relationship between a master and servant is portrayed in Camino Real: like Clov in Endgame, Esmeralda "can no longer grasp the reins and abolish domination" (Adorno, 1982, p. 145), but in her case, this impossibility occurs not because she is crippled, but because she remained a child in her mind. This is very evident in the way her mother puts her to sleep and makes her recite her evening's prayers:

GYPSY: Finish your Ovaltine and say your Now-I-Lay-Me.

[Esmeralda sips the drink and hands her the cup.] [...]

ESMERALDA [dropping to her knees] Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take (CR, p. 585.)

As was the case of clownish behavior in Kilroy, childish behavior is in Esmeralda not indicative of innocence, but a sign of a "regression to a primordial ontogenetic level"(ADORNO, p. 134): it signifies the impossibility for a reflection on the self that could imply freedom from the rule of others.

I have tried to show, through the tools provided by Adorno in his essay, that with Camino Real Williams seems to move away from the existentialist drama that presented the human condition "thinned out to a mere idea and then expressed in images" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 120) and to go towards a theatre that concentrates on form over content. Camino Real was mostly rejected by critics and audiences alike when he was first performed in the 1950s, mostly due to its unrealistic quality. Remarkably, some of the terms that the critics used to describe the play are the same used to describe absurdist drama, such as "anti-drama" and "anti-theatre."<sup>5</sup> The reason for the failed success of Camino Real lies precisely, in my opinion, in ignoring the absurdist element in it: the "organized meaninglessness" (ADORNO, 1982, p. 120) that allowed Williams to represent the irrational quality of the modern human condition.

## Tentando entender Camino Real: uma análise adorniana da peça de Tennessee Williams

### RESUMO

Este ensaio se concentra em Camino Real (1953), uma das peças menos analisadas pela crítica e provavelmente a menos encenada de Tennessee Williams. A obra tem sido frequentemente interpretada como sendo expressionista e/ou existencialista, além de ter sido rejeitada principalmente pela crítica e pelo público quando foi apresentada pela primeira vez na década de 1950, devido a seu caráter não realista. Alguns dos atributos que os críticos usaram para descrever a peça são os mesmos utilizados para descrever o teatro do absurdo, tais como “anti-drama”, “anti-teatro”. A razão do fracasso de Camino Real reside precisamente na falta de reconhecimento do elemento absurdo em sua composição: a “falta de sentido organizada” (ADORNO) que permitiu a Williams representar a qualidade irracional do ser humano moderno. Utilizando como ferramenta crítica o ensaio de Theodor Adorno “Tentando entender Fim de Partida”, meu objetivo será mostrar que a peça consegue com sucesso assumir os temas e técnicas do teatro absurdo à maneira de Samuel Beckett. Em “Tentando entender Fim de Partida”, Adorno menciona Camino Real e identifica o motivo do lixo como central tanto em Fim de Partida de Beckett quanto no Camino Real destacando assim uma espécie de continuidade entre as duas peças. Neste texto, analiso Camino Real usando algumas das ferramentas que Adorno aplica ao seu estudo de Fim de Partida e tento mostrar as características que fazem de Camino Real uma peça do teatro do absurdo.

**PALAVRAS/CHAVE:** Tennessee Williams. Camino Real. Adorno. Samuel Beckett.

## NOTAS

1 - An edition of the later plays of Tennessee Williams was published by New Directions in 2008 under the collective title of *The Travelling Companion and Other Plays*, edited by Annette Saddik, who is also the author of the most comprehensive study on the subject: *Tennessee Williams and the Theatre of Excess*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

2 - Most of these plays have been retrieved and are collected in *The Travelling Companion and Other Plays*, edited by Annette Saddik, New York, New Directions, 2008.

3 - WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *Camino Real in The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, Vol. 2, New York, New Directions, 1990, pp. 417-591. All the subsequent citations will be from this edition.

4 - An improvised kind of popular comedy in Italian theatres in the 16th–18th centuries, based on stock characters, like Pulcinella.

5 - Martin Esslin explains some of the plays of the absurd "are labeled anti-plays" (2004, p. 2.).

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