In the winter of 1948, after the successful opening of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway the previous December, Tennessee Williams embarked on the first of a series of trips to Europe that would become his customary way to avoid the nervous stress that the theatrical life in New York brought him. During the following decade, Williams would spend several months every year – usually during the summer – visiting different countries in Europe and, above all, staying in Italy for extended periods of time. Although he traveled alone on that first trip in 1948, a year later his long-term partner Frank Merlo joined him for prolonged stays in Rome and tours along the Italian coast. Despite their undeniable love and concern for one another, Williams and Merlo often underwent phases of estrangement, and both kept casual affairs and regular lovers, a habit that they continued when in Rome. Whenever the strain of their cohabitation became too unbearable, Williams impulsively decided to leave Rome in search of cooler climes, where he could work better.

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1 Concerning a later holiday, he would explain this to Jim Adams in a letter of 21 July 1956 from Barcelona: “I was terribly worn out when I left New York, I nearly always go to pieces for a while in the summer as a way of recovering from the strains of the other seasons.” *Tennessee Williams, The Selected Letters of Tennessee Williams, Volume II: 1945-1957*, eds Albert J. Devlin and Nancy M. Tischler, New York: New Directions, 2004, 619.

2 On 9 May 1949, a few months into their fifteen-year-long relationship, Williams wrote in his notebook: “I love F. - deeply, tenderly, unconditionally. I think I love with every bit of my heart [but] I’m afraid it will end badly.” *Tennessee Williams, Notebooks*, ed. Margaret Bradham Thornton, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006, 501.
One of the first such getaways took place in July 1951 and was rather ill-fated, as Williams would recall more than twenty years later: “having quarreled with Frankie, I split for Barcelona in my town-coupe Jaguar with a thermos of martinis and wrapped that elegant car around a tree when a truck swung out of a side road and my portable Olivetti flew out of the back seat and hit me right smack on the back of my head, knocking me out for I don’t know how long.”

Though only attempted – he would eventually flee to Paris – we could consider this escape as Williams’ first trip to Barcelona, a visit that would eventually become necessary every summer from 1953 to 1958, whenever he needed “the shock of something new to keep [him] from sinking into the old summer lethargy and stupefaction”.

During the better part of the 1950s, Williams paid at least one yearly visit to Spain, as his Notebooks attest. Whether he was on his way to or back from Tangier, he would briefly stopover in Madrid or drive through the South of the peninsula. Yet it was the city of Barcelona that became his refuge from the intolerable heat and routine in Rome or the tension in his relation with Merlo. In a country still impoverished by a civil war and the subsequent international isolation after World War II, Barcelona was comparatively attractive as it contained a number of things that were most appealing to Williams at the time: milder weather, cheap wine, good swimming facilities, and Spain’s most thriving – and scandalous and shameful, in the eyes of the Francoist authorities – homosexual scene.

Although Williams’ visits to Barcelona included some promotional responsibilities when he was invited to attend a few of the rare performances of his plays

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4 Williams, Notebooks, 531 and 569.
6 The 1944 issue of the report entitled La Moralidad Pública y su Evolución (Public Morality and Its Evolution) placed Barcelona at the head in respect to public cases of homosexuality, and deprecated in particular the situation on the beaches, where homosexuals were considered “a flourishing plague”. Quoted in Arturo Arnalte, Redada de violetas: La represión de los homosexuales durante el Franquismo (The Violet Raids: Homosexual Repression during the Franco Regime), Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2003, 56-59. Already in January 1933, Barcelona had hosted the first gay demonstration in Spanish history, organized by the Iberian Anarchist Association during the Second Republic; it would also be the birthplace of Spanish gay associations in the early 1970s (223 ff.).