



# A Feminist Reading of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Ladan Farah Bakhsh

Ph. D. student, University of Warsaw, Poland  
ladan.farhabakhsh@gmail.com

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**Abstract**— *The present article aims to study Williams' play from a feminist perspective, focusing on the life of its female protagonist – Maggie. It endeavors to reveal why Maggie, the cat, is virtually the most vulnerable character of the play, despite her beauty, intelligence, and resoluteness. The central questions of the research are: Why Maggie is the weakest link in the three couples of the family including herself and Brick, Mae and Gooper, and Big Mama and Big Daddy? To what extent does Maggie manage to perform the tasks assigned to her by the male-dominated capitalist society? What does she do to get over the sense of 'otherness' and rejection? Adopting a feminist critical standpoint, the researcher concentrates on the relation among Maggie and the other members of the family, her husband in particular, and tries to disclose the power structure as well as the source of power in the family. Concepts such as family background, gender, performativity, victimization, illusion, and male-chauvinism are deemed significant. The present research shows that if a woman cannot live up to the expectations and performances set by dominant males, she is considered a misfit and a liability, even though she is white, married, middle-class, and intelligent. Everyone blames Maggie for not bearing a child or for the estranged relation between her and her husband, although everyone knows (or at least suspects) that Brick is impotent and a homosexual day-dreamer. Surprisingly, Brick's homosexuality and alcoholism are attributed to Maggie's alleged frigidity and lack of womanly affection. It implies that in the eyes of the family members, and the society as a whole, Maggie fails to perform her tasks as a responsible, caring, and child-bearing wife.*

**Keywords**— *feminism, performativity, vulnerability, patriarchy, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Lanier Williams III (1911-1983), better known as Tennessee Williams, is one of the best 20<sup>th</sup> century American playwrights. According to Louise Blackwell, he is celebrated in contemporary American theatre as the writer of female leading characters (10). Along with the other two great American playwrights, namely Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller, he went a long way to establish what came to be considered as the American drama, with local color, American dialect, American folks and places. These three writers were among the first American dramatists who Americanized their works by adding local color to them. So, in their plays, for instance, one can find characters who talk with

an American accent. For example, pay attention to this line said by Mae in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: "Polly played the piano, Buster an' Sonny drums, an' then they turned out the lights an' Dixie an' Trixie puhfawmed a toe dance in fairy costume with spahklus!" (31). They also often tended to select a region in America as the setting for their works. Again, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, one can see that Williams has chosen "a plantation home in the Mississippi Delta" (13) as his play's setting. These playwrights also mainly focused on the social, cultural, and historical matters particular to America. For instance, Arthur Miller in *The Crucible* dramatizes the Salem witch trials, an event that occurred in colonial Massachusetts during 1692–93. One

can also read Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as his critique of American patriarchal society in the 1950s.

Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) is often listed as one of the three top American plays of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the other two being O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into the Night* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Williams' other plays of note include *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *Summer and Smoke* (1948), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961). A prolific writer, he also wrote two novels (*The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, 1950, and *Mosie and the World of Reason*, 1975), numerous screenplays and teleplays, short stories, one-act plays, two collections of poetry (*In the Winter of Cities*, 1956, and *Androgyne, Mon Amour*, 1977), and a non-fiction book, *Memoirs* (1975). Williams' masterpieces often include autobiographical elements; his *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, both of which were made into highly successful movies directed by Elia Kazan, overtly contain aspects of his private life, most notably homosexuality, mental instability and alcoholism. As T. Downes Henry has put it, William's characters are the hallmark of autobiographical candidness (3). Also, Williams' plays are praised for their psychological realism (Crandell 112), prominence of female protagonists (Bruhm 530), and a gloomy and dark quest for identity (Bauer-Briski 12).

As another example for the autobiographical quality of Williams' plays, the character of Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is generally believed to be based on his older sister Rose. Williams' sister suffered from a mental illness and was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia. In 1943, in Williams' absence, Rose underwent a prefrontal lobotomy. The operation was a failure, and she had to be institutionalized for the rest of her life. Williams always felt guilty and he blamed his mother, Edwina, for permitting the surgery. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams seems to be trying to immortalize his sister in the guise of Laura Wingfield. Although Laura is not schizophrenic, she is socially awkward and extremely shy. Laura is as fragile as the collection of glass animals she keeps. The character of Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is also thought to be modeled on Williams' mother, Edwina. Like Amanda, his mother was a former Southern belle. She was a domineering person, just like Amanda is in the play. Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* also seems to be the playwright's alter ego. In 1958 Williams published a one-act play called *Suddenly Last Summer*, in which he used lobotomy as a central theme.

Williams' genius as a writer lies in his remarkable ability to create iconic and unforgettable characters. He often puts his protagonists in a precarious situation or extreme emotional distress as they strive to regain a glorious past or create a bright future in order to escape their vulgar present. However, they often fail to do so and are eventually disillusioned after being emotionally, physically, or mentally degraded by callous and abusive characters. An excellent example is Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Once a pampered Southern belle, she ends up being bullied, raped, and disillusioned. The motifs of victimization and disillusionment are also present in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, where Maggie is emotionally and mentally abused by her husband and her in-laws throughout the play.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams' most performed play (Arrell 60), is set in a plantation home in Mississippi and is a three-act play which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1955 and which examines the relations among Bid Daddy's family members. Williams had already won a Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948 for his *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The present study, which uses Williams' original version of Act III (not the revised version prepared for the Broadway opening in 1955), aims to study the play from a feminist perspective, focusing on the life of its female protagonist – Maggie. It endeavors to reveal why Maggie, the cat, is virtually the most vulnerable character of the play, despite her beauty, intelligence, and resoluteness. The central questions of the research are: Why Maggie is the weakest link in the three couples of the family including herself and Brick, Mae and Gooper, and Big Mama and Big Daddy? To what extent does Maggie manage to perform the tasks assigned to her by a male-dominated capitalist society? What does she do to get over the sense of otherness and rejection? Adopting a feminist critical standpoint, the researcher concentrates on the relation among Maggie and the other members of the family, her husband in particular, and tries to disclose the power structure as well as the source of power in the family. Concepts such as social class, gender, performativity, victimization, and male-chauvinism are deemed significant. Also significant is illusion and deception (as in the play everyone is lying to him/herself and others and the family is constructed on a web of deceit – Daddy's terminal disease, Brick's illusion about his past and his future success as an athlete, and Maggie's pregnancy are only three among many examples). In the following pages, first a brief synopsis of the play, with an emphasis on Maggie's role in the family, as well as its major themes will be reviewed. In the mainstream discussion, Maggie will be constantly compared and contrasted with other female characters of the family in an

attempt to understand the reasons for her vulnerability and insecurity and her reactions to them. Her verbal, emotional, and intellectual interactions with Brick are also put under scrutiny, as will be those of Brick's with his family members. Also significant is the realization of the extent to which Maggie manages to perform (or fails to perform) the tasks given to her by a patriarchal society / family. The analytical sections of the article include: "Patriarchy and Female Victimization," "Maggie the Cat," "Maggie's Childlessness" and "Brick's Alcoholism." The conclusion section will sum up the main arguments of the article, answer the research questions and lay claim on the feminist qualities of Williams' play.

## II. DISCUSSION

Before dealing with the feminist aspects of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, I shall briefly review the synopsis of the play as well as its major themes. The play opens with Maggie and Brick's conversation in a bedroom at the Pollitt plantation house. Maggie complains to her husband about his aloofness and his older brother's noisy children. She suspects that Gooper and his wife, Mae, are plotting to inherit the family property as they know that Big Daddy has terminal disease and no written will. Brick has recently lost his friend, Skipper; he keeps drinking and he is now even more indifferent toward his wife. Big Mama, however, blames Maggie for his son's alcoholism and growing unhappiness, although everyone is certain about Brick's homosexuality. In Act Two, Big Daddy, celebrating his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, talks to Brick, referring to his homosexual relation with Skipper and taunting him for it and for his drinking. Brick lets him know that he is dying of cancer; in sheer disbelief, Big Daddy exclaims that he is surrounded by liars and hypocrites. In the third act, everyone tries to tell Big Mama that her husband will die soon; she backs Maggie and Brick, infuriating Gooper who demands the ownership of the entire family property. Big Daddy joins them in their heated conversation; in desperation, Maggie tells him that she is pregnant. Big Daddy and Big Mama are overjoyed, Gooper and Mae express contempt and skepticism, and Brick remains silent. The play ends as Maggie asks Brick to "make the lie true," confesses her love to him, and Brick repeats his father's catch-phrase "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?"

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is loosely based on another work of Williams, a short story titled "Three Players of a Summer Game." The play is Aristotelian in structure since it observes the classical unities of time, place, and action, even though in terms of tragic flaw (hamartia) and tragic hero, it is not compatible with Aristotelian standards of a tragedy. The protagonist, for instance, is not larger than

life; nor is she blinded by pride (hubris), or ambition or other fallacies, which would precipitate her downfall or invoke the sense of catharsis in the audience. Williams examines different themes in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the most important of which is illusion and deception versus reality and truth. For instance, we find out that Big Daddy, the patriarch of the family, suffers from a terminal disease and is going to die. Nevertheless, others do not tell him the truth about his impending death. They lie both to him and his wife Ida, often called Big Mama, keeping her in the dark by saying that he simply has a spastic colon and will recover soon. Big Daddy, at one point, states that "ignorance – of mortality – is a comfort" (77). He then continues: "A man don't have that comfort, he's the only living thing that conceives of death, that knows what it is. The others go without knowing, which is the way that anything living should go, go without knowing, without any knowledge of it" (77). Big Daddy is confident that he has been given a second chance in life, as he rapturously exclaims: "The sky is open! Christ, it's open again!" (78). Nonetheless, at the end of the second act, Big Daddy is tragically disillusioned when Brick tells him that he will not be alive to celebrate another birthday: "How about these birthday congratulations, these many, many happy returns of the day, when ev'rybody but you knows there won't be any!" (105). Throughout the play, Mae and Gooper pretend to love Big Daddy; Big Daddy, however hardly trusts them, as he declares: "Pretences! Ain't that mendacity?" (91). They display feigned affection towards Big Daddy to convince him that he must entrust his property and plantation with them and not to Brick and Margaret. However, it seems that everyone knows that Gooper and Mae are just trying to deceive Big Daddy. Even Big Mama, who is not exactly the brightest bulb in the chandelier, notices their scheme and confesses that "Gooper never liked Daddy" (121). The play also ends with a lie when Margaret declares that she is pregnant with Brick's child. Another central motif in the play is death and mortality. First there is Skipper's death, then Brick's suicidal impulse and finally the imminent death of Big Daddy. Also significant is people's reaction to death; as Williams has observed, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a "play which says only one affirmative thing about Man's Fate: that he has it still in his power not to squeal like a pig, but to keep a tight mouth about it" (in Parker 181).

### 2.1 Patriarchy and Female Victimization

In his famous plays, Tennessee Williams often depicts how women are marginalized and victimized in patriarchal societies. Since Williams himself, due to his sexual orientation, was also a victim of living in such a society, a society that only promotes and supports

heterosexual relationships and punishes those who deviate from its established framework, he could deeply sympathize with women. Therefore, as a male author who was ultimately writing from a male perspective, Williams exposed the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he tries to show how patriarchy disenfranchises both men and women by ascribing specific gender roles to them and expecting them to fulfill those roles and fit into the identity defined for them. We can define patriarchy (the supremacy of the father) as a social system in which men hold and exercise dominant power and are considered superior to women. In such a phallogocentric system, women are constantly abused and oppressed in both private and public life. In a patriarchal society, women have to suppress their desires and sacrifice their individuality as they are generally viewed as objects of male gratification. Although such a worldview is far from egalitarian, it still justifies itself by propagating the ideology which maintains that women are lesser beings by nature and, therefore, must always live under the supervision of men. Patriarchy consolidates the power imbalances between the sexes by constructing the concepts of femininity and masculinity and by generating and disseminating gender stereotypes. Femininity, for instance, can be defined as a set of qualities and roles traditionally associated with and expected from girls and women. In a patriarchal society, the primary role of women is to be obedient wives and devoted mothers. It follows that a girl must act femininely (or womanly) and from a very young age she is constantly reminded of her gender and is instructed how to behave accordingly. That is why Simone de Beauvoir, in her most celebrated work "The Second Sex" (1949), asserted that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (273). According to Alexander Wensby, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the roles of women are

generally that of wives and mothers as seen in Mae and Big Mama. For them being a wife who cares for husband and children is equated with femininity translated ... as fertility ... Furthermore, domesticity, understood as the care given to the practical matters of the home and as well as satisfying the needs of others, is another prominent feature of femininity in the patriarchal worldview in the play. However, the exception to the designated role of women is Maggie who is questioned for her inability to bear children and care for her husband Brick. (8)

In the same vein, Mary Eagleton explains that the role of Maggie showcases how the patriarchal world of the play is normalized while she struggles to fit into it. The estate of the Pollitt family is tied to how femininity is

constructed and to which extent Maggie conforms to it. Also significant is the fact that the family's distribution of wealth is made dependent on her producing an offspring (110-111).

## 2.2. Maggie the Cat

Margaret or Maggie, the main female character of Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, lives in a male-dominated society, but unlike Mae, she cannot live up to social and family expectations. She is the self-proclaimed 'cat' of the play as at one point in the first act, she stares into a mirror and calls herself 'Maggie the Cat,' (41) or while talking to her husband, she confesses that "I feel all the time like a cat on a hot tin roof!" (34). M. Thomas Inge explains that

Maggie can be read as the eponymous cat of the play who tries to remain in a seemingly unbearable situation as a cat on a hot tin roof or a woman who resists patriarchal constructions of femininity. Through Maggie's conflicts with members of the Pollitt family one can perceive the contours of the femininity construct which constitutes woman by the institution of marriage with the sole purpose of and responsibility for caring for her husband and bearing children. (10)

Maggie is married to a former football player, the second and favorite son of a wealthy and domineering plantation owner Big Daddy. Maggie's marriage, however, is on the rocks as her husband keeps humiliating and ignoring her. The reason for his emotional detachment is his belief that Maggie is responsible for the death of his friend Skipper and that unlike his sister-in-law or his mother she cannot perform her duties. He blames her for destroying the "one great good true thing in his life" (49), which is his friendship with Skipper. Brick believes that Maggie made Skipper commit suicide by planting the false idea in his mind that the relationship between him and Brick was not pure and asexual, that they were, as Brick puts it, "a couple of queers" (100). Maggie believes that "it was only Skipper that harbored even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure" (49). She then exclaims: "Who shot cock-robin? I with my merciful arrow" (50), thereby admitting to her role in Skipper's metaphorical conversion into a "receptacle for liquor and drug" (50) and his consequent death. Throughout the play, Maggie desperately tries to ingratiate herself with her husband, but Brick remains indifferent to her. It is obvious that at best, he can only manage to endure her presence. Maggie is well aware that the suffering is mutual; she bluntly observes: "I'm not living with you. We occupy the same cage" (30). However, Maggie is determined to save her marriage despite all the odds and the emotional and

even physical abuse she has to put up with: "But one thing I don't have is the charm of the defeated, my hat is still in the ring, and I am determined to win!—What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof?—I wish I knew.... Just staying on it, I guess, as long as she can...." (26). Here, two reasons can be mentioned for Maggie's unremitting efforts to win her husband's heart and mind: her love for Brick and her financial insecurity.

Although time and again Maggie keeps taunting and teasing Brick and his family, it seems that she genuinely loves her husband. She says to him: "You know, if I thought you would never, never, never, make love to me again—I would go downstairs to the kitchen and pick out the longest and sharpest knife I could find and stick it straight into my heart, I swear that I would!" (26). However, Maggie's love for Brick is not reciprocated as throughout the play he treats her with coldness and contempt. To make matters worse, he emotionally abuses her by advising her to "take a lover" (34), to which Maggie replies: "I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see you!" (Ibid.). Maggie's sincere but unreturned affection towards Brick echoes Big Mama's unrequited love for Big Daddy:

Big Mama: In all these years you never believed that I loved you??

Big Daddy: Huh?

Big Mama: And I did, I did so much, I did love you!—I even loved your hate and your hardness, Big Daddy! [...]

Big Daddy [to himself]: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true? (66)

In addition, there are instances of physical violence; in one occasion, Brick tries to hit Maggie with his crutch: "[Brick strikes at her with crutch, a blow that shatters the gemlike lamp on the table]" (50). The play ends with Maggie declaring her love for Brick, upon hearing which, he says: "Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?" (139), reminding us of the similarity between Brick and his father.

The other reason for Maggie's determination to save her marriage is her social class and her financial insecurity. In a patriarchal society like the one portrayed in the play, the majority of married women are financially dependent on their husbands. The implication is that men can easily gain dominance over their wives, who rely on them for financial support and who have to put up with the violence and abuse perpetuated by their husbands. Maggie is well aware of her social class and the importance of marrying someone from a family of higher social standing:

"Brick, y'know, I've been so God damn disgustingly poor all my life!—That's the truth, Brick! ... Always had to suck up to people I couldn't stand because they had money and I was poor as Job's turkey. You don't know what that's like (46). It justifies why Maggie is reluctant to leave Brick and prefers, instead, to stay on a hot tin roof. She would not lose the chance of living in luxury for the rest of her life as she knows that "You can be young without money but you can't be old without it" (46). That is why she does everything she can to secure her and Brick's share of Big Daddy's land and wealth after his death: "Born poor, raised poor, expect to die poor unless I manage to get us something out of what Big Daddy leaves when he dies of cancer!" (50). However, Maggie has to overcome two obstacles to achieve her goal: her childlessness and Brick's alcoholism. As she professes, "Mae an' Gooper are plannin' to freeze us out of Big Daddy's estate because you drink and I'm childless" (45).

### 2.3. Maggie's Childlessness

In a patriarchal society, women are degradingly viewed as mere means of reproduction. In a society dominated by male chauvinism, they are expected to accept that their most important task in life is to bear and raise children and perform their role accordingly. As a result, in such societies, being a woman becomes synonymous with being a wife and a mother. Patriarchy normalizes the mindset that being a loyal wife and a caring mother is women's most important duty. Maggie's childlessness calls her status as a typical woman and wife into question and justifies others' mistreatment. When Maggie complains to Big Mama about the rudeness of Mae and Gooper's "no-neck monsters," she retorts: "Shoot, Maggie, you just don't like children ... Well, why don't you have some and bring them up well, then, instead of all the time pickin' on Gooper's an' Mae's?" (37). Although it is Brick who refuses to sleep with Maggie, Big Mama, who is biased towards his son, puts all the blame on Maggie, insinuating that she cannot sexually satisfy Brick:

Big Mama: D'you make Brick happy in bed?

Margaret: Why don't you ask if he makes me happy in bed?

Big Mama: Because I know that—

Margaret: It works both ways! (40)

Having heard from Gooper and Mae that Brick does not sleep with Maggie, Big Daddy gives his son a fatherly piece of advice: "If you don't like Maggie, get rid of Maggie!" (71). The statement and the way in which it is uttered reveal just how precarious women's position can be in a patriarchal system. Being childless can have serious

consequences for a married woman, the least of which is being subjected to all kinds of abuse. Moreover, having sons is favored over having daughters, and women are expected to give birth to at least one male child to continue the family line. As Susan Seymour has argued, "in a society that stresses patrilineal descent, to bear children – especially sons – is critical, and girls learn from an early age that this is their responsibility" (97). That is why Big Mama chooses the word "grandson" instead of "grandchild" in the following excerpt: "Y'know what would be his fondest dream come true? If before he passed on, if Big Daddy has to pass on, you gave him a child of yours, a grandson as much like his son as his son is like Big Daddy!" (132). According to Monique Wittig,

gaining control of the production of children will mean much more than the mere control of the material means of this production: women will have to abstract themselves from the definition "woman" which is imposed upon them. In this way, the material for production in marriage is woman's body emphasized for its closeness to a natural world by being construed as serving a biological function of childbearing. This closeness becomes a claim for domesticity: care and support in the home ... fertility cannot be understood merely as a separate biological trait but becomes a socially constructed aspect of femininity in a patriarchal worldview. (104)

Unlike the childless Maggie, her sister-in-law represents the ideal image of a woman in a patriarchal society. Also referred to as Sister Woman, Mae is a proper housewife who has embraced the traditional roles expected from women and whose performativity is flawless. Despite the obvious differences between them, they both try to inherit Big Daddy's property. As Brick explains, "They're sittin' in the middle of a big piece of land, Big Daddy, twenty-eight thousand acres is a pretty big piece of land and so they're squaring off on it, each determined to knock off a bigger piece of it than the other whenever you let it go" (68). Needless to say, Mae has one advantage over Maggie; she has five children and is currently expecting the sixth. She is the kind of mother who patriarchy backs up, one who disregards her own needs for the sake of motherhood. Maggie mockingly calls her a "monster of fertility," (19) and recounts how Mae "refused twilight sleep!—when the twins were delivered! Because she feels motherhood's an experience that a woman ought to experience fully!—in order to fully appreciate the wonder and beauty of it!" (19).

Maggie's statement clearly shows how Mae performs her role as a self-sacrificing mother. However,

we can see that, as a woman, Mae is still regarded as an inferior person; for instance, Big Daddy talks about her as if he were talking about a farm animal: "Gooper's wife's a good breeder, you got to admit she's fertile" (68). Mae, to be sure, does not miss a chance to mock Maggie because of her childlessness: "Margaret: "Nawmal rid-blooded children attracted t'weapons' ought t'be taught to keep their hands off things that don't belong to them. Mae: Maggie, honey, if you had children of your own you'd know how funny that is" (31). Even one of the "no-neck monsters," as Maggie likes to call her nieces and nephews, cruelly says to her: "You're just jealous because you can't have babies!" (52). In order to sort out the problem, Maggie desperately tries to seduce Brick into sleeping with her. Posing voluptuously before him, she says: "Look, Brick! ... How high my body stays on me!—Nothing has fallen on me—not a fraction..." (42). Maggie then makes a pathetic attempt to arouse Brick's jealousy by telling him how other men lust after her:

Other men still want me ... I still turn heads on the street. Why, last week in Memphis everywhere that I went men's eyes burned holes in my clothes, at the country club and in restaurants and department stores, there wasn't a man I met or walked by that didn't just eat me up with his eyes and turn around when I passed him and look back at me. Why, at Alice's party ... the best-lookin' man in the crowd followed me upstairs and tried to force his way in the powder room with me, followed me to the door and tried to force his way in! (42)

However, her strategy fails when Brick coolly replies: "Why didn't you let him, Maggie?" (42). Knowing that only a child can secure her future, Maggie, at last, resorts to lying, announcing to others that she is pregnant. Nonetheless, she knows that this cannot be a permanent solution and that she has to "make the lie true" (138). She calculatedly capitalizes on Brick's weakness, his addiction to alcohol, to force him to go to bed with her: "Brick: But how are you going to conceive a child by a man in love with his liquor? Margaret: By locking his liquor up and making him satisfy my desire before I unlock it!" (137).

#### 2.4. Brick's Alcoholism

As mentioned earlier, another major setback in the materialization of Maggie's goals is Brick's drinking problem. Shortly after his best friend's death, Brick starts consuming large quantities of alcohol to dull his pain – in his own words, "to dodge away from life" (92). Seeking solace in the bottle, he overindulges in alcohol, patiently waiting for a "click in [his] head that makes [him] peaceful" (83). Harold Bloom believes that Brick functions

more like an object than Maggie does concerning family life and the norm of marriage. Brick is ultimately an unconvincing character to crop the play around as his conflicts are too solipsistic concerning internal ambivalence of desire which obscures the actions and intentions of other characters (3). Everyone knows that Brick is weak person who prefers to indulge in illusion or passivity. While talking to Brick, Big Daddy makes it clear that although he likes Brick more than Gooper, he cannot bring himself to leave his property to an alcoholic: "I hate Gooper and his five same monkeys and that bitch Mae! Why should I turn over twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile to not my kind?— But why in hell, on the other hand, Brick—should I subsidize a goddamn fool on the bottle?" (93).

Surprisingly, even though it is Brick who refuses to stop drinking, it is Maggie who is blamed for it. Unwilling to accept that her son is not a devoted family man, Big Mama contends that if Maggie had been a good wife, Brick would not have turned to alcohol: "Some single men stop drinkin' when they get married and others start! Brick never touched liquor before he—!" (40). As the mother-in-law and second in the chain of command, Big Mama can exert her authority over Maggie and reproach her for Brick's drinking habit; none the less, all her married life she herself is victimized and abused at the hand of Big Daddy. Like Mae, Big Mama has also internalized the norms and regulations that patriarchy propagates. She presents an image of a subjugated woman who is entirely subservient to her husband and performs her role as a wife and mother. In Williams' words, "Big Daddy is famous for his jokes at Big Mama's expense, and nobody laughs louder at these jokes than Big Mama herself, though sometimes they're pretty cruel and Big Mama has to pick up or fuss with something to cover the hurt that the loud laugh doesn't quite cover" (56). Although Big Daddy is cruel and unkind to her, asserting that "[he hasn't] been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of [her] for forty years now" (91), Big Mama is submissively devoted to him. It seems that both Maggie and Big Mama believe that "the responsibilities of a father" (133) will make Brick quit drinking, and that is why Brick's drinking is put down to Maggie's childlessness and her inability to turn Brick into a responsible and caring husband and family man. In other words, he would do better if Maggie were a better wife.

Yet another setback for Maggie is Brick's homosexuality, which is suspected by all but not explicitly stated by them. But like Brick's alcoholism, his homosexual desires are attributed to Maggie's inability to sexually please her husband and "make [him] happy in

bed." Williams has described Brick in feminine or gay terms. Dean Shackelford asserts that in the play,

Brick is clearly eroticized. His masculine appearance appeals to the gay playwright; to the audience which becomes involved in the subversive eroticization of the male body; to Skipper who is homoerotically attracted to Brick; and to Maggie ... In some production, Brick wears silk Pajamas – a clear indication of Brick's erotic appeal – after emerging from a hot shower ... Through [Maggie's] character Williams eroticizes Brick and thus centers the play on gay male subjectivity. (73)

Brick's drinking problem right after Skipper's death is ironic and it is yet another piece of evidence that testifies to his homosexuality. Brick blames both himself and Maggie for his death; that explains why his resentment toward Maggie actually grows after Skipper's suicide. At any rate, neither the society nor the family can possibly accept the fact that Brick is a homosexual; therefore, the only workable solution would be finding a liability, who is none but Maggie. This implies that Maggie's clever lie at the end of the play and her incessant insistence on having a child also target at saving her husband's name and his legitimacy for claiming the inheritance of the family, in times when homosexuality was not something to be spoken of.

### III. CONCLUSION

This research has been an attempt to conduct a feminist study on Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, with an emphasis on such notions as patriarchy, performativity and vulnerability. From what has been discussed, it can be deduced that in the battle of the sexes in the play, in a patriarchal society if a woman fails to fulfill the requirements and performances set by dominant males, she is considered a misfit and an outsider, even though she is white, married, middle-class, and intelligent. Everyone blames Maggie for not bearing a child or for the estranged relation between her and her husband, although everyone knows (or at least suspects) that Brick is impotent and a homosexual day-dreamer. Surprisingly, Brick's homosexuality and alcoholism are attributed to Maggie's alleged frigidity and lack of womanly affection. It implies that in the eyes of the family members, and on a larger scale the society, Maggie fails to perform her tasks as a responsible, caring, and child-bearing wife. In short, she is an alien in her own house since she is barren (most probably she is not) and since her husband is a sad, alcoholic loser. In order to secure the inheritance, she has

to lie about her pregnancy (which is described by Bid Daddy as she “has life”) and she has to promise Brick that she will “make the lie true,” thereby accepting her incompetence and taking all the blame upon herself. The counterpoints are Big Mama and Mae. Big Mama has given birth and raised children and has taken care of a successful businessman. Mae is a role model in the industrialized American South; she is not barren (far from it), she never complains, she is a loving wife, and she usually has no idea about anything. In short, she is an excellent performer and she happily plays her role as the traditional mother and wife. That is why she and Gooper (the similarity with the word goofy is ironic) are the best candidates for inheriting the family property.

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