

## UNIT 4

### TENNESSEE WILLIAMS & *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

#### I. BIOGRAPHICAL MAIN POINTS (1911-1983)

Thomas Lanier Williams --> diphtheria (paralyzed & weak constitution)

Very solitary child --> 10 library of classics --> 12 began to write stories

Family life unhappy (father-Southern & mother-New England) --> drama sustains this division (social/political conflict & evil/imagination)

Anxiety = own psyche & shift in social and cultural values.

18 Aware of homosexuality (repressed) --> sensual/sexual in work

Sister Rose --> major collapse (sense of guilt)

Williams's imagination (= Miller's) = social realities of the 1930s

Melodrama of early unpublished plays was (Manichaeic opposites).

Pieties (devociones) of the age --> world re-made by moral sensibility & political change with innocent environment innocence (spiritually delicate)

Radicalism foundered (political betrayals & pragmatics of war) --> remained imagination (= Paul Valéry)

Mortality in direction of absurdity (betrays grace of youth & ironizes relationships, hopes & constancies of characters)

Williams's world = spiritually and symbolically autumn (signs of decay)

Writing = escape from reality uncomfortable (refuge)

*The Glass Menagerie; Suddenly Last Summer; Sweet Bird of Youth, The Night of the Iguana, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

#### II. LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

1975 *Memoirs* --> story of a crack-up (derrumbe) --> Self-justification & self-accusation = origin of personal collapse (paranoia) --> conspiracy (directors, actors, reviewers or lovers)

Threat of insanity, disease & death

Hypersensitive to plight of writer (<--> materialism & prosaic literalness)

Neurotic intensity --> work with a luminous quality.

Apocalyptic imagination = collapse of personal sensibility on a public level

Sympathy for spiritually and materially dispossessed --> celebration of deviant, emotionally incomplete & willfully perverse

(= Faulkner) Williams created a world which was his own

South not identical to real South (fragments of myth, fiction and self-sustaining deceptions --> suspect)

Culture in precarious balance (= Chekhov)

Public world = private one (characters caught when personal dreams & myths under pressure & reality of mortality & physical decline) --> Shock in the form of a neurotic recoil (central to work)

Loneliness (*Memoirs*) = career to people his world

Characters = filling the void (pluralising himself) --> need for other people

Freedom of isolation = no freedom --> Greatest fear confinement (mental hospital & trapped in success)

Shy man forced to play a public role

Capturing evanescent & lyrical (feelings) (neither could exert authority)

Life = carefully constructed piece of theater (collapse a constant) -->

self-pity & own neuroses into lyricism & courage of characters into grace

Harold Hobson: brought to theater 'a drunk-sodden, drug-doped, self-pitying, sadistic nostalgia'

New: sexual pressure behind social surface & distension of psychological realism (process of invention no less subject than method)

Protagonists withdrawn from stage (towards darkness of pure fiction)

--> world which remains becomes instructively fragile

Naturalism only as irony -> surviving charact. to future no moral content

Striking blend of prosaic literalness & poetic yearning (pathos + lyricism) No other American playwright has created a dramatic world so distinctive, At his best = turned to own experience, reshaping it

(= O'Neill) transformed life into art <--> life became bad theater

Died 25 February 1983, hotel

Last twenty years = traumatizing moment (world slips away, dreams lose conviction, love dissolves into hard-knuckled need) (<-- death of Frank Merlo disestablished psychologically & artistically)

Powerful & original --> parody (life to simple pragmatism)

Blanche Dubois (comfort of strangers) = Williams's audience

Art = communication of pathologically shy man, characters unable to reach one another --> expression of fear of imperfect communication

Original writer: hysterical cry <--> moving aria.

### **III. THE MORALITY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**

+ Moralist - psychologist

Not Manichaeic ethic (consistent)

Desire to praise & punish simultaneously --> violence

Gentlest plays = virtue rewarded & guilty condemned

D. H. Lawrence's rationale of moral obsessions = natural instincts

(subconscious) trusted absolutely <--> sense of sin & morality

Ritual punishment --> rejection of sexuality

Motivating figure not appear (rejected homosexual)

Weakness = need to condemn & desire to pardon

Ambiguity --> works weaker & denotes confusion

### **IV. T. WILLIAMS'S *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* (1955)**

Maggie is not one of Williams's losers, but a survivor

homosexuality leads to suicide (= Streetcar)

Brick's moral & spiritual suicide <-> Big Daddy = vital & dominating  
people lie for one reason or another => 'mendacity'

denial of death => refusal to acknowledge reality of human need

Hypocrisy, greed & self-interest = governing principles of society

irony = Big Daddy (materialist) & Maggie (upward) = position (roof)

Kazan objected = Big Daddy (disappears), Brick (mutation) & Margaret (+  
sympathetic to audience) -> appealed to Williams

"We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins"

sense of space in set = deceptive -> communication is awful hard

preface = creative work closely related to personality of writer

not simply question of individual's sexual identity (submerged power)

ambiguity: homosexuality as image of suppressed truth

aware of mendacity forced on him by society (no sensibility)

sexual subversiveness of Williams's plays has social component

in country without ruling ideology -> sexuality metaphor of anarchy

source of Brick's guilt = accepts rigid categories of society

truth he drinks to deny = complicity in death of his friend

Big Daddy's cancer = image of that of his society

Big Mamma's hope = you know we just got to love each other

Brick's final response to Maggie = destructive circularity of experience

Brick's retreat into alcohol = resort to the ideal (not part of world)

price of relationship with Maggie = inheritance he does not want

resolution not only discharges tension -> Brick & Maggie in materiality

Brick's crutches & alcohol = symbol of retreat from reality of experience

Brick's collusion with Maggie's lie = triumph for Maggie (mendacity)

social concern & personal psychology (not strong & compromises)

-- potential homosexuality <-> + fear of life (sexual & emotional maturity)

irony of Maggie = fight for grace, which seems to belong to Brick by right

### **V. A. MILLER'S CRITIQUE OF *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF***

1956-57, New Dramatists' Committee

genuine work of art not completion (image of things in tentative balance)

relations (esp. between sexes) = transaction, materiality

Big Daddy = image of power, materiality, authority

problem of father == own immortality, his civilization to be carried on

no surface realism of living room, bedroom, walls, conventional light (poetic conflict, in eternal world) => beyond relationships/psychiatry

Brick refuses to participate, but cannot destroy or reform world

viewpoint of the audience (society & race)

struggle for freedom of manhood <-> servility of childhood (authority)

viewpoint of adolescent is revolutionary <-> parent deputy of injustice

quintessentially a social play = "right of society to renew itself when it is, in fact, unworthy" - Brick = Ibsenesque hero (revolutionary)

vital play = forces behind masks are identified

## QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS (UNIT 4):

- 1.- Which are the main facts of Tennessee Williams's life?
- 2.- Indicate some of Williams's recurrent ideas, obsessions, and world vision regarding his literary development.
- 3.- Name some of Williams's plays as well as their plots and main themes.
- 4.- Are Williams's plays moralistic? How does he deal with the question of guilt in his plays? Is there any similarity in the character of 'Brick' in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 'Sebastian' in *Suddenly Last Summer*, and 'Blanche' in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?
- 5.- What is the plot and main concerns of Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?
- 6.- Could you describe the main characters and their relationships Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?
- 7.- Describe Williams's treatment of the South and of sexuality in Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
- 8.- Name some literary achievements Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.
- 9.- Explain the morality of Williams's plays (Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*).
- 10.- Give your personal opinion about the play (film).

## ANSWER TO QUESTIONS (UNIT 4):

1.- Which are the main facts of Tennessee Williams's life?

At the age of five Thomas Lanier Williams caught diphtheria. It left him paralyzed in both legs and with a weak constitution. He was, as he said, 'a very solitary child'. By the age of ten he had read most of his grandfather's library of classics and began to write stories at the age of twelve. Family life was far from happy. His father came from Southern cavalier stock (drank to drown his disappointments and upbraided (reprendía) his son for what he took to be his effeminacy); his mother from a New England background (a puritan, shocked by anything to do with sex or alcohol); and these type persist in his writing representing the two poles of experience and two responses to the pressures of the private and public world. He feared but was awed by his father; he loved but pitied his mother. His drama sustains this division, sometimes, as in his earliest work, externalized as social and even political conflict, sometimes internalized as a battle within the sensibility between evil and imagination, the lure of the material and spiritual operates in his work equally at the level of symbol. While his sense of anxiety had its roots in his own psyche, he was also responding to what he saw as a fundamental shift in social and cultural values.

Reality...became violent and so remains. This much ought to be said to make it clearer that in speaking of the pressure of reality, I am thinking of life in a state of violence, not physically violent as yet for us in America, but physically violent for millions of our friends and still more millions of our enemies and spiritually violent, it may be said, for everyone else. A possible poet must be a poet capable of resisting or evading the pressure of reality of this last degree, with the knowledge that the degree of today may become a deadlier degree tomorrow.

Tennessee Williams died on 25 February 1983. For most of the last twenty years of his life, he seemed to live out in his own life that traumatizing moment which he dramatized in so many of his plays, the moments in which the central character feels the world begin to slip away, dreams to lose their conviction, love to dissolve into hard-knuckled (seria) need. The death of Frank Merlo affected him deeply. It disestablished him psychologically and artistically. And eventually what was powerful and original in his work dissolved into parody, and his life with it; where once he had written an elegy for a society in which the spiritual, the poetic and the vulnerable had deferred to simple pragmatism now the elegy was for his own lost powers.

Blanche Dubois in *Streetcar* confesses that she has always relied on the comfort of strangers. The strangers are Williams's audience invited to respond to the tortured, alienated and vulnerable figures which he places on stage. His art was the communication of a pathologically shy man; his accounts of characters unable to reach one another, or even to convey a sense of the nature and profundity of their need, an expression of his own fear that his plays themselves were an imperfect communication. The poetry implicit in his work, like the over-reliance on dramatic symbols, was his attempt at an oblique contact. At times he created a kind of spiritual doggerel(ripio) which barely escaped its origin in self-pity, but at others he produced a deeply affecting lyricism which charged his characters and their situations with a significance which he always feared to be lacking in his own life. He was as original as few writers are. His voice was his own. And if, on occasion, it was distorted into an hysterical cry, at others it genuinely aspired to a uniquely moving aria.

2.- Indicate some of Williams's recurrent ideas, obsessions, and world vision regarding his literary development.

He first became aware of his homosexuality at the age of eighteen when he went to college but he repressed it. In the late 1970s he was to suggest that it was this sexual repression, and the more subtle sexual tensions of his later life, that accounted for the degree to which his work was permeated with a concern for the sensual and the sexual. It was, anyway, not until he was in his late twenties that he was able to accept the full implications of his sexual identity. His sister Rose, who had been hospitalized twice for depression, was precipitated into a major collapse. She was at the end lobotomized and clamed(callada) for ever, without any possibility of recovery. This inspired him a sense of guilt. Tennessee Williams's imagination, like Arthur Miller's, was dominated by the social realities of the 1930s. The melodrama of his early unpublished plays was, to a degree, that of the decade. (reality as Manichaeian opposites).

He began his career with the pieties(devociones) of the age, believing that the world could be re-made by the moral sensibility, and that political change could shape an environment in which innocence could survive and the spiritually delicate be protected. But for him, as for many, radicalism foundered(se hundió) on the evidence of political betrayals and the pragmatics of war. And thus there remained only the imagination, and his position became essentially identified by Paul Valéry:

Productive of fiction, and note that fiction is our life. As we live, we are continually producing fictions...We live only by fictions, which are our projects, hopes, memories, regrets, etc..., and we are no more than a perpetual

invention... You are here, and later on you will no longer be here, and you know it.

And that is the central fact to be resisted in Williams's work -a mortality which presses in the direction of absurdity, which threatens every moment of consonance, which betrays the patterned grace of youth and which ironizes the relationships, the hopes and the constancies of his characters. Tennessee Williams's world is, spiritually and symbolically, always autumn. Things are on the turn(cambiando). The signs of decay are there to be seen. And, as for Williams himself admitted, he 'discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuge'.

3.- Name some of Williams's plays as well as their plots and main themes.

*The Glass Menagerie* (1945)(Bigby II, 40), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1957)(100), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959)(104), *The Night of the Iguana* (1961)(107-8), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.(1955)(82).

4.- Are Williams's plays moralistic? How does he deal with the question of guilt in his plays? Is there any similarity in the character of 'Brick' in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 'Sebastian' in *Suddenly Last Summer*, and 'Blanche' in *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

Tennessee Williams is more a moralist than a psychologist. In *Big Daddy (Cat)* the moral vision is somewhat blurred. His is not a Manichaeian ethic but a consistent one. From the self-lacerating desire to praise and punish simultaneously stems the violence that disfigures many Williams's plays. In his gentlest plays virtue is rewarded, while guilty is condemned.(*I Rise in Flame Cried the Phoenix*). From D. H. Lawrence he took the rationale of moral obsessions of his work. In *Streetcar*, the rejection of life (Blanche) is the greatest crime. In some of his plays, there is an elaborate, ritual punishment because of the rejection of sexuality. (*Streetcar, Summer and Smoke, Cat, and Suddenly*). Punishment of heroine in *Streetcar*, because her act of rejection. Varsouviana links crime to its retribution (*Streetcar*). Cries and noises of the jungle symbolize Blanche's dramatic state & the instrument of her destruction. Kowalski as embodiment of admired male sexuality & with the lonely homosexual dramatic suicide. The exiled homosexual is always tormented & despairing (*Streetcar* and *Cat*). Both are guilty (Blanche & Kowalski), the latter is the brutal torturer of a lonely spirit. Blanche has killed her husband by her cruelty and attempt in vain to turn away to the opposite, desire.

Motivating figure does not appear -rejected homosexual (*Cat, Street*).

Audience accepts Blanche as guilty, but Brick's guiltiness is much more ambiguous. Brick's castration (broken ankle) is not permanent (change at the end). Williams avoids asking audience to judge on homosexuality (*Cat*). Homosexuality carries no stigma (*Cat*). Big Daddy is virile, powerful, and sympathetic (*Cat*).

In *Suddenly*, homosexual as rejector, the sinner who must be punished. Catharine gives herself as an act of rescue (*Cat*). Sebastian is punished for his sins (*Suddenly*). Punishment monstrously fits the crime, for Sebastian is devoured by the band of children whom he had perverted (*Suddenly*). Sebastian's crime is the one committed by Blanche and Brick. He has turned away from his fellow creatures and, instead of offering love, has offered hate. Difficulty in accepting Sebastian's punishment because he is punished for what he is -homosexual object of sympathy and revulsion. Rejector & homosexual converge (*Suddenly*).

##### 5.- What is the plot and main concerns of Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?

(Plot) The play concerns the struggle by Margaret Pollitt (Maggie, the cat) to restore her relationship with Brick, a former football star who has turned to alcohol and become sexually insecure following the death of a male friend with whom he may have had a homosexual relationship. And beyond the renewal of the relationship Maggie wishes to make her husband into a credible heir to the estate of his dying father –Big Daddy. In this her chief rivals are Brick's brother, Gooper, and his wife Mae. Desperately sycophantic, Gooper and Mae parade their five children as pawns in their attempt to win the inheritance, in the knowledge that, though Brick is Big Daddy's favorite, the absence of any children threatens the notion of the dynasty for which he yearns. The play ends with Maggie and Brick reconciled and with their renewed sexual relationship promising and justifying the crucial inheritance.

In the preface to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Williams comments on the fact that creative work is so closely related to the personality of the writer. And this play presses closely to the center of Williams's personal sensibility. The peculiar concern at the heart of this play is not simply the question of the individual's sexual identity, but it is that which tends to charge it with a submerged power. The ambiguity of the preface reflects that of the play.

##### 6.- Could you describe the main characters and their relationships in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*?

Maggie is not one of Williams's losers. She was born poor and has learned the need to fight for what she wants. She is a survivor. Accused by Maggie of homosexuality, Skipper tries to make love to her. His failure precipitates his suicide. There are clearly echoes here of *Streetcar* in which of course, a public accusation of homosexuality also

leads to suicide, but is Brick and not Maggie who is disoriented by this. And death is a major force in the play. Besides Skipper's reported death and Brick's moral and spiritual suicide, Big Daddy, vital and dominating, is dying of cancer. The truth of Big Daddy's cancer is kept from him, while the play ends with Maggie's lie that she is pregnant, a lie which we are to believe will be translated into truth by Maggie and Brick as their relationship is restored.

Brick's present retreat into alcohol, his withdrawal from the sexual contract, which threatens to pull him into a world of causality, is merely another version of his resort to the ideal. He is simply not a part of the world, which surrounds him, a world that transforms value into price. And there is precisely a price to be put on his relationship with Maggie. It will buy him an inheritance that he does not want, and through that very utility it becomes a relationship that he cannot value.

The irony is that the two most vital figures are Big Daddy and Maggie –the one a voracious materialist, the other determinedly upwardly mobile, eager not to be displaced from her hard-won position. Big Daddy wants to live through Brick, Maggie wishes to consolidate her grip on the hot tin roof onto which she has clambered with such effort.

In Williams's world "communication is awful hard between people". And when that world seems open, as it did momentarily for Big Daddy, it is usually an illusion. Thus Big Daddy announces "*The sky is open! Christ, it's open again! It's open!*" precisely when, unbeknown to him, news of his imminent death by cancer has just been confirmed.

#### 7.- Describe Williams's treatment of the society and of sexuality in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

**SOCIETY:** Big Daddy's cancer stands as an image of that of his society. It has destroyed his kidneys and he has developed uremia, which is a "poisoning of the whole system due to the failure of the body to eliminate its poisons". Clearly this is essentially the disease from which the whole culture suffers. The only defense, against this and the primary fact of death is what Big Mamma offers in the original version of the third act: "Time goes by so fast. Nothin' can outrun it. Death commences too early –almost before you're half-acquainted with life- you meet with the other...Oh, you know we just got to love each other...". And Williams attempts to neutralize sentimentality by making love an active force, by creating, in the person of Maggie, a tough version of that love. And Maggie is strong.

Brick's final response to Maggie's declaration of love –"Wouldn't it be funny if that were true?" (an echo of his father's similar comment earlier in the play and hence suggestive of a destructive circularity of experience)- is excised.

The play is full of people who lie for one reason or another or at least refuse to acknowledge the truth. The word 'mendacity' echoes throughout. But, to Williams, it

equally characterizes the world in which they operate. The denial of death is fundamental, but so, too, is a refusal to acknowledge the reality and substance of human need. Hypocrisy, cant, greed and self-interest seem the governing principles of this society. Big Daddy hoards his possessions and, for most of the play's characters, life consists essentially of an attempt to gain possession of them. One of the ironies is the fact that Maggie is as involved in this process as anyone is. And she too is capable of lying. To Benjamin Nelson hers is "a life –lie, told in the face of death":

I meant for the audience to discover how people erect false values by not facing what is true in their natures, by having to live a lie, and if I hoped the audience would admire the heroic persistence of life and vitality, and I hoped they would feel the thwarted desire of people to reach each other through this fog, this screen of incomprehension. (Williams's in an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1957)

SEXUALITY: The homosexuality, which may or may not have colored the relationship between Brick and his friend Skipper, exists as an image of suppressed truth. On the one hand he resists a simple definition of truth which too closely defines character and motive, while on the other hand he acknowledges the need to concede a reality to personal proclivities and experiences which simple denial cannot neutralize:

The bird that I hoped to catch in the net of his play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent –fiercely charged! –interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis. Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself.

The sexual subversiveness of Williams's plays has its social component. The rich are typified, as they are in Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* or Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, as impotent, incestuous and exhausted. But, then, in a country without a ruling ideology sexuality has always been seen by writers as a key to cultural presumptions –a ruling metaphor of anarchy, subversion or placid contentment.

The ambivalence in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is considerable. "Was Brick homosexual?":

...yet his sexual nature was not innately 'normal'...But Brick's overt sexual adjustment was, and must always remain, a heterosexual one. He will go back to Maggie for sheer animal comfort, even if she did not make him dependent on her for such a creature comforts as only a devoted slave can provide.  
(Williams)

The vast territory ruled over by Big Daddy had been accumulated by two homosexuals. For Williams was "a relationship which must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon". The source of Brick's guilt, and hence the source of the pain which he seeks to control with alcohol, is that he wholly accepts the rigid and human categories of his society and is deeply worried about what he fears may be his own ambivalence. Fornication can be absorbed easily into a myth of cavalier adventure: homosexuality threatens that myth. Haunted by the specter of prejudice, he had denied that same friend when he was most in need. The truth, which he drinks to deny, is thus his complicity in the death of his friend. For when Skipper had, through the failure of his attempted adultery with Maggie, convinced himself of his own homosexuality, Brick had condemned him as implacably as the society which in his heart he despised.

8.- Name some literary achievements of Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

NEW: The social concern is plainly there but he has an equal interest in personal psychology, in the plights of those who are not strong and the compromises which they are forced to make in order to survive. In some fundamental sense it is less a potential homosexuality which is the heart of Brick's dilemma than his fear of life, his desire to resist a process which pulls him into the world of sexual and emotional maturity with its tensions, its profound ambivalences and its causal implications. This is, in a sense, the fundamental dilemma of the Williams protagonist.

The irony of Maggie is that she feels she has to fight for a grace, which seems to belong to Brick by right. Yet Maggie is like Stanley only in her energy, her ability to dominate those around her. Her real strength, and the basis of the play's optimism, lies in her recognition of qualities and values which she does not possess, in the use of her strength not just to destroy and subordinate but to support.

The present resolution not merely discharges this tension; it potentially enrolls Brick and Maggie along with the Goopers, in the materiality of which the play is so distrustful. Brick's crutches, like his alcohol, are a patent symbol of his retreat from the brittle realities of experience but, thrown away, they leave him to confront those realities merely as a result of a conversation with his father and yet another appeal from his wife.

Brick's collusion with Maggie's lie (she declares herself pregnant), and his willingness to convert the lie into reality, is a triumph for Maggie and seems a legitimate climax to the play. But it is also evidence of Brick's renewed commitment to mendacity as well as of his re-entry into the Pollitt family and the world of rapacious capitalism which it represents, and this irony is hard to sustain in the face of his apparent decision to re-embrace life.

9.- Explain the cinematic structure of Williams's plays (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*)

The ready-made plot and dialogue of successful stage plays -and their equally ready-made publicity- were too good a bet for Hollywood to miss in his years of glory; and even in the latter years of decline the practice of making 'the film of the play' has continued. A biographer of his tells us that the young Williams was a great movie addict while still at high school. Williams broke through as a writer not for the theater but for the cinema to begin with: he was a contract script writer for M-G-M in 1943. It was not a particular happy period of his career; his writing assignments turned out to be flops (fracasos). No fewer than ten of his plays have so far been adapted for the screen: *The Glass Menagerie* (1950), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *The Rose Tattoo* (1955), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1960), *The Fugitive Kind* (1960), *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1962), *The Night of the Iguana* (1964) and others.

The stylization, which rarely rises quite to the level of poetry in diction or concept, has variously caused Williams to be called an exponent of the 'Gothic', of poetic naturalism or of plain 'expressionism'. This realistic aim puts Williams's expressionism closer to a cinematic vision of reality than to the expressionism of the post-World War I period. A characteristic feature of Williams's stage settings is to leave out inessentials of architecture and overcome the division between interiors and exteriors. If the author's eye cuts through the walls of rooms and penetrates into the hearts of his characters, the stress he lays on the abiding (pertinaz, duradera) presence of nature serves as a counterpoint to the human scene. A good deal of what the words in other plays would convey of the author's point of view is hinted at instead by means of light, color and atmosphere. The atmosphere in Williams's plays do not always suggest 'eternity' or conjure up lyrical moods, but they also serve to the service of pathetic fallacy. (*Cat, Iguana*). Williams's orchestration of sound -music as well as effects- is almost as deeply indebted to the cinema as are some of his visual devices. (Noises of the jungle in *Iguana*)

Kazan presented *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), which proved both successful and controversial, and was filmed with Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman playing the principal parts. Kazan had objected in three counts:

One, he felt that Big Daddy was too vivid and important a character to disappear from the play except as an offstage cry after the second act curtain; two, he felt that the character of Brick should undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father in Act Two. Three, he felt that the character of Margaret, while he understood that I sympathized with her and liked her myself, should be, if possible, more clearly sympathetic to an audience.

Only the third suggestion appealed to Williams although he was convinced that he had already presented “a very true and moving portrait of a young woman whose frustration in love and whose practicality drove her to the literal seduction of an unwilling young man”.

But while Williams’s work is, indeed, clearly designed as a rage against a dying light it is also as elegy both for cultural presumptions and a creative imagination threatened by the material world. As he explained in a crucial essay called “Person-to-Person”, the urgent need to communicate stems from a sense of abandonment, a “lonely condition, so terrifying to think of that we usually don’t”. Indeed, he suggested that it was his personal shyness, which originally led him to the indirect communication of drama: “We’re all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins”. And that constriction becomes a dominant image in his plays. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* he called on the designer to create a sense of space in his set, “to give the actors room to move about freely. But that freedom is deceptive. For the central truth from which his characters are in flight is the knowledge that, as Big Daddy remarks, “the human animal is a beast that dies”, and “the fact that he’s dying don’t give him pity for others”.

10.- Give your personal opinion about the play (film).

In 1956-57, in a speech he prepared for the New Dramatists’ Committee, Arthur Miller commented on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Williams’s work.

It is no profound thing to say that a genuine work of art creates not completion, but a sustained image of things in tentative balance... Brick conceives of his friendship with his dead friend as an idealistic, even gallant and valorous and somehow morally elevated one... It is world in whose relations –especially between the sexes- there is always the element of the transaction, of materiality... Not only is he the head of a family, but the very image of power, of materiality, of authority. And the problem this father is given is how he can infuse his own personality into the prostrated spirit of his son, so that a hand as strong as his own will guide his fortune when he is gone –more particularly, so that his own immortality, his civilization, will be carried on...

As the play was produced, without the surface realism of living room, bedroom, walls, conventional light –an atmosphere, instead, of poetic conflict, in a world that is eternal and not merely this world, it provided more evidence that Williams’ preoccupation extends beyond the surface realities of the relationships, and beyond the psychiatric connotations of homosexuality and impotence... We are persuaded as we watch this play that the world around Brick is in fact an unworthy collection of unworthy motives and greedy actions. Brick refuses to participate in this world, but he cannot destroy it either or reform it and turns against himself... Brick, despite his resignation from the race, has shown a challenge to it which informs the whole play, a challenge which the father and the play both recognize and ignore... The father in this play, I think, must be forced to the wall in justification of his world and Brick must be forced to the wall in justification of his condemning that world to the ultimate biological degree... Above the father’s death and the son’s individual viewpoints the third must emerge, the viewpoint, in fact, of the audience, the society, and the race. It is a viewpoint that must weigh, as I have said, the question of its own right to biological survival –and one thing more, the question of the fate of the sensitive and the just in an impure world of power... The struggle for mastery –for the freedom of manhood or womanhood as opposed to the servility of childhood- is the struggle not only to overthrow authority but to reconstitute it anew. The viewpoint of the adolescent is precious because it is revolutionary and insists upon justice. But in truth the parent, powerful as he appears, is not the source of injustice but its deputy.

For Miller, unsurprisingly, it becomes quintessentially a social play. It is concerned with “the right of society to renew itself when it is, in fact, unworthy”. Brick becomes a kind of Ibsenesque hero presenting his demand of the ideal, and the father-son relationship is seen as important less for psychological reasons than because it compresses social process into a single transaction. The son is inherently revolutionary, challenging the rights of authority, but the father is only the image of authority and not the thing itself. For him, the vital play is that in which the forces behind the masks are identified.