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Bakalářská práce

**Interpersonal Relationships and Psychology
in Tennessee Williams' Plays**

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Prohlášení

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Abstract

Tennessee Williams is one of the foremost playwrights of the 20th century. The first part of the thesis focuses on the life of Tennessee Williams. Many of William's plays present autobiographical accounts of his childhood and experiences. He was able to point out the social issues and inner struggles of an individual. The second part deals with the analysis of the characters in the two selected plays *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* from the psychological point of view. This part shows the clash between desire and harsh reality, tense situations in life, the complexity of interpersonal relationships and an unconscionable struggle between truth and falsehood. Based on this analysis, it has been concluded that people encounter similar problems even in today's society. The human psyche is vulnerable and the modern life is more difficult to handle. It shows that social relations among people are not idyllic and that Tennessee Williams' plays and characters are relevant today just as they were when first written.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, interpersonal relationships, family, Rose, Edwina, fear, anxiety, illusion

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Introduction

Tennessee Williams, the name that awakes feelings of passion, compassion, uniqueness, impulsivity, anger, emptiness and sadness in me. This is what fascinates me the most in Tennessee Williams' plays. The motivation for choosing this theme was mainly the author himself, his life, plays, the realistic portrayals of the characters and furthermore, my interest in interpersonal relationships.

The characteristic feature for all Tennessee Williams' plays is the complexity of interpersonal relationships, tough choices, dealing with the aftermath of emotional abuse and healing from that. Therefore, an integral part of the theoretical part in order to understand his plays is the description of his personality and life focusing on his problematic family, relationships, health issues and fears, namely of madness, death and disease, failure and loneliness, their presence and repercussion in the life and work of Williams.

The practical part is related to psychology and focuses on the analysis of two Williams' plays *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The selection of these works is conditioned by a series of events. *The Glass Menagerie* is the most autobiographical Williams' play focusing only on a mother and daughter and him, as a son. It is fraught with images of his childhood. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* the situation is different from the previous play. The focus of the play is on a working-class family. It explores the uncharted and forbidden sphere of his life. Using psychology as support, the main goal of the analysis is to show the complicated characters, their struggles with themselves, and family relations dating back to the first half of the 20th century in comparison with the family relations in the 21st century and how much the family in which Williams grew up influenced his whole life and work.

Theoretical part

The theoretical part is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the analysis of Tennessee Williams' life from an early age. It begins by looking at his problematic family and complicated family relationships, and then it moves on to his initial creative period while studying at university. The chapter ends with his literary activity and love relationships. The second chapter focuses on Williams' mental illnesses (fears), which pervaded all spheres of his psychic life and served as a base for his plays. The end of this chapter is devoted to the lonely life and death of Williams.

1 Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) was born Thomas Lanier Williams in Columbus, Mississippi.¹ He is a well-known and one of the most successful playwrights of the 20th century. His boozy southern charm, interpersonal relationships, sexual identity and conflicts in the family, in the city, in himself, in his own body and his tumultuous childhood were the things that affected his whole life and permeated in his plays.²

Behind the persona of Tennessee Williams there also existed someone frightened, leery and different, someone called Tom.³

Williams won several major awards throughout his life. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1948) and for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). In addition, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) received New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards. His play *The Rose Tattoo* (1952) received the Tony Award for best play. He was awarded Four Drama Critic Circle Awards and The Presidential Medal of Freedom.⁴

¹ BOTTOMS, Stephen, Philip KOLIN and Michael HOOPER, *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie; A Streetcar Named Desire; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Sweet Bird of Youth*, p. 9.

² SHIACH, Don, *American Drama 1900–1990*, p. 33.

³ As cited in LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. xxii.

⁴ ARNOTT, Catherine M., *Tennessee Williams on File*, p. 7-9.

1.1 Inspiration in his problematic family

The Williamses were family of five, consisting of parents Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwina Williams and their three children Rose, Thomas and Dakin. There was a marked emotional distance between the spouses.⁵ The children showed an excessive dependence on the mother in the early years. This dependence slowly disappeared, they no longer needed the affection.⁶

To understand the current situation, it is convenient to observe some key elements of the family. Tennessee Williams was raised in a very dysfunctional family and he drew inspiration from his own family which displays in his plays. Williams' parents Cornelius Williams and Edwina Williams were incompatible parents. Edwina was not in relationships to satisfy the desire of herself or the other, she did it to satisfy her desire to be a mother and to have a complete family. Once it was achieved, she turned completely away from the man and focused all of her attention on the children.⁷

Williams' father Cornelius Williams was heavy drinker and gambler. He was happiest out on the road with other men playing poker and dallying with the ladies, he was popular among his colleagues.⁸ He was angry, violent and abusive, more toward William than his younger brother, Dakin. Cornelius was independent, but his lack of affection conditioned their relationships. "He never paid much attention to the children, anyhow; Edwina's father was more like a father to them."⁹ Later, it will be physical assault on his wife and psychological abuse of his children. He did not give love to those he missed when travelling and loved so much simply because he cannot give what he did not receive. Cornelius linked his life to a woman who could not, in any way, satisfy his emotional needs. On the contrary, he grew his hunger for love in such a way that he turned his life and marriage into a true hell.¹⁰

Williams' mother Edwina Williams was a mentally unstable, overbearing and smothering. She often behaved snobbishly to others, always conscious of her position in society and had very strict moral attitudes, especially relating to sex. "Sex was

⁵ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

a man's pleasure and woman's duty."¹¹ She was obsessed with southern living, sometimes aggressive and manipulative. Edwina depended on her husband since she lived in a time when the woman could not easily separate. She introduced Williams to the world of literature and showed him works of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. Edwina's ideas about sex conditioned her children to the extent that they could not experience it with the naturalness of a mentally healthy person. As a result, Williams did not have sex until his university years and Rose died a virgin, it had penetrated her deeper than Williams.¹² Edwina influenced Rose so much that she somatized some of the illnesses.

During the first twelve years in St. Louis, Edwina had eight operations, including a hysterectomy, while Rose suffered almost as much as her mother. Terrified Edwina would die, leaving her at the mercy of a violent father, Rose developed symptoms identical with her mother's and suffered from delusions.¹³

Williams had an older sister, Rose, whom he was very close to. She was schizophrenic and was given a prefrontal lobotomy that incapacitated her for the rest of her life. The first abrupt changes in Rose occurred in adolescence. At that time, she began to suffer delusions, she believed that they wanted to hurt and poison her, and she feared for the life of the whole family. At the beginning, she had rapid mood swings and later, she began to show signs of mental problems. All of this added even more attention to the home. She lived an almost whole life in an institution, Williams paid for her care for the rest of her life.¹⁴ Williams pointed out in *Memoirs* that his sister's illness was not only caused by the bad co-existence with their parents. It made him feel responsible for his sister's madness, "it's not very pleasant to look back on that year, and to know that Rose knew she was going mad and to know, also, that I was not too kind to my sister."¹⁵

Rose began to feel the first symptoms of mental illness that was brewing in her mind. Nervous breakdowns, fears and insecurities began, until they reached the gradual

¹¹ Ibid., p. 50.

¹² Ibid., p. 61.

¹³ As cited in HAYMAN, Ronald, *Tennessee Williams: Everyone Else Is an Audience*, p. 12.

¹⁴ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Notebooks*, p. 40-41.

¹⁵ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Memoirs*, p.

isolation that characterizes schizophrenia.¹⁶ Today, an illness like Rose's is controlled by following the recommendations of a psychiatrist and regularly taking medication.¹⁷ Sadly, Rose had no such alternative at that time.

1.2 Growing up in a dysfunctional household

Williams spent the first years of his life in Mississippi with his mother Edwina and his sister Rose. He spent his infant years in a house that belonged to church, where his grandfather was a highly respected minister. Edwina's father Walter Dakin was a minister and a leading citizen.¹⁸ Williams' father Cornelius was a travelling shoe salesman. He was usually out of town and that was suitable for the entire family. Edwina was at home and looked after Williams and his sister Rose and in the meantime, she sold subscriptions on the telephone. When Cornelius was home, he was terrorizing Edwina and the children. Williams was a needy child and he needed more attention when he contracted diphtheria which gave him problems with mobility.¹⁹ He was bedridden for a year. He was not able to walk and get out of the house.²⁰ In 1918 Williams' world was turned upside down.²¹ He moved to St. Louis with his family when his father Cornelius was promoted to the position of sales manager. They were uprooted from rural Mississippi to St. Louis. They rented a flat in a neighbourhood and, the entire family had to live all together under one roof and due to that Cornelius' misery mood got worse.

From the moment of their arrival, the relocation had a devastating effect on the children, whose gentle, ordered parochial life was at once replaced by a cruder, noisier industrial atmosphere ill-suited both to Miss Edwina's social aspirations and to her children's physical frailty.²²

There was a lot of yelling in the presence of Williams' father Cornelius. Cornelius was drunk most of the time. Cornelius liked the city and was satisfied there

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 124-127.

¹⁷ MEYER, Jonathan M. and Henry A. NASRALLAH, *Medical Illness and Schizophrenia*, p. 268.

¹⁸ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁰ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 21.

²¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 45.

²² As cited in SPOTO, Donald, *The Kindness Of Strangers: The Life Of Tennessee Williams*, p. 13.

because he saw it as a great opportunity. There were prestigious schools, art museums, parks and pubs. However, for the rest of the family, it was an unfamiliar setting and took them quite a lot of time to settle in. Williams was not happy there, he spent a lot of time in his room, reading and writing.²³

Williams started going to Eugene Field School, where he was immediately ridiculed for his southern accent. He compared it to a jail. It influenced him to the point that his writings were about being picked up, full of anger, sadness, despair and dirty St. Louis.²⁴

I can remember gangs of kids following me home yelling ‘Sissy’ – and home was not a very pleasant refuge. If I had been born to this situation I might not have resented it so deeply. But It was forced upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood.²⁵

In 1919 the third child Dakin was born and was named after Edwina’s father.²⁶ Because of that, money was tight. Dakin become Cornelius’ favourite, mainly because Williams showed more interest in writing and drew deeper into his own world full of poetry and novels, which was an escape from reality and a psychotherapy for him.²⁷

“Why did I write? Because I found life unsatisfactory.”²⁸

Cornelius could not stand the fact that Williams did not like sports, therefore, Cornelius made fun of Williams and called him names like “Miss Nancy”. For the first time, Cornelius played with the thought whether Williams is being a homosexual.²⁹

Cornelius wanted Williams to be as similar to himself as possible, Cornelius tried to exert influence on him without taking account of either his personality or his potential. All students were obliged to

²³ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 27

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁵ As cited in BARNETT, Lincoln, *The Kindness Of Strangers: The Life Of Tennessee Williams*, p. 116.

²⁶ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 28

²⁷ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 29.

²⁸ HATCH, Laurence C., *Finesse 401*, p. 12.

²⁹ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 27.

enroll for two years in the military training program, and Tom was told he should take an active part in the ROTC.³⁰

Williams spent hours with his two years older sister Rose and started getting closer with her. They were similar in personalities, inseparable and best friends. They played together, when they were older they went to movies and had fun together. The strength and pillar of his life had always been Rose.³¹ Edwina was not satisfied and was looking for a better place for her children, so the family moved away. Williams had a chance to start over, he attended a new school and started to be involved in school activities. This did not last long, because the family moved again into a flat in the suburb of the city.³²

Williams started attending a new high school where he did not fit in and did not have any friends. He was an ordinary sullen teenager with his own sense of humour and vivid ideas. In University City High School, he amazed everyone by his creativity.³³ First, he won five dollars in a magazine essay contest with the prompt “*Can a Good Wife Be a Good Sport?*”, then *Weird Tales* paid him 35 dollars for a story set in ancient Egypt. Williams felt that he might be talented, therefore, he entered a drama contest. When he won fourth place, it crushed him.³⁴

Williams had remained close with his grandparents, they were more supportive than Williams’ father.³⁵ When Williams was visiting Europe, he wrote about his memories and experiences in France and Italy. When he returned from the trip back home, he started writing articles for the school newspapers. His position quite changed and he blossomed out.³⁶

1.3 University years

By his literary accomplishments, Williams decided to try his luck at the University of Missouri. His father Cornelius was not proud and felt his son was a disgrace to the family, but for Williams the time spent there filled him with excitement. He exactly

³⁰ As cited in HAYMAN, Ronald, *Tennessee Williams: Everyone Else Is an Audience*, p. 24.

³¹ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 19.

³² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 74.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁴ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 31.

³⁵ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 37.

³⁶ WILLIAMS, Dakin, *Tennessee Williams: An Intimate Biography*, p. 25.

knew where his steps were leading him.³⁷ Williams then went to Columbia to escape from all of the problems. To live the life he has always dreamed of, away from everything. He was still known as an eccentric person, but now, he had friends and attended parties.³⁸

With a degree from university, he planned to follow in the footsteps of Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway and became a journalist. Unfortunately for Williams, just a year from graduation he failed the required ROTC class and his father Cornelius would not let him go back. Cornelius got Williams a job at the International Shoe Company. Williams stacked boxes in the warehouse, not developing his potential. Those were the most unhappy and unstable years. After all the happy years, he was again dealing with his problematic family and his illusions flew off. It began to have negative effect on his mental health.³⁹ Edwina recalled:

Every evening when he came home from the shoe company, Tom would go to his room with black coffee and cigarettes and I could hear the typewriter clicking away at night in the silent house. Some mornings when I walked in to wake him for work, I would find him sprawled fully dressed across the bed, too tired to remove his clothes as he fell off to sleep at heaven knows what hour.⁴⁰

Because of the relationship with his father, his sister Rose's deterioration of health⁴¹ and the monotony of the job, he began to see the symptoms of anxiety, which was following the rest of his life, he lived in fear that this was one of first sign of mental illness like his sister's. Because of the concerns about his health, he quit his job at the International Shoe Company and finally continued to live his own life.⁴²

After three years in the work Williams entered Washington University. At the age of 24, he was one of the oldest students and finally started to be recognized as a potential writer.⁴³ He was influenced by the writers and artists in his circle of friends

³⁷ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 100.

³⁸ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 37.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Notebooks*, p. xi.

⁴¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 62.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

and as a result, he began to think about writing longer and meaningful plays. These years were for Williams the most important in his young life.⁴⁴

Mummers Theatre Group were a sort of the avant-garde theatre group. It was organized by Willard Holland. Williams found a mentor in him. The reason why he felt welcomed in the Mummers Theatre was because it attracted lots of individuals like Williams. Williams had to write shorts plays and later the Mummer's were staging his play *Candles to the Sun* (1937). This was the time Williams started to think of himself as a dramatist.⁴⁵

After all, it seemed that Williams is not going to get a degree. He had to write a one-act play for his final exams. Everyone assumed he would write about what influences him most – his family, instead of that, Williams wrote a play *Me, Vashya!* (1937). To aggravate the situation, he failed classes, therefore, he could not finish his degree. In 1937 he went to university number three – University of Iowa. This time, he finished his degree.⁴⁶

This was the time Williams started to feel that Thomas Lanier Williams was not the right name. “He regarded Thomas Lanier Williams as more suited to ‘a writer who turns out sonnet sequences to Spring’, while Tennessee recalled the Williams family experience fighting Indians.”⁴⁷ From now on he was Tennessee Williams.

1.4 Moving away from home

It was the right time to move away from home. Williams decided to move to New Orleans. In 1938, Williams arrived to start a new chapter of his life. Williams discovered his sexual orientation and realized that he favoured the company of men. He was openly about being gay at a time when it might put him in problems.⁴⁸

Williams still did not have enough money and when everything seemed hopeless, he won the first prize in a literary contest and got 100 dollars. This caught the attention of a literary agent Audrey Wood. She persuaded Williams to go to

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁵ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁷ BIGSBY, Christopher William Edgar, *Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume 2, Williams, Miller, Albee*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 52.

New York City. When Williams arrived, he was accompanied by other writers, some of them were also homosexual.⁴⁹

As in New Orleans, even in New York City Williams was trying to survive with a small amount of money. Williams wanted to change it. In the summer of 1943, he headed to Hollywood and got a job as a scriptwriter. He made a lot of money and at this point, he was enjoying life even more.⁵⁰

One of his works the *Gentleman Caller* was based on his mother Edwina and sister Rose. The play was rejected in Hollywood and when Williams returned to New York City, he revised the title of the play to *The Glass Menagerie*.⁵¹

In 1943 Williams cut ties with his family when his sister Rose underwent a lobotomy on the recommendation of doctors. The decision was difficult and even more so if it falls to one person. Williams was far away, and Dakin was not old enough to assess what was happening with Rose. Edwina later admitted that “the lobotomy for Rose was a grave mistake. We all believed at the time that this operation might completely cure Rose.”⁵²

Two years later, Williams returned to the flat in New Orleans. He worked on a play about another southern belle and named it *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951).⁵³

1.5 His love life and own issues

Most of the time, Williams was feeling alone and abandoned. One thing, that could free him from that feeling, was a healthy, loving, and supportive relationship. He continually sought sexual satisfaction in his relationships. His first and last sexual experience with woman was with a girl named Bette Reitz.⁵⁴

One of his more stable, although brief, relationship is the one Williams had with a Canadian dancer Kip Kiernan in 1940 while he was spending time in Provincetown. Pancho Rodriguez y Gonzales was his second stable partner.⁵⁵ In one of his escapades Williams met with a gentleman by the name Frank Merlo, a former sailor with

⁴⁹ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ HEINTZELMAN, Greta and Alycia SMITH-HOWARD, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams*, p. 9.

⁵¹ LLOYD, James B., *Lives of Mississippi Authors, 1817-1967*, p. 476.

⁵² LEAVITT, Richard F. and Kenneth HOLDITCH, *The World of Tennessee Williams*, p. 85-86.

⁵³ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 92.

⁵⁴ TRACY, Kathleen, *Poets and Playwrights: Tennessee Williams*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ HOOPER, Michael S. D., *Sexual Politics in the Work of Tennessee Williams: Desire Over Protest*, p. 114.

a charismatic personality, who at that time lived with another man. Much later, Williams and Merlo fall in love, moved in together and they had a long-term relationship. During this time, Williams was productive and successful. Merlo truly loved him.⁵⁶

Frank was a warm, decent man with a strong native intelligence and a sense of humor. Those of us who cared about Tennessee realized that Frank wanted to care for him and provide some order in his chaotic life... And with great love, this is what Frank did.⁵⁷

In the 1950s Williams and Merlo were spending their time in Key West, where they had a house. In Key West, Williams became a victim of anti-gay violence. Five teenagers beat Williams, who was not seriously injured. This was preceded by a newspaper advertisement against homosexuality, which resulted in several assaults.⁵⁸

Williams and Merlo started to argue more and more. They broke up in 1962. Merlo had lung cancer and died a year later, in 1963. The death was the beginning of the end of Williams' creative period. Williams suffered from depression. Many of Williams relatives were drinkers and he was slowly started to follow the family tradition. He found relief in alcohol and medications.⁵⁹

In the end, Williams remained close to his lobotomized sister Rose. To strengthen their relationship, Williams brought her to his plays. Later, due to alcohol and drugs, he became very difficult to talk to and to work with.⁶⁰

To conclude, this chapter provides access to the aspects of Williams' personality. Half the personality of Williams was made by his parents' influence, mainly with his father. Also, mentioned important life circumstances affected him for the rest of his life.

⁵⁶ *Leading Men* Reimagines Love Affair between Tennessee Williams and Frank Merlo, *Bu.edu*.

⁵⁷ As cited in SPOTO, Donald, *The Kindness Of Strangers: The Life Of Tennessee Williams*, p. 153.

⁵⁸ Art in Ad Places, *Thepansyproject.com*.

⁵⁹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Notebooks*, p. 731.

⁶⁰ MAGILL, Frank N., *The 20th Century O-Z: Dictionary of World Biography (Vol 9)*.

2 Tennessee Williams' fears

*"The fear is so much worse than the thing feared."*⁶¹

Fear is as an element that encompasses the entirety of Tennessee Williams' literary production. Williams lived threatened by fears that decimated his physical and mental health, conditioned his way of relating to others and prevented him from enjoying life. Those fears crossed the barrier of the personal and inevitably permeated his work.⁶²

2.1 Fear of madness

Williams lived his entire life obsessed with the fear of going insane, a fact that is readily apparent throughout his work. His world is riddled with beings doomed to self-destruction by insanity, nervous breakdown, intensified by the feeling of worthlessness and despair, as her sister, "not merely because he was obsessed with her madness, but because her madness strongly suggested that his lurked around the corner, and that somehow he must evade it, outrun it, keep it from conquering him."⁶³

Edwina's family had a history of mental problems. She herself had a mental health condition of which there was information until her old age. Edwina was a psychotic, however, as in many cases, her life was continuing with relative normality.⁶⁴

2.2 Fear of death and disease

Williams was a hypochondriac, he was terribly afraid of disease and death. His diary, letters and other writings make constant references to his excessive concern about his state of health. At many times he felt like a victim of cancer or confused anxiety attacks with heart problems.⁶⁵

⁶¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 125.

⁶² O'CONNOR, Jacqueline, *Law and Sexuality in Tennessee Williams's America*, p. 74.

⁶³ O'CONNOR, Jacqueline, *Dramatizing Dementia: Madness in the Plays of Tennessee Williams*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Williams Choked on a Bottle Cap, *NYtimes.com*.

Williams suffered at a very young age from diphtheria. “I remember developing my first true neurosis at the age of ten. I was terrified to go to sleep at night, because sleep seemed to me so similar to death.”⁶⁶

The worst thing was that Williams had to learn to walk again. Although he physically recovered, the disease left him with other kinds of consequences. “Williams believes that the attack of diphtheria in childhood permanently injured his heart.”⁶⁷ He became a shy individual with troubles making new friends.

The fear of getting sick accompanied him throughout his life and, as with madness, is very present in his work. For example, cancer is going to be the disease that undermines the lives of his characters in plays *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *Orpheus Descending* (1957).⁶⁸

2.3 Fear of failure

Fear of failure is quintessential for every writer, it can be said that this is considered to be normal. The problem becomes more acute when, as with Williams, the writing becomes an obsession, a way of feeling alive and a livelihood.⁶⁹

Among all this fame Williams got and the happy times, there was a downside. Most of his late plays were not successful and highly criticized but he kept writing with the thought that this play will be the one, the classic. Williams felt the weight of everyone’s expectations. It was the only thing that seemed to really matter to him.⁷⁰

2.4 Fear of loneliness

Along with the fears of madness, disease and death, the fear of loneliness can be found in many of his plays. Williams’ fear of loneliness manifests itself in various ways, such as incessantly pursuing the object of his desire or withdrawing from all of those who love him. Williams was plunged into a deep feeling of emptiness.⁷¹

However, there were some people who managed to stay close to him at the cost of accepting his many slights. Among his longest friendships would be the writer

⁶⁶ WILLIAMS, Tennessee and Albert J. DEVLIN, ed., *Conversations with Tennessee Williams*, p. 113.

⁶⁷ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ SERAFIN, Steven and Alfred BENDIXEN, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, p. 1240.

⁶⁹ Common Writer Fears, *Thewritepractice.com*.

⁷⁰ BLOOM, Harold, *Modern Critical Views: Tennessee Williams*, p. 136.

⁷¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 360-365.

Carson McCullers and Donald Windham. Williams had a long and fruitful friendship with Elia Kazan, who established in 1947 New York Actor's Studio together with Robert Lewis and Cheryl Crawford.⁷²

Williams' relationship with Elia Kazan was purely professional, based on mutual understanding, respect, and admiration.⁷³ Williams never felt that his father loved him. Many years of being nobody to his father, Williams was continually checking that others feel love for him, while at the same time insisting the feelings of others cannot be trusted. In reality, it was only an illusion.⁷⁴

I know that I have sometimes presumed too much upon corresponding sympathies and interest in those to whom I talk boldly, and this led to rejections that were painful and costly enough to inspire more prudence.⁷⁵

After Merlo's death, he fell into a deep depression, although he did not admit that it was entirely due to that death, so he looked for other reasons. "I was broken as much by repeated failures in the theatre as by Frank's death. Everything went wrong. My life – private and professional – and ultimately my mind broke."⁷⁶

The depth of despair with which he lived his final months was unbelievable. In early 1983 Williams seemed to give up, he had absolutely no energy, nothing left to offer.⁷⁷

At the end of his days he was alone, lived in hotels most of the time. He died with no one by his side, in a cold room. He died from allegedly choking on a bottle cap when putting eye drops.⁷⁸ To protect his reputation, there is the rumour that he died of a drug or alcohol overdose. Tennessee Williams wished to be buried at sea, but his brother Dakin decided that his final resting place would be at Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis.⁷⁹ Ironically, loneliness was his last companion.

⁷² UNWIN, Stephen and Carole WODDIS, *A Pocket Guide to 20th Century Drama*, p. 140.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷⁴ DILEO, John, *Tennessee Williams and Company: His Essential Screen Actors*, p. 160.

⁷⁵ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, p. 120.

⁷⁶ HAYMAN, Ronald, *Tennessee Williams: Everyone Else Is an Audience*, p. 173.

⁷⁷ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Sto let amerického dramatu, *Vltava.rozhlas.cz*.

In conclusion, knowledge of his life and personality has given us an opportunity to demonstrate that fear was closely linked to him, to such an extent that it completely infected his life and literary production as presented in the practical part. Consequently, violence, loneliness, sexuality, pain and despair are recurring themes in Williams' literary work. Williams' fear of death forced him to live in a state of continuous anxiety and as well as excitement, while the fear of loneliness was a reflection of the abandonment suffered in childhood, the absence of a loving father.

Practical part

The practical part focuses on Tennessee Williams' two plays – *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the plays, the reader gets a fairly precise idea of the characters and the situations in which they find themselves.

Of all William's plays, *The Glass Menagerie* was chosen because of its mysterious title. The plot of the book and the lives of characters attracted my interest from the very beginning. *A Streetcar Named Desire* was chosen based on the film adaptation from the year 1951 and because of its popularity.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams pictured his youthful years, his family and problematic relationships, his fears and struggles as mentioned in the theoretical part focusing on Williams' life, while in *A Streetcar Named Desire* Williams courageously broached the issue of society as a whole, as well as the issue of sexuality and violence within relationships. The analysis tries to find answers to the following questions:

- To what extent have Williams' family influenced his work?
- What are the characters' inner conflicts and struggles?
- How have interpersonal relationships changed since the plays' premieres?
- How are people dealing with similar problems today?

The Glass Menagerie and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are tragedies of human characters who have been driven into different hopeless living conditions by different events and decisions. Interpersonal relationships are shaped by conflicts and oppositions.

In the practical part, I use psychological and mental health books as sources of information to provide a psychological formulation of the characters, to know their nature and to deepen on it and lastly, to support my thoughts.

“I have found it easier to identify with the characters who verge upon hysteria, who were frightened of life, who were desperate to reach out to another person.

But these seemingly fragile people are the strong people really.”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, p. 383.

3 The Glass Menagerie

The Glass Menagerie (1944) was created from several Tennessee Williams' works: *Portrait of a Girl in Glass*, *Stairs to the Roof*, *The Gentleman Caller* and *The Lon Goodbye*. Williams experimented with the characters, played with different settings and circumstances.⁸¹

The play focuses on three completely diverse characters – mother Amanda and her children Laura and Tom. Through the analysis of the individual characters we get to understand the relationships between them and to look at the roots of their personal problems and struggles.

3.1 Laura

The character Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* is a real portrait of Williams' sister Rose because it had reflected her purity and sensitivity. From the personality of the young woman who was before the lobotomy (see Chapter 1.1), Rose was a cheerful, outgoing and very imaginative. Williams and Rose suffered from childhood diseases. Williams was unable to walk because of diphtheria, and when he was able to do it again, he was barely able to support himself because of weak legs (see Chapter 1.2). He felt different from the others. It is very likely that this experience made him realize the discomfort that any type of disability produces in a person.⁸²

Because of the absence of the father Cornelius, Williams was in real life surrounded only by his mother Edwina and his only friend was his sister Rose, living in St. Louis, the city where the family moved when Williams was a child (see Chapter 1.2). This isolation, however, had a serious drawback, it caused a feeling of loneliness.

The Wingfield family live in St. Louis. Mr. Wingfield, the father “who fell in love with long distances”⁸³, was present in their life. He was permanently accompanying them because a photograph of him remains in the living room, where the family spends most of the time. The living room is also Laura's room.

⁸¹ BLOOM, Harold, *Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie*, p. 43-55.

⁸² HENDERSON, George and Willie V. Bryan, *Psychosocial Aspects of Disability*, p. 34.

⁸³ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 5

The kind of fear that dominates Laura's life is a phobia. Laura's fear fits perfectly in the description of phobia. "It is an intense fear of a specific object, situation, or activity."⁸⁴

In my opinion, the type of phobia Laura suffers from is a social phobia. According to the Phobias, social phobia "is a powerful fear of being embarrassed or humiliated in front of other people who do not belong to the family."⁸⁵

The origin of the phobia has various causes: lonely adolescence, a consequence of a negative experience with a situation from the past.⁸⁶ Laura's phobia may originate from her own family, which is evident from the conversation between Tom, Laura's brother, and Amanda, Laura's mother.

TOM: Laura is very different from other girls.

AMANDA: I think the difference is at her advantage.

TOM: Not quite all – in the eyes of others – strangers – she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.

AMANDA: Don't say peculiar.

TOM: Face the facts. She is.⁸⁷

Amanda's attitude towards Laura becomes very important. Amanda was once young, attractive, and socially accepted. Her expectations of Laura are enormous. Amanda is putting more emphasis on Laura's appearance than on her personality, which causes Laura to develop a negative self-image. This poor vision of herself leads her to see herself outside the real world.

Laura has a physical defect that strongly changes the perception of her appearance and the condition of her life. Her limp makes her a shy and tormented girl, which is identifiable in her conversation with "the most realistic character"⁸⁸ Jim O'Connor who she was in love at school. He sees Laura's problem as surmountable and he has more understanding for her.

⁸⁴ HOVANEK, Erin M. and Elaine S. CHONG, *Phobias*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ CRASKE, Michelle G., *Origins of Phobias and Anxiety Disorders: Why More Women than Men?*, p. 132.

⁸⁷ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 47-48.

⁸⁸ THOMPSON, Judith J., *Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol*, p. 20.

LAURA: Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg – it clumped so loud!

JIM: I never heard any clumping.

LAURA [*wincing at the recollection*]: To me it sounded like – thunder!

JIM: Well, well, well, I never even noticed.⁸⁹

What for Jim and other classmates was hardly appreciable, Laura experienced it as something terrible. The traumatic experience of her physical defect, which prevented her from making friends during childhood and her phobia is what inhibited her from any relationship.

The only way Laura has found to feel safe is to close herself off from other people. The little glass animal collection is a manifestation of her own world – fragile, unreal and cold. Laura’s projection of herself on the glass ornaments increases progressively, reaching a complete identification at the end of the work. Laura spends much of her time taking care of her glass figures collection while listening to the albums left by Mr. Wingfield.

TOM [*gently*]: She lives in a world of her own – a world of little glass ornaments, Mother...⁹⁰

Laura has invented her imaginary world to hide from reality, to avoid interacting with others, the attention she pays to the glass animals is what takes away her own life. Laura’s care for her figurines gives her a momentary illusion of controlling her fears. This has nothing to do with reality but, rather, her life is reduced to a sequence of rituals. “Anxiety is diffuse, objectless, unpleasant, and persistent. When feeling anxious, the person has difficulty in identifying the cause of the uneasy tension or the nature of the anticipated event or disaster”⁹¹, however, Laura deep down in her knows that it is caused by everything that reminds her that she is alive.

Amanda does not understand what is happening inside Laura, her behaviour seems even absurd. She doesn’t hesitate to let her know. The fact that Laura’s problem

⁸⁹ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 75.

⁹⁰ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 48.

⁹¹ RACHMAN, Stanley J., *Anxiety*, p. 3.

is treated as absurd makes the situation more difficult for her. Tom speaks of Laura's problem with some indifference.

TOM: Oh – with Laura? Laura is – terribly shy.

Laura does not want to appear at dinner, thus trying to avoid the dreaded contact with the stranger. Her mother insists, ignoring her difficulties:

TOM: Laura is not feeling well and she says that she thinks she'd better not come to the table.⁹²

Amanda calls it nonsense, while Jim pretends to make Laura see that her problem is truly surmountable. "Everybody excels in some one thing. Some in many. ... All you've got to do is discover in *what!*"⁹³ Laura rather lets herself be carried away by vanity, keeping her relationships with others frozen.

For all the above it can be said that Laura is the victim of an irrational fear that takes the form of a phobia and that makes her a person unable to live in a real world. The only way out would be out of that environment, but her fear prevents her from going out and interact with other people. She is, therefore, condemned to live in an imaginary world full of little glass animals.

3.2 Tom

The character of Tom Wingfield, a young man with aspirations to be a writer, was based on Williams real persona. The existence of coincidences between Williams and the character Tom is obvious. The degree of guilt that Williams imputed to his mother Edwina for Cornelius' poor relationship with her family is comparable to that attributed by Tom to Amanda for his father's disappearance.⁹⁴

Williams father Cornelius also did not try hard to meet his children (see Chapter 1.1). Cornelius' presence at home is like the portrait of Tom's father in *The Glass Menagerie*, being there without actually being there. Neither of them can speak to their father.

⁹² As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁹⁴ Theater: The Angel of the Odd, *Time.com*.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom is forced to work at the shoe store Continental Shoemakers because he must take care of his family. Williams was inspired there by the time he had to work with his father in International Shoe Company (see Chapter 1.3).

For Tom, going to the movies was a way to escape reality. According to Miroslav Plzák, the brain cannot respond to the recurring activity with the same positive stimulus causing an intense joy as it did for the first time.⁹⁵ As a result, going to the movies was presented as being boring and Tom wanted to move because he does not feel fulfilled in any aspect of his life.

Hostility, dissatisfaction, frustration and resentment are words that define Tom's personality very well. Tom wants to live, what he does day by day is, in fact, he dies a little bit inside.

TOM: ... Every time you come in yelling that God damn "Rise and Shine!" "Rise and Shine!" I say to myself, "How lucky dead people are!"⁹⁶

Tom feels a strong resentment towards his father who abandoned his responsibilities knowing that he could harm his children by this. Neither Amanda seems to be interested in the same way as Tom.

TOM: ... It seems unimportant to you, what I'm doing – what I want to do – having a little difference between them!⁹⁷

Tom blames Amanda for parental abandonment. Theorists "argued that the early relationships with our primary caregivers provide the basis for later adult relationships."⁹⁸ Many of their confrontations are conditioned by fear. Tom is a frightened child who wants to rebel but cannot do it yet.

Tom does not want to harm Amanda, he only wants to show her that he is unhappy. Unfortunately, Amanda is always ready to remind him of his obligations without listening to what he really wants. When a person is dissatisfied with something,

⁹⁵ PLZÁK, Miroslav, *Kostky byly vrženy*, translated, p. 143.

⁹⁶ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 22.

⁹⁸ WILLERTON, Julia, *The Psychology of Relationships*, p. 40.

it is automatically assigned to the feeling of frustration. If the person does not overcome the frustration, he is followed by anguish.⁹⁹

There are a series of circumstances that has awoken in Tom a desire for freedom. Therefore, Tom lives in anguish at the impossibility of following his own path. The price is very high, leaving means cutting the umbilical cord but for Tom, this is the only way to gain freedom.

TOM: I didn't go to the moon, I went much further – for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box. I left Saint Louis, I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space.¹⁰⁰

3.3 Amanda

Amanda Wingfield was inspired by the likeness of Williams' own mother, Edwina. Amanda suffered abandonment issues because she loved her husband. It was not very pleasant for her to continually see the photo of the one who ran away. This feeling intensifies when the person leaves without a trace, not knowing anything about him.¹⁰¹ Amanda takes a sufferer stance, looks like a victim. There is no doubt that she loves her children but in an unhealthy way. She took over the responsibilities of a father.

Fear is also a fully integrated element in Amanda's personality. Like Laura, Amanda is afraid of life, she knows that life no longer has anything to do with the one she longs for.

Amanda does not want to live the present. The anguish caused by her marital failure progressively turns into fear. Unconsciously, Amanda takes refuge in the past, when she was still a charming young woman. She cannot look at the present clearly, she does not like it, hence her refusal to name Laura's problem.

In reality, Amanda will never be able to accept Laura's flaw. Amanda does not accept that her children are adults, she still wants to take care of them.

⁹⁹ KUYKENDALL, Sally, *Bullying*, p. 77-78.

¹⁰⁰ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 86.

¹⁰¹ Identifying and Managing Abandonment Issues, *Healthline.com*.

Amanda tries to awake the feeling of guilt in her children. As seen here, Amanda adopted the victim position.

AMANDA: I went to the typing instructor and introduced myself as your mother. She didn't know who you were. Wingfield, she said, we don't have any such student enrolled at the school! ... Oh! I felt so weak I could barely keep on my feet! I had to sit down while they got me a glass of water! Fifty dollars' tuition, all of our plans – my hopes and ambition for you – just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that.¹⁰²

In conclusion, Amanda's fears can be considered as the fear of abandonment. She resorts to emotionally blackmailing her children and lives in the past full of beautiful memories. Amanda manages to escape from her harsh reality remembering the world where she spent her youth, a universe in which she was constantly entertained by a multitude of suitors. This remembrance of the glorious past helps her to be happy.

The characters in *The Glass Menagerie* do not accept their own identity and cannot be at peace with themselves. This leads them to live in a world full of illusions, far from reality. They have to face the society that constrains them and causes them to feel unhappy. They fail to build or maintain relationships, whether it be a friendships or romantic relationships.

Even today, this is actual. People are seeking shelter in the online world, avoiding personal contact which may lead to an addiction. People are more attracted to social media, they are online almost constantly because of the fear that they could miss something.¹⁰³

As with Laura, she feels safe in her imaginary life full of little glass animals, many people have the same problem. The difference is that they often resort to the unreal world in the cyberspace.

Laura is the character many young people can identify with. Her feeling of being lonely and despair, not being accepted by classmates exactly describes how especially young girls can feel sometimes in today's society focused on superficial beauty and charms.

¹⁰² As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *The Glass Menagerie*, p. 12.

¹⁰³ SPITZER, Manfred, *Digitální demence*, translated, p. 243.

4 A Streetcar Named Desire

STANLEY: Stell-lahhhhh!

EUNICE [*calling down from the door of her upper apartment*]: Quit that howling out there an' go back to bed!

STANLEY: I want my baby down here. Stella, Stella!

EUNICE: She ain't comin' down so you quit! Or you'll git th' law on you!

STANLEY: Stella!

...

STANLEY [*humbly*]: Eunice, I want my girl to come down with me!

EUNICE: Hah! [*She slams her door.*]

STANLEY [*with heaven-splitting violence*]: STELL-LAHHHHH!¹⁰⁴

A very popular extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) that everyone is familiar with. To that extent, that every year at the Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis people try to test their vocal cords and recreate this famous loudly Stanley shouting.¹⁰⁵

Throughout the play, we meet with characters such as young married couple Stella Kowalski and Stanley Kowalski, Stella's older sister Blanche DuBois, Eunice, and Stanley's poker friends Mitch, Pablo and Steve. My main focus is Blanche, Stanley and Stella because of their complicated yet interesting and colourful personality and their relationship.

4.1 Stella

Stella lived in the same family environment as Blanche, but decided to leave, perhaps because she perceived that, despite its advantages, she would not have the independence that she considered necessary. This is the reason why her action was criticized by the rest of the family members, including Blanche.

¹⁰⁴ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE and a "STELLA!" Shouting Contest at the Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis, *Wearemoviegeeks.com*.

Stella met Stanley, the son of Polish immigrants. She fell in love not only with him but also with his physique and his way of being energetic, open, direct and rude. Even Stanley's obvious flaws were his strengths, or at least she learned to accept them.

Stella saw in Stanley a capable and willful man, who provided her with the love and protection she needs, and decided to marry him accepting his peculiarities, his excesses and his bravado. Stella accepted all of that, but never forgot the ways and values in which she had been raised. She knew that behind all of that she left a world and continued to exist with her standards and pleasures, and sometimes, when Stanley's excesses reached an unbearable point, remembered them with a certain inner nostalgia.

When Blanche appeared, that world Stella left behind suddenly reappeared. Blanche reminded Stella of her past. However, the sibling love she felt for Blanche, together with deep compassion at seeing her so fragile and unstable, so miserable and lonely, restrained her impulses.

Stanley on the one hand, and Blanche on the other, plunged her into a deep state of anxiety. Stella was unable to manage them. She felt in the middle, unable to redirect a situation that was getting worse day by day and that directly affected her and disrupted her marriage, at the moment when she was expecting a child with Stanley. When Blanche was taken to a psychiatric hospital, Stella was filled with remorse forever. Perhaps Stella could have avoided all of that if she had had a little more courage. This was most likely due to the fact that beyond Stella's love for Stanley, she still loved her sister as she was.

4.2 Stanley

In Stanley, Williams was making a portrait of an abuser, a figure he knew perfectly well: his father Cornelius (see Chapter 1.1). I believe it is necessary to repeat the relationship Edwina and Cornelius had. Williams inherited some personality traits from his father that he knew how to transmit to the character of Stanley.

Williams knew the subject of domestic violence firsthand, having observed spousal abuse in his own family. As Williams's brother Dakin points out, their father, Cornelius Coffin Williams, would frequently

return home intoxicated and fly into a rage against their mother, Edwina.¹⁰⁶

When Williams returned from the University of Missouri, his father found him a job at the International Shoe Company (see Chapter 1.3). There Williams met one of his co-workers. He was friendly and his name was Stanley Kowalski. The two became friends, and from him Williams took the name of the antagonist of Blanche DuBois.

Stanley Kowalski's entry into the scene is very significant, he is the only financial support of the family. Stella does not work so she depends financially on him. Stella is expecting a baby, which makes ties with Stanley stronger. The family is prepared for the entry of a new member and to face this change since this is part of the development process in every family.¹⁰⁷

What this couple is not prepared for is the arrival of Stella's sister, Blanche. Blanche's visit will not leave the family structure unchanged. They have to get used to sharing a tiny flat, which Blanche does not find very comfortable and cozy. The tension begins to be a common denominator in their interactions.

An attempt to enter the family is seen when Blanche's desire is to make a place for herself in the flat. Blanche wants to be accepted and recognized as part of the group, she must please Stanley's friends because she is aware that this is the only way to become part of the family. Friends are very important to Stanley, so Blanche has to be accepted by them.

Stanley's first contact with Blanche determines their future relationship. Stanley realizes that his bottle of whiskey has waned considerably because Blanche has been drinking behind his back. Behind Stanley's hardness hides a feared man.

STANLEY: ... Liquor goes fast in hot weather.

[*He holds the bottle to the light to observe its depletion.*] Have a shot?

BLANCHE: No, I – rarely touch it.

STANLEY: Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ As cited in BLOOM, Harold, *Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁷ CAREY, William et al., *Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁸ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 23 .

With Blanche's arrival, Stanley realizes that he must share his wife from now. He needs affection, and nothing he can do will satisfy that need as Stella devotes her attention to Blanche. Stanley fears that Blanche will steal Stella away. Stanley's feeling of inferiority is reinforced with the arrival of Blanche. Stanley's fear of Blanche is clear from the beginning. "I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type."¹⁰⁹ Stella embodies the sensuality and Blanche symbolizes spirituality.¹¹⁰

As a consequence, Stanley wants to get rid of Blanche. Losing Stella would mean for him losing the world he had been working on for both of them. At first Blanche likes Stanley, "you're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think."¹¹¹ Even after Stanley is going through her belongings, Blanche seems to be still on his side, as her words show. "But maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve and have to go on without Belle Reve to protect us."¹¹²

Blanche begins to understand that Stanley is not what he seems to be like when she witnesses Stanley attacking Stella. Blanche perceives what that man is capable of. He is a threat to her sister.

You're married to a madman! He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something – sub-human – something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something – ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in – anthropological studies!¹¹³

Stanley's attitude towards Blanche has also been progressive. After listening to Blanche's words about him, he starts to act aggressively, even towards Stella.

Freud's suggestions regarding the origins and nature of aggression are extremely pessimistic. Not only is such behaviour innate, stemming, from the "built-in" death instinct, it is also inevitable, for if thanatos

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹⁰ BOXILL, Roger, *Tennessee Williams*, p. 76-92.

¹¹¹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 30.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹¹³ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 53.

(death instinct) is not turned outward upon others, it will soon result in the destruction of the individual.¹¹⁴

This indicates that Stanley is a violent man, who starts to act aggressively right after the situation gets out of his hands. However, Stella is completely blinded by his masculinity. This is the image of Stanley she keeps in her head. Stella is dazzled by the passion she feels towards Stanley. Blanche is facing the same reality, although with different view of Stanley.

STELLA: No Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere.

BLANCHE: What makes you think Stanley will?

STELLA: Look at him.

BLANCHE: I've looked at him.

STELLA: Then you should know.

BLANCHE: I'm sorry, but I haven't noticed the stamp of genius even on Stanley's forehead.¹¹⁵

4.3 Blanche

The character of Blanche is more natural, more honest, and more tragic than any Williams character before or since. She embodies his sense of isolation, his concern for cruelty, his fear of death, and his disgust with his own flesh.¹¹⁶ Williams always needed someone's company, since like Blanche, he feared loneliness (see Chapter 2.4). Blanche fears the time passing by, just as Williams does because death is always near.

Blanche is a Southern woman, aging and alone, who subsists on illusions which give her life meaning because she is weak and unable to face the real world. As a basic element of her personality is histrionics, which "is characterized by a high energy level and emotional and autonomic reactivity."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ As cited in BARON, Robert A., *Human Aggression*, p. 15.

¹¹⁵ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 38.

¹¹⁶ STANTON, Stephen S., *Tennessee Williams: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 169.

¹¹⁷ SPERRY, Len, *Handbook of Diagnosis and Treatment of DSM-5 Personality Disorders: Assessment, Case Conceptualization, and Treatment*, p. 155.

Blanche likes to question others about her appearance. She does it in a charming and seductive way. She does it in order to reaffirm her image as an attractive woman, to feel admired and to give meaning to her life. Stella is aware of this need and encourages Stanley to praise Blanche by saying, “when she comes in be sure to say something nice about her appearance.”¹¹⁸ Blanche seems to believe what everyone says about her look.

BLANCHE: Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart – and I have all of those things – aren’t taken away, but grow! Increase with the years!¹¹⁹

When Stanley asks her about the furs, she assures him they have been given to her from her millionaire friend who will come to save her from poverty. “Everything Blanche does in reality too is coloured by this necessity, this compulsion to be special.”¹²⁰

The conversations between Stanley and Blanche have always double meanings. She plays and flirts with him without realizing what this can cause to her or her sister. “If I didn't know that you were my wife’s sister I’d get ideas about you!”¹²¹ From Blanches response “I was fishing for a compliment.”¹²² this is evident.

The suicide of Blanche’s husband Allan was a traumatic experience for her and left consequences on her life. Since then, she wanted to live in the shadows and avoided light. Her psychic life froze, she fell as prey to infinite suffering. Therefore, it can be understood that Blanche’s fear turns into a phobia of light. Blanche avoids the light, affirms “I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me.”¹²³

The bathroom is the most important place in the house for Blanche, since in it she finds the rest that her body and spirit need. Above all the intimacy that she lacks, it is the only room where you can be with the door closed. There she spends time when

¹¹⁸ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ BOTTOMS, Stephen, Philip KOLIN a Michael HOOPER, *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie; A Streetcar Named Desire; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Sweet Bird of Youth*, p. 112.

¹²¹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 31.

¹²² Ibid., p. 30.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 88.

she feels a kind of tension, on the negative side there was fear and anxiety, and on the positive side, there was a relief that the threat averted.¹²⁴

Blanche needs support, understanding, and love. Therefore, she catches the opportunity and tries to get close with one of Stanley's poker friends Mitch, a simple man who has always lived in his parents' house. Mitch sees Blanche differently from the other women. Blanche is educated, dreamy, intelligent, perhaps too outlandish.

MITCH: You need somebody. And I need somebody, too.
Could it be – you and me, Blanche?¹²⁵

Unfortunately, the developing relationship between Mitch and Blanche is set back when Stanley shares the information he has gathered about Blanche's past. Mitch feels betrayed. The illusion that he had been living in has suddenly been broken.

Blanche withdraws into a fantasy world that is brutally confronted again with the harsh reality personified by Stanley. Alone with Stanley wearing "his silky pyjamas he wore on his wedding night"¹²⁶, he raped Blanche while Stella was in the hospital giving birth to their baby. This incident finally destroys Blanche, since no one believes her, not even Stella, she is sent to a psychiatric hospital.

Stanley in his ignorance and insensitivity, destroys both Blanche's hope and her illusions. He sees through her pose without understanding why she needs one. He thinks merely that she feels superior to him and he wishes to destroy her composure to make her recognize that she is the same as he, a sexual animal.¹²⁷

Williams seeks an ending for his characters. He does not want to condemn them, but he is not going to give them a chance either. At first, it is easy to feel sympathy for Stanley, as he must defend himself against the intruder Blanche. Blanche is the representation of another Williams' fear of confinement.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ PLZÁK, Miroslav, *Kostky byly vrženy*, translated, p. 97.

¹²⁵ As cited in WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 72.

¹²⁶ THOMPSON, Judith J., *Tennessee Williams' Plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol*, p. 44.

¹²⁷ As cited in BOTTOMS, Stephen, Philip KOLIN a Michael HOOPER, *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie; A Streetcar Named Desire; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Sweet Bird of Youth*, p. 107.

¹²⁸ BIGSBY, Christopher William Edgar, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-century American Drama: Beyond Broadway (Vol 3)*, p. 17.

The relationship between Stella and Stanley is the greatest happiness that they can share. But even if the relationship is harmonious and the partners understand each other, misunderstandings or seemingly insurmountable differences can still arise in every relationship. Likewise, in many other interpersonal areas, such as between friends, family members, conflicts sometimes arise that burden those involved and should be resolved.

Being in the middle of interpersonal conflicts is always an up-to-date theme. Perhaps even more so today, as nowadays work, family, commitments and free time must be brought under one roof. There is less time to be more careful with other people and to deal with interpersonal issues, often leading to breaking the tight ties with relatives. Today's world is more hectic and in problem solving, people often act affectively. People are in many cases not open to new solutions, they are less likely to forgive because they cling to the past.

Seen in this way, Blanche's and Stella's fate are not as different as they appear on the surface. Blanche was broken and completely destroyed by the events in Belle Reve. Stella is also a broken woman, but this fact is less obvious to her. The relationship with her husband forces her to deny reality and break ties with her sister, who she was very close to. Stella's future now belongs entirely to her brutal husband Stanley. She can no longer expect salvation since there is no one left to recognize the fatality of this relationship that, as stated above, may seem to be the source of great happiness and fulfilment for her.

Conclusion

The analysis of the plays *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* allow us to see and compare the connections between Tennessee Williams' personal and family life with the lives and situations of the characters portrayed in the plays. This analysis shows that the family in which Williams was raised and educated had a huge influence on his personal development and served as a source of inspiration for creating characters who are almost identical with the members of his family and, consequently, with himself.

After analyzing Williams' complex personality, we have found that fear is an essential element to understand the complex personality of Williams and has an important function in his literary production. The characters are afraid of failure, misunderstanding or sense of loss, but above all, of personal acceptance and recognizing the reality that surrounds them. In this sense, fear is associated with conflict between fiction and reality. In most cases, the characters are lonely and melancholic beings nullifying the possibility of finding their inner peace and incapacitating the individual to feel fully fulfilled. Williams' characters are misunderstood, they do not adapt to conventional family rules, they suffer serious identity problems and experience failure on a daily basis, they are unable to build meaningful relationships – whether romantic or friendships – which, in a worst-case scenario forces them to initiate and maintain relationships that lead to nothing and can even harm. This makes them unhappy and pervades all spheres of their psychic life.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, we have had the opportunity to see how the relationships between parents determine the lives of children, and how certain events and attitudes can create in them a feeling of insecurity that leads to fear. Delving into the problems of Amanda, Tom and Laura, it has been found that living with fear is not a personal choice, but the product of one's life experiences. Amanda feels anguish at the possibility of a new abandonment. To avoid this, she emotionally blackmailing her children, thus enabling that imagined fear to become a reality. Laura and Tom, who grew up feeling their anguish, are also victims of fear. Laura cannot relate to the world outside the flat. Tom, on the contrary, cannot continue living inside it.

A Streetcar Named Desire tells the story of a woman Blanche who is too afraid to face her past and, therefore, has locked herself in a lie that leads to loneliness.

She cannot share the truth with anyone, her lies and isolation confine her and drag her into the world of illusion. Blanche has a strong personality disorder and a phobia of light. She is cruel to herself and relives the agonizing guilt of Allan's suicide day and night. Stanley, like Amanda, is afraid of abandonment, but to avoid it he uses violence, and Stella is always in the middle of their conflict.

Interpersonal relationships are as old as humanity and their resolving conflicts is almost the same as in today's world. However, it must be viewed in the context of the time –in the 21st century, we have the Internet, which is accessible to everyone and has changed the social environment since its inception. On the Internet, there is a lack of possibility to use expressions and gestures through which people are able to communicate, to be heard and understood better in real life. Behind this perfection lies the disillusionment, personal problems or emotional disappointments.

In today's society, instead of meeting with people and talking to them, the Internet allows us to create modern social relationships, avoiding real-life interaction and causing the isolation of an individual. Blanche does not want to see reality, so do the majority of people nowadays. These are mainly young people since their wings are trimmed by the environment in which they live, they seek refuge in the Internet to overcome their fears and frustrations. Permanently unresolved problems can lead to the feeling of misunderstanding, being drained or depressed, just as with Blanche or Amanda. Today's world is accelerated, and people do not have time for each other. There is an incredible lack of empathy, understanding, compassion and love for others.

To conclude, Williams presents us characters subjected to a hostile reality, they live tormented and carry scars from previous damages. They are survivors in a society that abandons them. It arises from conflicts that apparently had been buried in previous times, conflicts that come to the surface with renewed force because the individual is unable to identify its origin and, therefore, is unable to look for a way out. The psychological complexity of Williams' characters brings them closer to reality and makes them perfectly identifiable and authentic beings. This makes it possible for everyone to find typical human emotions and reactions that can still after all the years be applied to today's society.

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Résumé

Tennessee Williams patří k nejvýznamnějším dramatikům 20. století. První část práce se zabývá životem Tennessee Williamse. Ve svém životě nacházel podněty pro své díla, viděl problémy v rodině a ve společnosti, ale také vnitřní problémy člověka. Druhá část se věnuje analýze postav v dílech *Skleněný zvěřinec* a *Tramvaj do stanice touha* z psychologického hlediska. Tato část poukazuje na střetání lidské touhy s tvrdou realitou, vyhrocené životní situace, složitost mezilidských vztahů a zoufalý zápas mezi pravdou a lží. V dílech se řeší vztahy mezi lidmi, které ani v současné době nejsou vůbec idylické. Na základě této analýzy je vyvozen závěr, že jsou tyto problémy aplikovatelné na dnešní dobu. Psychika člověka v moderní složité době je možná ještě zranitelnější než za života Tennessee Williams.

Annotation

Jméno a příjmení:	Dagmar Sedláčková
Katedra:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Josef Nevařil, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2020

Název práce:	Mezilidské vztahy a psychologie v dramatech Tennessee Williamse
Název v angličtině:	Interpersonal Relationships and Psychology in Tennessee Williams' Plays
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce se zabývá psychologií postav a problémy v mezilidských vztazích. V první části práce je shrnut život Tennessee Williamse a všechny jeho obavy, které ho doprovázely po celý život. V druhé části jsou ve dvou jeho dílech – <i>Skleněný zvěřinec</i> a <i>Tramvaj do stanice Touha</i> rozebírány postavy z psychologického hlediska a jejich mezilidské vztahy, které jsou porovnány s dnešním světem.
Klíčová slova:	Tennessee Williams, Skleněný zvěřinec, Tramvaj do stanice Touha, mezilidské vztahy, rodina, Rose, Edwina, obavy, úzkost, iluze
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor's thesis deals with the psychology of characters and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. The first part of the thesis summarizes the life of Tennessee Williams and all his fears that accompanied him throughout his life. The second part analyzes the characters in two of Williams' plays – <i>The Glass Menagerie</i> and <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> from the psychological point of view and their interpersonal relationships which are compared with today's world.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, interpersonal relationships, family, Rose, Edwina, fear, anxiety, illusion
Přílohy vázané v práci:	CD
Rozsah práce:	44 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk