

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyků

Bakalářská práce

Mario Pokorný

Tennessee Williams' women characters

Olomouc 2019

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová, Ph.D.

Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.

V Olomouci 23. 4. 2019

.....

vlastnoruční podpis

I would like to thank Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová Ph.D. for her valuable comments on the content of my thesis. Additionally, I would like to thank Věnka Vařeková for all her love and emotional support.

Abstract

This thesis analyses Tennessee Williams' life and four of his iconic plays in order to find possible similarities between the fictional female characters and Tennessee Williams' female family members. First two chapters serve as an analysis of Tennessee Williams' life and literary career with focus on defining the unique personalities of his mother and sister. Forth comes the main body of the thesis, in which the fictional characters are analysed and compared. Last chapter provides results of the research in form of individual groups. Based on the research of this thesis, every female character has shown some autobiographical features.

Content

Introduction.....	1
1. Tennessee Williams' family	4
2. Tennessee Williams' life and works	11
3. The Glass Menagerie.....	17
4. A Streetcar Named Desire	21
5. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	26
6. Sweet Bird of Youth.....	29
7. Comparison of the characters with respect to the autobiographical features of Tennessee Williams' work	32
Conclusion	35
References.....	37

Introduction

Tennessee Williams is undisputedly one of the most influential authors of American drama. His innovatory and shocking style of writing, accompanied by his unconventional characters, both male and female, are famous to this day. His most known plays, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *The Glass Menagerie* are being performed all over the globe, despite their display of often quite shocking themes, such as exaggerated violence, homosexuality, rape, castration or even cannibalism.

Williams' plays have many autobiographical features, not only concerning Williams himself, e.g. his homosexuality, alcohol addiction or problematic family situation, but also the women characters of his famous plays who were inspired by real women in his life. „The plays are his emotional autobiography, snapshots of his heart's mutation.”¹ Williams' homosexuality and his sensitive nature combined with the female influence on his upbringing can be one of the few possible reasons why especially Williams' women characters were created with passion and understanding, which makes these characters very relatable for the audience.

In the present thesis, I will analyse five of Williams' most iconic plays to prove that many of the female characters bear resemblance to the actual women in Williams' life. Based on my research, I must stress the importance of studying the recently published biographies of Tennessee Williams *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams* by Lyle Leverich and *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh* by John Lahr in order to learn most comprehensive information about Williams' life and female influence in it. In my opinion, these are the most in-depth written biographies of Tennessee Williams to this day.

¹ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. i.

The main focus of the thesis is to use these recently written biographies to help us understand William's life, especially by looking at his family situation and literary career. By examining these two main female figures Williams had in his life, his mother and his sister, we can discover the degree in which most of his famous female protagonists were inspired by actual people. Another aim of this thesis is to analyse the fictional female protagonists themselves, describe their strengths, weaknesses, important moments and struggles in order to find possible similarities and differences between them. The final outcome of this project is the creation of different groups of Williams' women characters based on their determining resemblance to Williams' mother Edwina and sister Rose. Because of the analytical nature of my project, I will additionally look for other interesting autobiographical features.

The thesis is divided into 7 chapters, firstly, it is essential to analyse the Williams' life as mentioned above to determine the "mother" and "sister" figures. Advancing chapter will briefly cover Williams' work to outline his influence in the literary world. Forth comes the main body of the thesis, in which I will analyse main female protagonists of *The Glass Menagerie* – Amanda and Laura, *A Streetcar Named Desire* – Blanche and Stella, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*– Margaret and *Sweet Bird of Youth* – Alexandra Del Lago and Heavenly. Results of these analyses are compared and summarized in last chapter.

One of the major difficulties I had to overcome while writing this bachelor thesis is to differentiate mine from the others that have been written on similar subject. In the interest of presenting new subjective thoughts, which every successful analysis should contain, I did not want to recycle the already written information, instead I aimed to submit a thesis that would be valuable to literary theory students. I wanted to provide a new point of view, focusing on women characters in connection with autobiographical features of Williams' plays.

It is also important to note that Tennessee Williams used to revise his plays several times. As a result, there are often several versions of his plays. I am going to use the versions published in the two collections by *Library of America*.

Tennessee Williams' family

If we want to set Edwina and Rose as two main figures that influenced Williams' women characters, it is necessary to define their personality as clearly as possible. Lyle Leverich goes in broad detail about Williams' whole family history in his biography *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, therefore for my research I was using primarily this book. "Leverich was Williams's first and only authorized biographer (Williams had given him two letters of authorization, one just a month or so before he died, though both were squashed under the iron first of Lady St Just; only after her death was Leverich allowed to publish his biography), and his study delivered on most of its promises. It is the gold standard by which all biographies on Williams are, and should be, measured."²

Edwina Estelle Dakin was born on 19th August 1884 as the only child of her parents.³ In her younger years she was considered quite popular, receiving many gentleman callers.⁴ She spent part of her childhood in the south, which made her adopt not only the southern accent, but also their "genteel" behaviour and lifestyle. She identified as a "southern belle" and later even joined D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution).⁵ When her main aim was to get married, she was in need of a flirtier and more open mindset that was not completely aligned with her puritan values. "Edwina was an actress, playing the role of a coquette."⁶ Eventually, she met Cornelius Coffin Williams, a manager for a telephone company and a future father of Rose Isabel Williams and Thomas Lanier Williams III who we can recognize more by the name "Tennessee Williams".⁷

² BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. viii.

³ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 15.

⁴ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 45.

⁵ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 32.

⁶ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 25.

⁷ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 28.

Shortly after the marriage, first problems arise. Cornelius was generally unhappy with his job that did not suit his carefree and audacious nature and vented his frustration onto Edwina. “In all probability, the combination of management and marriage was more than he could handle. As she was to learn, Edwina could press for answers to her questions for only so long before he would either explode or lapse into glum silence.”⁸ The situation turned to better after he started working as a travelling salesman. Nevertheless, this also meant that Edwina was left to endure loneliness, which emphasized the contrast to her former life full of parties and gentleman callers.⁹ After she got pregnant, Cornelius even accused her of cheating.¹⁰

As a result of their problems, Edwina became increasingly more distant and refused to have sex with Cornelius on a regular basis. Edwina’s own puritanical denial of her sexual desire left Cornelius frustrated and angry.¹¹ “Williams recalled hearing his mother’s screams, futile protestations as his father cornered her in their bedroom. Tom, Rose, and Dakin would run out of the house and to the neighbors’ to escape.”¹² In the year of 1916, Thomas had diphtheria and Edwina fully embraced her new role of a mother, not a wife. She slept next to her ailing son, read him stories and created an overprotective relationship, which was yet another reason for a family drama. Cornelius was not fond of their close bond and was probably even envious of his son, he thought this smothering love will make Tom weak and feminine.¹³ After the family moved to St. Louis, Edwina had to endure living with Cornelius, their quarrels became more and more serious and

⁸ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 34.

⁹ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 3.

¹⁰ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 37.

¹¹ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 38.

¹² JACOB, Susannah, *Blow Out Your Candles: An Elegy for Rose*.

¹³ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 36-43.

Cornelius' alcohol fuelled rage incidents were starting to take the toll on mental health of Edwina and her children.¹⁴

Edwina, being forced to move to foreign environment, had to make adjustments to fulfil her need of social approval. While some people of St. Louis called her snobbish or arrogant, people that got close to her described her as a friendly and talkative woman. Her snobbishness was probably a defence mechanism against St. Louis, Jazz age and the lack of puritan values in people around her. She was an outsider, and at her home the situation was not any better.¹⁵ Consequently, she vented her problems by telling endless stories to Tom about her former life, full of parties, gentleman callers and social gatherings.¹⁶ All this trauma connected with her husband (his alcohol abuse, poker parties and eventually even affairs with prostitutes)¹⁷ often resulted in her health issues.¹⁸ However, she was a strong woman, despite her fragile and harmless visage she was no “pushover”, her witty southern language and expressions many times won her verbal quarrels with Cornelius, leaving him alienated with the look of defeated, dull northern man.¹⁹ She could not leave him because she was dependent on Cornelius' money.²⁰ Additionally, divorce in her age would mean a disaster to her reputation. She hated his drinking and unchristian values, and he hated her for exaggerated affection for her children and no affection for him. This “battlefield” they called home was partially responsible for Rose's early mental issues.²¹

Sadly, if we want to analyse Rose's life, we must go through her entire history of misfortune and disappointing events. As a child, she was an outgoing

¹⁴ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 39.

¹⁵ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 47.

¹⁶ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 48-49.

¹⁷ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 53.

¹⁸ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 4-5.

¹⁹ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 43-44.

²⁰ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 10.

²¹ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 47.

and beautiful girl, unconscious of her unfortunate fate.²² Her first and arguably last real hobby was playing the piano and violin. Performing her skills at stage proved to be one of the first traumatic experiences for her, rendering her completely discouraged.²³ Rose had very close and loving relationship with her brother Thomas, what she lacked though was love and affection of her own father. Cornelius was either on business trips or at home, mostly drunk and sometimes even violent.²⁴ While Thomas resented father and his behaviour, Rose as a female probably had a greater need for a male role model and tried her best to win father's affection.²⁵ Especially as a teenager, she was desperate for peer recognition and acceptance. With the "Jazz age" of 1920's came new fashion and generally more liberal way of thinking. Edwina, as a puritan, naturally was not fond of these new manners. This led to first conflicts between Rose and her mother, leading to Rose's first rebellious behaviour.²⁶ Many years later, Edwina's puritan values still had a significant importance for her and even led to conflicts with the shocking themes of Thomas' literary work. "The puritanical and polite 'Miss Edwina' could hardly be expected to respond enthusiastically to her son's more complex and violent works and to his bohemian life. Throughout much of his adult life, Williams shielded his mother from his life-style and his more salacious writings."²⁷

Rose's lack of success, affection and peer recognition led her to develop first atypical personal and physical traits. Constant nervousness about her appearance, hunched shoulders, or high-pitched and hysteric voice directly pointed to her need for validation.²⁸ Although there were several young gentlemen interested in her, probably because they saw her natural beauty, none of them

²² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 60.

²³ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 61.

²⁴ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 21.

²⁵ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 56-57.

²⁶ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 60.

²⁷ TISCHLER, Nancy M., *Tennessee on Tennessee*.

²⁸ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 46.

advanced further in their attempts to escalate the relationship. Constant rejection led Rose to have several nervous breakdowns and fall into depression.²⁹ This scenario kept repeating until Edwina decided to step in by trying to set her up at parties, where Rose many times had to act happy or elegant.³⁰ Instead of going to a business course that Edwina payed for, Rose wandered around the city feeling miserable for not meeting the expectations of her family.³¹ It was clear that she was in desperate need for love and affection. Nevertheless, Edwina refused to accept the idea of finding her a partner simply for satisfying her sexual needs, despite the doctor's recommendation of sex as possible solution.³²

Rose was aware of her worsening mental state and in her frantic desire for improvement, she tried to offer herself sexually to Thomas' colleague from a shoe company. Unfortunately, Rose was rejected, and Thomas heard of her attempt. However, Thomas did not try to show empathy and said to her – “Rose, I heard you offer yourself to Colin, and I want you to know that you disgusted me.”³³ This meant another rejection from a beau and mainly from her own brother. Another harsh experience came years later, when Thomas insulted her after she revealed to Edwina that Thomas hosted a party at their house – “I hate the sight of your ugly old face!”³⁴

This accumulation of traumatizing experiences left Rose on the verge of insanity. Thomas had several traumatizing experiences too, but his “sanctuary” was his imaginative world of literature and writing.³⁵ Moreover, Thomas also had a social circle and was attending university. “In short, he had the freedom now to explore life in ways Rose never really had, and that may have had all the

²⁹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 87.

³⁰ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 85-86.

³¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 116.

³² BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 30.

³³ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 142.

³⁴ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 179.

³⁵ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 5.

difference on his wellbeing and her eventual decline.”³⁶ Rose, on the other hand, had no interests and no passion which could have helped her escape and vent her problems.³⁷

Her family did not react in time to prevent her misfortune from advancing. In 1936, Rose was put in a hospital to undergo psychoanalysis, results later pointed to dementia praecox, also known as schizophrenia. Her violent outbursts led to hospitalization in a convalescent home led by nuns.³⁸ Rose did not show signs of improvement, on the contrary her mental condition got considerably worse, she was reportedly hallucinating and her obscene behaviour shocked entire Williams family. In 1943, Rose received a prefrontal lobotomy, in that time a new surgical procedure. From this year on, Rose was half-conscious of her surroundings meaning that the lobotomy was her final defeat.³⁹

Based on my study of the already mentioned biographies and other secondary literature, we can make following assumptions. Edwina was arguably more of a dominant figure with a strong motherly nature, elegant southern behaviour and puritan lifestyle. Some of her core values transferred onto her children, especially concerning sexual repression.⁴⁰ Although Edwina cared greatly about her social status and, to certain degree, about opinions of others, she was no “pushover”. Her wittiness and adaptability made her endure several life crises, despite her puritan values she knew how to flirt and be seductive, if the situation demanded it. Although being bold and brave in some respects, she was certainly deeply concerned to the point of depression about the mental health of Tom and Rose. Edwina was also clinging onto her past, she was dependant on the mental image of her old southern self, and in certain situations was

³⁶ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 18.

³⁷ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 50.

³⁸ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 6.

³⁹ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 71.

⁴⁰ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 46.

overcompensating for it by being overly talkative and expressive. For the purposes of this thesis, it is also crucial to mention that for most of her life, she was trapped in a household full of constant quarrels. I like to use the term “false appearance of strength and bravery”, because this type of “masks” that served as her defence mechanisms are exactly what many of the female characters in Williams’ plays successfully embodied.

Rose, on the other hand, certainly cannot be labelled as a strong and dominant figure. Her life was full of disappointments and traumatic experiences which she did not have the power to control. Rose was going through life in a passive manner, she was a victim of circumstances. Because of her shyness, lack of confidence, need for validation, emotional vulnerability, sexual repression and anxiety attacks she was unable to find a suitable partner and died as a virgin.⁴¹ Rose was conscious of her problems, but having no passion to turn to, she had to develop different personas, either of overly dim and dull or self-dramatizing and demonstrative demeanour, to cope with her difficulties.⁴² Combined with the violent and distant behaviour of her father, Rose lost control of her own self and succumbed to insanity.⁴³

⁴¹ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 46.

⁴² SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 6.

⁴³ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 21.

Tennessee Williams' life and works

This chapter consists in a brief introduction of Tennessee Williams as an autobiographical writer, and an examination of some of his important life events, especially regarding to his writing career. This chapter additionally serves as an analysis of his attitude towards his problematic family environment and towards other inner struggles that he had endured that may be reflected in his works. By analysing his life and early work up to the production of *The Glass Menagerie* in 1945, we can also make assumptions about the possible importance of Edwina, Rose or other women in his life as role models for his famous female characters.

Tennessee Williams' love for literature originated from his youth. As a young boy, he was heavily influenced by his mother Edwina that herself was enthusiastic about literature.⁴⁴ Even his own name, Thomas Lanier Williams III, besides being named after the founders of the American nation, is a tribute to one of his famous poet ancestors Sidney Lanier.⁴⁵ Walter Dakin, Edwina's father and a prominent figure of episcopal church, owned a library filled with books of all genres. It is no surprise that this library is where young Thomas L. Williams spend plenty of his free time, learning about literature from his grandfather.⁴⁶ It was not only love for literature that he inherited, the Dakin side of the family brought him up in religious and cultured manner, Thomas' grandfather played the role of his absent father.⁴⁷ "He would never lose his love for the old and gentle ways and would all his life decry the brutalization of the romantic tradition. In this, it was like mother, like son."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, because of the constant moving of Williams' family, Thomas eventually lost his access to the library. His happy

⁴⁴ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 37.

⁴⁷ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 54.

memories about Clarksdale with its elegant southern atmosphere were projected into his later work.⁴⁹ For example, one of the noble ladies of Clarksdale that he remembered was named Blanche Curter and her daughter was Stella Curter. He used the names Blanche and Stella in one of his most well-known plays *A Streetcar Named Desire*. One of the friends of Dakin's side of the family was Mrs. Maggie Wingfield that allegedly had a collection of glass animals, this motif was later projected into *The Glass Menagerie* and the name into *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Brick Gotcher was a young boy in Clarksdale who bullied Thomas because of his feminine behaviour, the name Brick was then also used in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. It is obvious that his southern origin had a great impact not only on Williams' behaviour and manners, but also on his repertoire of names for his characters.⁵⁰ Although Thomas spent a happy childhood in Clarksdale, his family was eventually forced to move out of the city. Despite being separated from his grandfather, Thomas' interest in literature, especially poetry, did not fade away in the slightest.

In 1916, Thomas got infected by diphtheria, the illness strengthened his bond with his attentive and caring mother and left him even more interested in literature. Being unable to walk, he directed his youthful energy into his imaginative world.⁵¹ It was not only Rose's life that was full of traumatic experiences, Thomas himself had his fair share of torment in his youth. His favourite theme of excessive violence may originate from his memories about the war and many deaths and funerals that came with it, especially after his family moved to St. Louis. Moving to St. Louis additionally gave Thomas several years of constant exposure to quarrels between Edwina and Cornelius, and his southern accent and manners made him unpopular and bullied at school.⁵² All these internal

⁴⁹ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 55.

⁵¹ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 4.

⁵² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 51.

struggles eventually found their way to be expressed, because Edwina bought Thomas his first typewriter.⁵³

Thomas' new obsession with writing was another subject of Cornelius' complaints. Cornelius felt ashamed of and did not believe in Thomas, mainly because of his artistic and feminine nature.⁵⁴ "Williams was always at war with his father, whose own virility was offended by his son's quiet manner and his interest in books."⁵⁵ Edwina as a "counterstrike" multiplied her effort in supporting Thomas' new hobby.⁵⁶ It did not take long for Thomas to receive his first recognition. In 1927, his piece *Can a Wife be a Good Sport?* won him five dollars in a magazine contest. Not long after, he wrote a melodramatic short story *The Vengeance of Nitocris* about an Egyptian queen and her revenge.⁵⁷ After these two small successes his grandfather took him for a life-changing trip to New York and Paris, during which he experienced a spiritual awakening, his "memento mori" moment about the irony of life and death. From this moment on, Thomas chose to focus on poetry as a spiritual expression of his inner self.⁵⁸

Shortly before attending university, Thomas broke up with his girlfriend Hazel Kramer, this left an emotional scar on him and it is the reason of his early mental problems. "I suppose that I can honestly say, despite the homosexual loves that began years later, that she was the great extrafamilial love of my life."⁵⁹ Hazel's mother, Mrs. Florence was one of the possible models for Williams' flirty and seductive female characters.⁶⁰ His studies of journalism at the University of Missouri were accompanied by sexual confusion, crippling shyness and lack of

⁵³ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ HIRSCH, Foster, *A Portrait of the Artist: The Plays of Tennessee Williams*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 48.

⁵⁷ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 7-9.

⁵⁸ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Memoirs*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 20-26.

discipline.⁶¹ Two of his good friends from these times, Jim and Mitch are being honoured as Jim O' Connor in *The Glass Menagerie* and Harold Mitchell in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.⁶²

Not only did university have decisive influence over Thomas' social life, but also over his literary career. *Beauty is the Word* is not only his first play, but also his first work with clear autobiographical motives. In this play, Thomas expresses his opinion about Edwina's puritanism and introduces a motive of free will in contrast to the religious conservatism. His feeling of loneliness after the loss of his loved one is projected in his short story *Something by Tolstoi*. *Hot Milk at Three in the Morning* is Thomas' second play and yet again, it has clear autobiographical motives about a dysfunctional marriage.⁶³

As a result of his consistent engagement with his writing, Thomas failed his military training, and thus again disappointed his father. Consequently, Thomas was under protest employed by Cornelius in a shoe company.⁶⁴ In this dreadful job, which was frowned upon even by the main protagonist of *The Glass Menagerie*, he met Stanley Kowalski who was later portrayed in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.⁶⁵

Despite growing in popularity in St. Louis as a poet, Thomas wanted to start getting paid as a professional writer, and thus had to adjust his focus more into writing short stories. Bearing this in mind, it is crucial to note that in the early years of his efforts to become acknowledged by his literary peers he repeatedly faced rejection. This rejection, mainly from the *Story* and *Manuscript* magazines, did not make him stop writing and he kept on producing story after story. In *The Accent of a Coming Foot* Thomas expressed his frustration from lack of money

⁶¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 107.

⁶² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 113-118.

⁶³ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 18-21.

⁶⁴ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 5-6.

⁶⁵ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 130.

and recognition as a poet. Thomas' desperate need for approval of his fellow writers took its toll in the form of a complete nervous exhaustion.⁶⁶ In this period, Thomas also created his habits of abusing different substances to help him endure his feelings of loneliness, rejection and sexual confusion.⁶⁷ These self-destructive habits accompanied him throughout his entire literary life.⁶⁸ "But considering the years of repression Tom was enduring in St. Louis, it is not difficult to imagine him identifying with character who suffer stifled and frustrated passions."⁶⁹

In 1937, the long period of Thomas' frustration ended. He made his debut with the production of his play *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!*. From this moment on, Thomas fell in love with the feeling of acknowledgment that he received from his audience. "He had discovered a means of communication with built-in reciprocation: that of a live audience's response."⁷⁰ In this moment, he began his long journey of being a playwright and loving theatre. Thanks to the boost of motivation and confidence, Thomas started to steer his focus slowly into the world of theatre. His cooperation with Willard Holland, a chief director of an amateur acting company *The Mummies* helped him produce his next successful play *Candles to the Sun*. Even though Thomas was not satisfied with the productions of his other plays, *Me, Vaysha* and *The Magic Tower*, it was undeniable that he found his new long-lasting passion. He started to work under the name "Tennessee Williams", a name that would change the American drama forever.⁷¹

In years to come Williams had to endure many crises. In 1943, his sister Rose received lobotomy that would permanently change her. This left him with the feeling of guilt and remorse for the rest of his life.⁷² Because of Edwina's influence, he was also sexually confused. "Edwina's children inevitably inherited

⁶⁶ BAK, John S., *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*, p. 29-30.

⁶⁷ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 147.

⁶⁸ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 151.

⁷⁰ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 153.

⁷¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 184-207.

⁷² LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 312.

her fear of the flesh. Her puritan hectoring echoes through Williams' plays: 'Don't hang back with the beasts.'"⁷³ Tennessee Williams, the depressed, sexually repressed and self-destructive artist, now had many years to contemplate about his life and project his thoughts into his new world of drama. Forth came his most famous plays that are the subject of analysis in the following chapters.

In conclusion, based on all the evidence gathered in this chapter, it seems reasonable to assume that Tennessee Williams had great tendency to make his works autobiographical. This supports Lahr with his description of Tennessee as "the most autobiographical of American playwrights"⁷⁴. Elia Kazan, a director that stands behind the original production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, said that Williams' plays "might be read as a massive autobiography... as naked as the best confessions."⁷⁵ Tennessee Williams himself remarked "My work is emotionally autobiographical. It has no relationship to the actual events of my life, but it reflects the emotional currents of my life."⁷⁶

⁷³ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 66.

⁷⁴ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 28.

⁷⁵ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 179-180.

⁷⁶ RADER, Dotson. Tennessee Williams, *The Art of Theater* No. 5.

The Glass Menagerie

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play set in a domestic environment. One of the reasons why I have chosen this play for an analysis is the sheer importance of it for the career of Tennessee Williams. “*The Glass Menagerie*, the play responsible for making Williams famous”⁷⁷. Additionally, the obvious connection between the play, its characters, its story and the personal life of Tennessee Williams suits the purposes of this thesis. Having two important female characters, there is much content to analyse and compare.

Amanda Wingfield, the first female protagonist of *The Glass Menagerie* is a mother of Tom, the narrator, and Laura, her crippled and lonely daughter. Amanda’s indisputable love for her children is impaired with lack of empathy. Her ignorant boasting about her youth filled with gentleman callers is indirectly making her daughter Laura increasingly more self-conscious.

“Now just look at your mother! (*She wears a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. She carries a bunch of jonquils – the legend of her youth is nearly revived. Feverishly.*) This is the dress in which I led the cotillion. Won the cakewalk twice at Sunset Hill, wore one spring to the Governor’s ball in Jackson! See how I sashayed around the ballroom, Laura? (*She raises her skirt and does a mincing step around the room.*)”⁷⁸

The fact that Laura cannot dance, probably also because of her disability, makes her boasting even more inconsiderable. At one side, her actions suggest that she truly wants to help Laura to find her a worthy husband, but at the same time her false self-image is sabotaging her attempts. The constant yammering made it look like she was selling herself to Jim and possibly wanted to make the date just about her instead of making it about Laura. Her flirty approach most

⁷⁷ BLOOM, Harold, *Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 434.

probably did not have any other meaning besides satisfying her emotional craving for recognition of her reborn young spirit. Her youth was taken away by marrying her absent husband, and thus the emotional void was created. Amanda is looking for possible ways to fill this void and at the same time, endure her life situation. In the character description, Williams wrote the following “Certainly she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person.”⁷⁹

Laura, a shy young woman with a crippled leg and no gentleman caller is the second female protagonist. She lives in her own world of glass animals, partly detached from reality. She lacks discipline and motivation, instead of going to business college, she wanders aimlessly around the city. Being conscious of her problems, she lives in a constant inner conflict with her shyness and fragility. Despite her beauty, she is incredibly nervous and submissive.

*“The arrangement of Laura’s hair is changed, it is softer and more becoming. A fragile, unearthly prettiness has come out in Laura, she is like a piece of translucent glass touched by light, given a momentary radiance, not actual, not lasting.”*⁸⁰

During their conversation, Jim O’ Connor serves as a guide in her spiritual awakening. Jim is capable of understanding and shows real empathy. By having a light-hearted and romantic conversation, he makes Laura slowly open up.

“Laura: I’ve never danced in my life!

Jim: Come on, try!

Laura: Oh, but I’d step on you!

Jim: I’m not made out of glass!”⁸¹

⁷⁹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 394.

⁸⁰ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 433.

⁸¹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 456.

This part emphasises the importance of the situation for Laura's mental enlightenment. Jim says he's not made of glass, meaning he is real (not just another of her glass animals) and is pulling her away from her imaginative world. Her collection of glass animals is her only passion and the glass unicorn symbolizes Laura herself. The loss of unicorn's horn symbolizes Laura's change. From that moment on, she is no longer her former self, their conversation changed her look on the world.

Tennessee Williams truly projected his past into this play. The resemblance of the characters to his actual family is evident. Tom, bearing the original first name of Tennessee Williams, is the narrator and personal projection of Tennessee Williams himself. Tom, amongst other things, inherited his alcohol addiction, absent father and hate for the job in the shoe company, Amanda clearly resembles Williams' mother Edwina. Her emotional attachment to her past is inspired by the endless stories about the south that Edwina was narrating to young Williams.

“They knew how to entertain their gentleman callers. It was not enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and graceful figure – although I was not slighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions.”⁸²

The previous paragraph does not only prove the point of her exaggerated self-opinion and her attachment to former life, but additionally it is clearly inspired by Edwina's own wittiness that was many times shown in her conflicts with Cornelius. Endurance and bravery are also some of the qualities that Edwina possessed, even though they were possibly pretended. Regarding the resemblances of lesser significance, it can be pointed out that both Edwina's and Amanda's husbands work for a telephone company, both are part of the D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution) and both share their hate for alcohol. One

⁸² WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 403.

of the more comic similarities is their annoying habit of waking up their children by shouting “Rise and Shine!”. “.... when Mother opened up his doors in the morning, trilling ‘Rise and shine! Rise and shine!’ A cloud of stale smoke would come out.”⁸³

Resemblance of Laura to Rose is also apparent. Both are trapped in circumstances they can neither control nor change. They share crippling shyness, nervousness, but at the same time beauty and fragility. Similarly to Laura, Rose was also conscious of her state and it put a lot of psychological pressure on her. Due to her lack of discipline and ambition Rose too did not attend the business course. The whole plot of the play was inspired by real events. Clark Mills, a poet and former mentor of Tennessee Williams was arranged by Tennessee and Edwina as a gentleman caller for Rose. The events leading to chapter VII were very similar to the actual incident. Rose was unable to stay in the same room with Clark and she could not join the conversation in any way, all the talking had to be done by Edwina.⁸⁴

At the end of the play, Laura gets rejected by Jim and abandons her old self for uncertain future, meaning the chapter VII was a depiction of her final defeat, her ideal gentleman caller was gone forever. Rose was in a similar situation, her lobotomy was meant to help her, but ended up as a total disaster. “Throughout his life and career, Tom would pay tribute to his dearly loved sister and retell her story.”⁸⁵ The ending of *The Glass Menagerie* is probably a projection of Tennessee Williams’ feeling of shame and remorse for Rose’s “last act”.

⁸³ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 181.

⁸⁵ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 7.

A Streetcar Named Desire

A Streetcar Named Desire is a Pulitzer Prize winning play set in New Orleans. Yet another highly autobiographical play, it gives a lot of material to compare with Tennessee Williams' life.

Arguably the most deeply developed female character of Williams' plays, Blanche DuBois, is the main protagonist of this play. Arriving in New Orleans to visit her sister Stella, she is introduced to her brother-in-law and the main antagonist, Stanley Kowalski. Stanley is a masculine and animalistic type of a man that likes to drink, play poker and is not afraid of performing violent acts, even on his spouse. Stanley has a strong set of values which he uses to judge women around him. His impulse driven behaviour invokes feelings of sexual desire in Stella. Despite being a victim of domestic violence, Stella loves Stanley and is attracted to his drive and direct, coarse attitude.

“Stella: But there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark—that sort of make everything else seem—unimportant. (Pause.)

Blanche: What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire! —the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another . . .”⁸⁶

Blanche cannot quite understand the social dynamic between Stella and Stanley. Her idea of love is different, but also very unconventional. Because of her southern manners and image of a “southern belle” she does not feel comfortable in her new environment. She identifies more with the upper-class society and can be perceived as snobbish or straight-up arrogant. Nevertheless, it is crucial to analyse her true identity. Behind her mask of an elegant southern demeanour and dominant, confident and seductive behaviour she is actually a

⁸⁶ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 509.

fragile human being with alcohol addiction, fear of loneliness and a need for validation.

“Blanche: Well—anyhow—I brought nice clothes and I’ll wear them. I guess you’re hoping I’ll say I’ll put up at a hotel, but I’m not going to put up at a hotel. I want to be near you, got to be with somebody, I cannot be alone! Because—as you must have noticed—I’m—not very well . . .”⁸⁷

From the previous paragraph, it is clear that she is indeed afraid of loneliness and needs constant company. This fear is a result of a trauma from her youth, when she got abandoned by her only love. This unknown man was homosexual and cheated on Blanche, leaving her to question her attractiveness for the rest of her life. The following paragraph is just one of the several possible examples of her resulting obsession with appearance.

“Blanche: . . . I want you to look at my figure! (*She turns around*) You know I haven’t put on one ounce in ten years, Stella? I weigh what I weighed the summer you left Belle Reve. The summer Dad died, and you left us . . .

Stella: (*a little wearily*): It’s just incredible, Blanche, how well you’re looking.

Blanche: You see I still have that awful vanity about my looks even now that my looks are slipping! (*She laughs nervously and glances at Stella for reassurance.*)”⁸⁸

Additional proof of her low confidence is the fact that before the date with Mitch she kissed the young delivery boy solely for the purpose of reassurance of her good looks and attractiveness. Her diffidence and need for approval resulted in creation of a fake personality. Blanche repeatedly lies about her age and is completely congruent with using deception to achieve her goals.

⁸⁷WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 477.

⁸⁸WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 476.

“Blanche: I don’t want realism.

Mitch: Naw, I guess not.

Blanche: I’ll tell you what I want. Magic! (*Mitch laughs*) Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misinterpret things to them. I don’t tell the truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful then let me be damned for it! —

*Don’t turn the light on!”*⁸⁹

Her fragile imaginary world of deception crumbles under the overwhelming masculine influence of her brother-in-law. Stanley sees through her lies and does not want to comply to them, instead he makes Blanche face the hard truth. After her false reality gets shattered, Stanley takes advantage of her poor state, bordering on madness, and rapes her. After Stella denies Blanche’s story and turns her back to her, Blanche finally surrenders to the care of the doctors and, possibly, to insanity.

In contrast to *The Glass Menagerie*, in which we can safely assume that Laura is based on Rose and Amanda is based on Edwina, we cannot make a similar assumption about female characters in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The two main female characters are not based solely on one person because both Stella and Blanche bear a mixture of resemblances. This means that Tennessee Williams implemented a variety of autobiographical features across all the characters.

Based on the information given from the act I, we can see a correlation between Blanche and Edwina. They were both living in the south which made them identify as “southern belles”. After Edwina moved to St. Louis, she, similarly to Blanche, felt as an outcast from the society, therefore they both developed a coping behaviour that can be described as snobbish and arrogant. Behind their false image that suggests a brave and strong presence, lies their true, concealed identity. Blanche’s seductive behaviour could be inspired by Edwina,

⁸⁹WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 544.

but it is unlikely that Williams had actually seen Edwina in her flirty and seductive state. It seems reasonable to declare that Edwina was not the main model for Blanche. “She is the extreme opposite and furthest away from the maternal type. She is instinctively oriented towards the individual and relates with him for his own sake and not as a father of her children or for his social status.”⁹⁰ Additionally, Blanche inherited some of the psychological issues from Rose. For instance, on multiple occasions Blanche shows her obsession with appearance that resulted from the mental pain she had to endure in her youth. This is very similar to Rose’s youth which was coincided with constant rejection from men. In other words, they both had to endure rejection from the opposite sex that consequently resulted in their false idea of love and excessive preoccupation with their visage and fashion. Furthermore, they both lived in an imaginary world of lies that easily crumbled under the rough and masculine influence. Rose was a victim of Cornelius’ violent attacks and this naturally left her both mentally and physically injured. Ultimately, both Rose and Blanche ended up defeated and in the care of doctors with severe psychological traumas.

“Stanley: Delicate piece she is.

Stella: She is. You didn’t know Blanche as a girl. Nobody, nobody, was tender and trusting as she was. But people like you abused her and forced her to change.”⁹¹

Having said that, it is also important to note that Blanche can be viewed as a projection of Tennessee Williams himself. Similarly to Blanche, Williams also lived through an alcohol addiction, fear of loneliness⁹² and long history of nervous exhaustions and anxiety attacks. Blanche’s promiscuity can also be a reference to the phase of Williams’ sexual awakening.⁹³ Williams obviously was under great

⁹⁰ BLOOM, Harold, *Tennessee Williams’s A Streetcar Named Desire*, p. 7.

⁹¹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 540.

⁹² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 84.

⁹³ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 527.

psychological pressure that most probably increased after he became a publicly known and respected playwright. Williams' homosexuality and Blanche's promiscuity possibly made them feel like outcasts from their society.⁹⁴ Moreover, their resemblance is supported by their wish to be buried in the sea, this is inspired by the burial of Williams' favourite poet, Stephen Crane.⁹⁵

Stella as a victim of her desire can also be a reference to the Williams' homosexual promiscuity. The fact that Stanley is intentionally clearly depicted as an animalistic and sexual being might be a projection of Williams' own male ideal that he was uncontrollably attracted to at that time. This possibility seems quite logical, considering that most romantic relationships have masculine and feminine sides and Williams is generally described as sensitive and emotional. The guilt Stella felt after the doctors took Blanche is yet another autobiographical aspect from Williams' life which points to the hospitalization of Rose. Nevertheless, it can be suggested that Stella, being a victim of domestic violence, might be also inspired by Edwina and her household situation.

In conclusion, *A Streetcar Named Desire* has many autobiographical aspects and their recognition requires an extensive research of Williams' life. Both Blanche and Stella are inspired to some degree by Rose and Edwina, but it is important to mention that Williams himself hid many of his own personal emotions into these characters.

⁹⁴ LAHR, John, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, p. 276.

⁹⁵ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 14.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is another of Williams' Pulitzer Prize-winning plays. The play is set in a household environment, which suggests yet another autobiographical feature to analyse. The main heroine of this play is Margaret, a wife of an alcoholic and sports announcer Brick. Brick's father, called "Big Daddy", is slowly dying of cancer and the whole family is concerned about who will receive his heritage. Big Daddy needs to decide who will inherit his many thousand acres of land. There are two possibilities, either he will give his land to Mae and her husband Gooper or Margaret and her husband Brick.

Margaret is put under a lot of pressure, mainly because she is childless, and her husband is an alcoholic. Most of the Williams' characters face some sort of frustration in their lives, and Margaret is no exception. Her frustrations are mainly caused by lack of love from her husband Brick. After the death of his friend Skipper, Brick started to drink heavily and question his sexuality. Margaret is a noticeably beautiful woman, and the fact that Brick denies having sex with her and does not want to give her children is making her frustrated and alienated from the family. Both Mae and Brick's mother, called "Big Mama" are constantly making her feel miserable for being childless. As a result, she feels her chance for receiving the heritage is low. On the other hand, Mae has five children with Gooper and many times Margaret feels like she would be a better mother than Mae. This continual rejection from all sides pushes her to identify as a martyr and a "cat on a hot tin roof".

"Margaret: ... I'm sorry. I never could keep my fingers off a sore – I wish you would lose your looks. If you did, it would make the martyrdom of Saint

Maggie a little more bearable. But no such goddamn luck. I actually believe you've gotten better looking since you've gone on the bottle. ..."⁹⁶

From the paragraph above, it is clear that her self-dramatization has a negative impact on her ego. For this reason, she begins to develop a protective "gimmick" to endure her difficulties. It is also crucial to note that Margaret is a truly enduring woman, who does not want to give up neither her husband or her right for the heritage.

"When she opens her eyes again, what she sees is the long oval mirror and she rushes straight to it, stares into it with a grimace and says: "Who are you?" – Then she crouches a little and answers herself in a different voice which is high, thin, mocking: "I am Maggie the Cat!" – Straightens quickly as bathroom door opens a little and Brick calls out to her."⁹⁷

The third act of the play bears great importance for the development of Margaret' character. Her attitude drastically changes when she sees how Mae and Gooper are driven by their greed for the heritage and how malicious they can be even against their own family members. During this act, Brick apathetic attitude is on full display, he does not care about the heritage in the slightest. It is apparent that his only worries are connected to the death of his friend Skipper. Due to indulging in his grief, sorrow and alcoholism, his character does not really develop throughout the play. However, Margaret loses her desperate desire for the heritage and finally starts showing support to her husband. "She wants him not to give in to defeat and passivity. Rather, she wants him to fight his way out of the labyrinth of despair and non-involvement"⁹⁸ By telling others a lie about being pregnant, she tries to improve Brick's reputation, especially in the eyes of Big Daddy. It is at this moment that Margaret stands behind her husband and offers him that they drink together, provided that Brick will have sex with her. The

⁹⁶WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 892.

⁹⁷WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1937-1955*, p. 903.

⁹⁸BLOOM, Harold, *Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, p. 22.

“click” that Brick was looking for during the third act might be a representation of the Margaret’s change of attitude towards him. Margaret no longer stands directly against Brick and his alcoholism, but instead she shows empathy and tries to make the best out of their troubled situation.

Firstly, the entire theme of domestic struggle is by itself autobiographical. Similarly to Williams’ family, the couple that should be expressing their love through their sexuality is not doing so, instead they are showing cold and distant attitude towards each other. The sexual frustration that Cornelius felt because of Edwina might be similar to that of Margaret’s. Margaret and Edwina are both stuck in a household that they see as a prison or cage. Edwina most likely endured this situation for the sake of her children and her own reputation. In Margaret’s case, she endures her unpleasant position in hope for possible future children and reputation that she might get from receiving the heritage. Additionally, both developed a unique brave personality that served them as a protective mask. Margaret shows no greater resemblance to Rose; an exception is their self-dramatization that shows lack of love and recognition.

Secondly, we can see several autobiographical elements in Brick. Tennessee Williams projected into Brick his own alcohol problems, struggles with accepting his homosexuality and conflicts with his father.

Taking everything into account, it is safe to assume that *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* can be viewed as at least a partly autobiographical play.

Sweet Bird of Youth

Sweet Bird of Youth is the last play analysed in this thesis. It was written in 1959, meaning that the play is one of the Williams' later works. The main theme of the play, as its name suggests, is the loss of youth. The main female heroines are Alexandra del Lago, also called "Princess Kosmonopolis", and Heavenly. The following chapter is an analysis of these characters and provides an assessment of their resemblance to Rose and Edwina.

Alexandra Del Lago is a former actress that quit her career because of an embarrassing incident. After she fell from the stairs during her performance, Alexandra fled the city and uses a fake name "Princess Kosmonopolis". Chance Wayne, the main protagonist that works as a male prostitute, is keeping her company during her travels. They enjoy each other's company mainly because they are both obsessed about their past. Chance's main task is to regain his reputation and leave the city with his former love, Heavenly. Unfortunately for Chance, his desperate attempts fail, and, in the end, he only looks like a pathetic drug addict. Similarly to Laura from *The Glass Menagerie*, Alexandra goes through a personal enlightenment. After she sees how futile and ridiculous Chance's attempts to achieve his lost youth are, Alexandra realizes that external recognition and validation will never bring her happiness. From this moment on, she can breathe freely, and her panic attacks are finally over. She does not want Chance to fall into despair and wants to help him realize the same thing she did.

"Princess: Chance, when I saw you driving under the window with your head held high, with that terrible stiff-necked pride of the defeated which I know so well, I knew that your come-back had been a failure like mine. And I felt

something in my heart for you. That's a miracle, Chance. That's a wonderful thing that happened to me. ...”⁹⁹

Despite her newly acquired wisdom and awareness, Alexandra gets rejected by Chance. It is apparent that Chance only wanted to use Alexandra for her fame and contacts, and never actually had any feelings for her. It is possible that he had no real affection for Heavenly neither, given that he abandoned her and gave her a sexually transmitted disease. For Chance, Heavenly was probably just an achievement that would prove his youth was revived. Ultimately, they both accept their fate and face the results of their actions. Chance realizes that his goal is unachievable, and surrenders to his punishment, a castration.

Both Alexandra Del Lago and Heavenly bear certain resemblances to Rose. Both female characters have some sort of medical condition that is making them vulnerable. Heavenly unconsciously received a sexually transmitted disease from Chance, this disease was the reason behind the operation of her appendix. Heavenly is clearly based on Rose because both Rose's and Heavenly's operation sentenced them to be childless for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, Heavenly also was being forced to marriage, and the resulting stress made them both acquire hysterical behaviour.

“Boss: ... And you're gonna wear a proud happy smile on your face, you're gonna stare straight out at the crowd in the ballroom with pride and joy in your eyes. ...”¹⁰⁰

The previous part from the play is presumably inspired by the social gatherings Rose had to attend with similarly forced “happy smile”. Coupled with the fact that Heavenly's brother is also named Tom, it is evident that Heavenly is indeed based on Williams' sister Rose.

⁹⁹ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1957-1980*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁰ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1957-1980*, p. 199.

That being said, Alexandra, apart from having the same disease as Heavenly, is also in a poor condition. Just as Tennessee Williams himself, Alexandra has neuritis, panic attacks and fear of suffocation.¹⁰¹ Alexandra's embarrassing incident can be viewed as a single event that made her lose her sense of youth. As for Edwina, her marriage to Cornelius had a similar effect.¹⁰² After she realized that Cornelius will not bring her happiness, she had to indulge into story-telling and her youth was left just as a memory.

In conclusion, Heavenly is distinctly inspired by Rose, while on the other hand, Alexandra has some resemblance to Edwina and Williams himself. It is also important to note that Williams projected his feeling of pity and anger into the play. "Tom junior", as a character in the play, is a possible representation of Williams' anger towards his father and towards himself. This anger can be connected to his feeling of guilt that he had to endure after Rose's lobotomy.

¹⁰¹ LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 83.

¹⁰² LEVERICH, Lyle, *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*, p. 35.

Comparison of the characters with respect to the autobiographical features of Tennessee Williams' work

Based on the analyses provided in this thesis, it is apparent that the female characters in Williams' most famous plays are to some extent inspired by real people. This chapter provides a comparison of these characters with an intention to assign them to different groups. This chapter additionally serves as a summary of the main autobiographical features that Williams expressed into his works.

The first group consists of characters solely inspired by Williams' sister Rose. Both Laura from *The Glass Menagerie* and Heavenly from *Sweet Bird of Youth* are assigned here mainly because of their fragile nature that they share with Rose. Laura, Heavenly and Rose all have a medical condition that makes them very vulnerable to the outer world. They are not in control of their lives and can be viewed as victims of unfortunate circumstances. Because of their passive attitude and vulnerability, their fate is often decided by other people, mainly by their family members. As a result of the awareness they possess of their problems, they developed self-dramatizing and hysterical behaviour. Rose's lobotomy became an everlasting inspiration for the final defeats of Williams' women characters. The best example of the final defeat is Blanche DuBois' fate in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Rose and Blanche both went through a traumatizing experience because of a dominant male figure. Cornelius' and Stanley's compassionless and cruel behaviour were some of the decisive factors in the hospitalization of Rose and Blanche.

The second group includes characters that bear resemblance to Williams' mother Edwina. While Amanda from *The Glass Menagerie* is based solely on Edwina, Margaret from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Alexandra del Lago from *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* were inspired by her just partially. Amanda inherited even the smallest character traits of

Edwina, like her favourite phrases, hobbies or resentful attitude to alcohol abuse. Margaret's and Alexandra's main goals are more of a representation of Edwina's constant campaign to reclaim her reputation. On the other hand, Blanche represents the feeling of alienation that Edwina had to endure when moving to a new environment that did not respect her values and traditions. Another key aspect these characters share with Edwina is their undue devotion to their past.

Third group is rather a combination of Williams' own personal emotions and struggles. Stella Kowalski and Blanche DuBois from *A Streetcar Named Desire* can be a representation of Williams' newly discovered sexuality and desire. "Williams himself had had no sexual relations until he was twenty-seven. He hadn't even masturbated until the year before that—that repressed had his childhood been. Yet, shortly after breaking out of the closet, circa 1940, he went from 'prude to lewd'."¹⁰³ His homosexuality and promiscuity possibly made him feel like an outcast from his society, this feeling might have been projected into Blanche's own alienation and rejection. The guilt Williams felt in connection to Rose's lobotomy can be seen in Stella's attitude towards her own sister's hospitalization. Naturally, many autobiographical features of Williams' plays can be assigned to multiple people. The chase for reputation and the dependence on the mental image of one's former identity, as seen in the character of Alexandra Del Lago, can be assigned to Edwina and to Williams himself. "It is the Princess, however, who emerges as the play's more vivid character, probably because she expresses things that Williams was experiencing intensely during the mid-1950s, the time of the play's composition, primarily the fading of his artistic powers due to the consumption of alcohol and drugs and the increasing recurrence of panic attacks."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ LARSON, L. Charles, *Our Most Autobiographical Playwright*.

¹⁰⁴ MURPHY, Brenda, *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*, p. 131.

To conclude, while characters of *The Glass Menagerie* were created as a clear depiction of Rose, Edwina and Tennessee Williams himself, most of the other female characters symbolize rather a combination of several inner struggles that all the members of the Williams family had to endure, as described in depth in chapters 4-7.

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to analyse Tennessee Williams' life, especially by focusing on his youth. With the use of biographies and other secondary literature, the personalities of Williams' mother and sister were described as clearly as possible. Based on the information found in secondary sources, it was proven that Tennessee Williams indeed had autobiographical tendencies in his works, even in the early ones. Forth came an analysis of four of his most iconic plays. Based on the results from these analyses, three groups of Williams' female characters were proposed based on their autobiographical nature. Every female character has shown some sort of autobiographical features, whether it was in connection with Edwina and Rose Williams or Tennessee Williams himself.

Nevertheless, the results of this thesis are still open to additional research. Themes that are dominant in Williams' plays, such as madness or loss of youth, can be a representation of Edwina's and Rose's issues, but they may also come from Williams himself or simply from someone completely unknown. Further study of this matter could be focused on other Williams' plays, for example on *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* that was written right after Williams undertook a psychoanalysis which made him more aware of his own mental issues, especially those connected with his sister Rose.¹⁰⁵ Although there is much evidence supporting the assumption that Edwina and Rose had the most significant influence on the nature of Williams' female characters, it is also possible that there were other women who influenced him to a great degree. For example, the impact of actresses Tallulah Bankhead and Blanche Marvin can be a subject of further

¹⁰⁵ SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN, *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 13.

study. Moreover, the study of Williams' relationship with his father, homosexual partners or his girlfriend Hazel Kramer can also yield interesting results.

The psychological torment that the entire Williams family had to endure was undoubtedly projected into Tennessee Williams' plays. Whether it was alcoholism, insanity, promiscuity, homosexuality or guilt, all these themes were implemented into the plays with obvious passion and understanding that suggests a first-hand experience of the author. "In fact, I can't expose a human weakness on the stage, unless I know it through having it myself. I have exposed a good many human weaknesses and brutalities and consequently I have them."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ WILLIAMS, Tennessee, *Plays, 1957-1980*, p. 153-154.

References

Primary literature:

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *Plays, 1937-1955*. New York: The Library of America, 2008. ISBN 978-1-883-01186-4.

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *Plays, 1957-1980*. New York: The Library of America, 2008. ISBN 978-1-883-01186-4.

Secondary literature:

BAK, John S. *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. ISBN 978-0-230-27352-8.

BLOOM, Harold. *Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: Chelsea House, 2009. ISBN 978-1-604-13389-9.

BLOOM, Harold. *Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. New York: Chelsea House, 2005. ISBN 978-0-791-06342-2.

BLOOM, Harold. *Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie*. New York: Chelsea House, 2007. ISBN 978-1-555-46052-5.

HIRSCH, Foster. *A Portrait of the Artist: The Plays of Tennessee Williams*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979. ISBN 978-0-804-69230-4.

LAHR, John. *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014. ISBN 978-0-393-02124-0.

LEVERICH, Lyle. *Tom: The Unknown Tennessee Williams*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997. ISBN 978-0-393-31663-6.

MURPHY, Brenda. *The Theatre of Tennessee Williams*. London: Methuen Drama., 2014. ISBN 978-1-408-14543-2.

SMITH-HOWARD, Alycia and Greta HEINTZELMAN. *Critical Companion to Tennessee Williams: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2005. ISBN 978-0-816-04888-5.

WILLIAMS, Tennessee. *Memoirs*. New York: New Directions, 2006. ISBN 978-0-811-21669-2.

Online sources:

JACOB, Susannah. Blow Out Your Candles: An Elegy for Rose Williams. *The Paris Review* [online]. 2013, December 2013 [cit. 2019-04-15]. Retrieved from: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/12/05/blow-out-your-candles-an-elegy-for-rose-williams/>

LARSON, L. Charles. Our Most Autobiographical Playwright. *CounterPunch* [online]. 2014, September 2014 [cit. 2019-04-15]. Retrieved from: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2014/09/12/our-most-autobiographical-playwright/>

RADER, Dotson. Tennessee Williams, The Art of Theater No. 5. *The Paris Review* [online]. 1981, Fall 1981 [cit. 2019-04-15]. Retrieved from: <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3209/tennessee-williams-the-art-of-theater-no-5-tennessee-williams>

TISCHLER, Nancy m. Tennessee on Tennessee. *Mississippi Quarterly* [online]. 1998, **51**(4), 649-661 [cit. 2019-04-16]. ISSN 0026637X. Retrieved from: <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=8&sid=f93cf39d-8373-429a-9935-65ba8a44ed09%40pdc-v-sessmgr05&bdata=Jmxhbmc9Y3Mmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#AN=1859762&db=asn>

Resumé

Bakalářská práce se věnuje analýze ženských postav v dílech Tennesseeho Williamse. První dvě kapitoly se zabývají popisem Williamsova života a literární kariéry. Stať práce se věnuje analýze ženských postav, jejich komparaci a popisu autobiografických prvků. Cílem práce bylo najít podobnosti mezi členkami Williamsovy rodiny a fiktivními ženskými postavami v jeho hrách. Dle výsledků práce je zjevné, že každá z ženských postav vykazuje určitou míru podobnosti.

Anotace

Jméno a příjmení:	Mario Pokorný
Katedra nebo ústav:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2019

Název závěrečné práce:	Ženské postavy v dílech Tennesseeho Williamse
Název závěrečné práce v angličtině:	Tennessee Williams' women characters
Anotace závěrečné práce:	Bakalářská práce se věnuje analýze ženských postav v dílech Tennesseeho Williamse. Cílem práce je najít podobnosti mezi členkami Williamsovy rodiny a fiktivními ženskými postavami v jeho hrách. První dvě kapitoly se věnují popisu Williamsova života a literární kariéry. Stať práce se věnuje analýze ženských postav, jejich komparaci a popisu autobiografických prvků.
Klíčová slova:	Tennessee Williams, ženské postavy, ženy, autobiografické prvky, americké drama, americká literatura, divadelní hry
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor thesis focuses on analysis of Tennessee Williams' women characters. The aim of the thesis is to find possible resemblances between Williams' female family members and fictional female characters of his plays. First two chapters serve as an analysis of Tennessee Williams' life and literary career. In the main

	body of the thesis, the fictional characters are analysed and compared with attention to autobiographical features.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Tennessee Williams, women characters, women, autobiographical features, American drama, American literature, plays
Přílohy vázané k práci:	CD
Rozsah práce:	38 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk