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**ANALYSIS OF THE WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (BOTH THE WRITTEN PLAYS AND THE FILM PRODUCTIONS)**

**ANALÝZA ŽENSKÝCH POSTAV V HRÁCH TENNESSEE WILLIAMSE (V DIVADELNÍCH I FILMOVÝCH VERZÍCH)**

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## **Poděkování**

Děkuji vedoucímu mé diplomové práce PhDr. Christopheru Koyovi, M.A., Ph.D. za psychickou podporu, odborné rady, připomínky, poznámky, ochotu a metodické vedení, které vedlo k vypracování této práce.

## **Anotace**

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá ženskými hrdinkami v pěti hrách Tennesseeho Williamse a jejich následných adaptacích na filmovém plátně. Množství sekundární literatury je omezeno, diplomová práce se soustředí na vlastní interpretaci ženských postav, zejména na jižanské zobrazení ženy a její role ve společnosti. Tyto role se v polovině dvacátého století zásadním způsobem proměňovaly. Analýza se soustředí na její motivy a sociální interakci s dalšími postavami. Filmová zpracování nabízí další významný pohled a možnost další analýzy. Témata jako osobní konflikty, lidské touhy a strachy, stejně jako sociální tabu, otázky sexuality, mateřství, osobního úspěchu nebo psychické poruchy doprovází ženské hrdinky v dramatech Tennesseeho Williamse.

## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis deals with the women characters in five plays of Tennessee Williams and their visualisation in the film versions. Focusing on interpretation of women characters, particularly Southern women, the amount of secondary literature is limited. The analysis focuses on the role of woman in the society, her motives and her social interaction with other characters in the play. These roles had come to undergo a transformation in the middle of the twentieth century. The film versions of the plays offer another significant view and ways of other analysis of the characters. Personal conflicts, human desires and fears as well as social taboos are described and analysed. The questions of sexuality, motherhood, personal success or psychological disorders accompanies the women characters in the dramas of Tennessee Williams.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the famous plays of Tennessee Williams, an significant american writer of psychological drama. His plays were famous on Broadway and still are played all around the world theatres. The plays were also made into famous movies inspired by the broadway performaces. Famous characters like Maggie, the Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Brick, her husband Brick or Blanche DuBois or Stanley Kowalski were acted by famous actors like Elizabeth Taylor, Paul Newman, Marlon Brando and others. The characters are never black or white. Focusing on woman characters, this thesis goes through the famous plays like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *A Streetcar named Desire*, *Glass Menagerie*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *The Night of the Iguana*. The specific roles of the main woman characters are decribed and analysed. The origin of the author influenced his view on women. The characters, including the women characters, are not highlighted as ideals, but rather are used as a social mirror and means of criticism. The primary source of the analysis are the written plays and broadway performances which were made into movies. The amount of secondary literature is limited because of the focus on personal interpretation. In the performances we can find differences because it is always someone's interpretation of the written text. The characters are shown in different ways through the text, performaces or author's notes in the plays. The outcome of this thesis should be a determination of the women characters on the basis of the analysis. If this hypothesis will be verified it could be used also on the other plays of Williams which are not included in this thesis.



## BIOGRAPHY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Tennessee Williams, born as Thomas Lanier Williams, is considered to be one of the most significant American playwrights of the 20th century. He was born on 26 March, 1911, in Columbus, Mississippi. His father was a salesman. He was the second of three children. His future writing was influenced by his family situation, especially the move to St. Louis was one of the main reasons why he started to write. In his plays he copes with his mother, a southern belle, with his father who was often away and also his sister who had a mental disease and underwent a lobotomy. He also set his plays in cities he used to live in. As a student he has won several literary competitions. He went to university to study journalism but he was withdrawn from the school by his father and started to work as a clerk in a shoe company. He hated the job and turned to his writing. However, he also suffered from depression and had a nervous breakdown. After recovering in Memphis, he returned to St. Louis. In 1937 he returned to university and graduated the following year. When he moved to New Orleans, in the age of 28, he changed his name to Tennessee. His first play, *Battle of Angels*, debuted in 1940 in Boston. Later he revised it as *Orpheus Descending* which was made into film, *The Fugitive Kind*, starring Marlon Brando. In 1945, his play *The Glass Menagerie* opened on Broadway. Two years later, *The Streetcar named Desire* brought him a big success and his first Pulitzer Prize and also a Drama's Critics' award. The other plays like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* followed.

## **WOMEN IN DRAMA**

The word woman and the word drama are connected since the humans are on Earth. Women are emotional and emotions is the base of drama. Women need to express their emotions, they need someone to talk to, someone who can react on their wide variety of feelings: “In such a world, to be a woman is inevitably to be a creature of extremes.” (Kriegel, 1975: 14). They need other people, especially a man. Women and men together, a real drama can arise. The literary form of drama is perfect for portray women: “Perhaps no other art form allows us to view our myths in a clearer light than does dramatic literature.” (Kriegel, 1975: 13). Women have not always had a space for free selfrealization during the history. They had to gain their rights and after that their femaleness was questioned:

“The correlation between how women were portrayed in drama and how women functioned in society is overwhelming. In periods in which they find room for development in their lives, they are self-sufficient, reasonable, sometimes courageous, often inspiring. In periods in which they are constricted within the confines provided by social pressures, they can be demonic or they can be caricature. What they rarely can be is human.” (Kriegel, 1975: 14)

Another fact is that dramas are basically meant to be seen, performed and the experience from this is much more powerful than reading.

Women are the important part of dramatic art since the ancient Greece: “women played an important role in that society, perhaps a dominant one.” (Kriegel, 1975: 15). In the classical Greek theater, women were pictured with depth and they were capable of great heroic acts and passion: “Motivated by complex emotions, they struggle against fate and determine their own destinies as men do.” (Kriegel, 1975: 14). Women are able to survive even if the conditions are not auspicious. They sometimes have to fight for their survival

very hard because of the lack of money, love or a possibility for self-realization: “They possess a solid basis for their nobility, and they are able to live courageously, even without the comfort of love.” (Kriegel, 1975: 14). Even when missing something in their complicated lives, they do not surrender. The drama in the ancient Greece produced many unforgettable heroines, passionate, sometimes insane, but definitely very strong women capable of great acts: “Greek drama remains richer in heroines than any drama that followed it.” (Kriegel, 1975: 16)

The role of women in drama has undergone a change in the Elizabethan drama. The cause was probably the change of society and the idea of family itself which acquired importance: “The family gained a new centrality, and the role of the wife grew correspondingly stronger.” (Kriegel, 1975: 19). A woman should be the part of the family and a good wife for her husband. This led later to an opposite extreme when women fought for their rights and equality:

“A great deal of energy was expended in the controversy arising from the new woman. Pamphlets and sermons began to appear on the dangers and the advantages of feminine freedom. While some preachers felt such freedom was a symptom of the evil of the age, others were quick to come to women’s defense, creating an early feminist literature.” (Kriegel, 1975: 20)

As the ruler of England was a woman, she proved that women are politically competent. On the one side they want her and the society highlighted women, but on the other side the ones who did not agree with her as the head of England were emphasizing women’s weaknesses. It was connected with Christianity and the idea that women are basically sinful.

Women characters are also present in the work of William Shakespeare. His women are intelligent, interesting and self-willed. The women in his comedies are witty and charming, bright and self-possessed: “They frequently control their own property and rule their own lives; they command those who

serve them authoritatively.” (Kriegel, 1975: 21). Then in the times of James I, independent women were not fancied. While the women’s world experienced prosperity in the Elizabethan era, later James I set all the decisions back. After the death of Elizabeth the women character in Shakespeare’s plays were more sinister, demonic, power hungry or irresponsible. The trend was in general increasingly critical.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the age of modern European drama, especially because of the Industrial Revolution, the modern family was created. Traditional structures broke down. The proper function of women were questioned, especially when they, too, began to work in factories... In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the age of romanticism, the marriage was questioned. As feminism took place, the social aspects of marriage were a big topic and women demanded freedom and self-determination. Women’s rights became one of the leading issues in Scandinavia. Women began to organize, hoping to find both intellectual stimulation and economic opportunity in the school system and civil service. Ibsen was convinced that “men and women strive to be true to themselves rather than adopt a role imported by society” (Kriegel, 1975: 26) and that a woman with courage and independence to rebel against stifling convention. The problem of women’s place in society arose. This led to a kind of madness of women’s emancipation. Woman became the tyrant and soul destroyer. Capitalism was in some way evil and harmful for women because it was exploiting them and wasting their potential.

Finally, there is the American Drama. After Shaw, the rational woman all but disappears from drama. Women lose rational identities, they were predators bordering on caricature. For instance, Eugene O’Neill portrayed women as destructive to others as well as to themselves. His women are instinctual creatures, often maternal, often fragile, but destructive in their fragility driven by

emotions which they don't understand. They can dominate men, boss them or arouse them with their instinctual desires.

This thesis will concentrate on the women characters in the selected plays of Tennessee Williams. The probe into the broken soul of then society, which is still valid, has disclosed women in their vulnerability, the damage can be seen, the madness, as well as understanding, is present through his plays:

"Tennessee Williams offers a devastating view of American society through his pitiful women, beings who have no control over their destinies and mutilated by the world, who are overwhelmed by loneliness and weakness." (Kriegel, 1975: 21)

Women were constantly under social pressure, they were tested and judged. The basic function of a woman is, together with a man, to give birth to a new life. However, it is not the only one, women, like men, want to self-realization, they can be pragmatic and persistent. Some realize themselves as mothers, some love to build a career, some just try to survive. Not all are successful. Some are very fragile, while others are powerful. Tennessee Williams has all kinds of women in his plays. He has an eye, both for men and women, to show their weaknesses, as well as their strengths. In his plays, nobody is black or white, good or bad.

## **A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**

Two different worlds clash in the one of the most famous plays by Tennessee Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire*, published in 1947. The first is the old-fashioned scented aristocratic world with big white habitations and rich dancing balls and the second is a new-born place full of dirty workers and their noisy speech. Two sisters come from the same home but one sister decides to go her way and adapt herself to a new America and take it as her own. The other tries to maintain the old traditional standards of wealth and opulence, but without success.

Blanche DuBois comes to visit her sister Stella, now caring the name Kowalski. She is married to a Polish immigrant, Stanley Kowalski. The main scenes are set in the apartment of Kowalski consisting of two small rooms. Blanche directly faces the strong worker-type character Stanley. Stella adapted herself to Kowalski.

The plot comprises of Blanche's arrival, the men's poker game, Blanche dating with Mitch, Blanche's birthday party and taking Blanche away to a sanatorium. These events are connected with dialogues and conflicts, secrets and revelation.

### Blanche DuBois

In the opening of the play, Blanche arrives at Elysian Fields in New Orleans, she transferred from Cemeteries and took the streetcar named Desire before. She goes from desire to a cemetery and ends in Elysian Fields, almost like she was dying. Elysian Fields is a place in Greek mythology in the underworld where souls of the honest and justice come to after death. With

regard of the background she is coming from, the City of New Orleans could denote her underworld. The problem is that only the honest and just can stay in the Elysian Fields according to the Greek mythology, which may explain why Blanche cannot remain there and is instead violently taken away.

From the start it is easy to see that Blanche does not fit here and that she feels uncomfortable:

“(...) Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, ..., looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party... There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth.” (Williams 1947:15)

She is about five years older than Stella and used to be a teacher at the grammar school. She attracts attention and wants everybody to acknowledge her good looks all the time. Her past comes to the surface gradually. As a young lady she had been married to a young boy who then committed suicide. They were both young and in love and Blanche blames herself for his death. Memories of Allan remind her of the feeling of being in love which she is searching for in her relationships with men with similar qualities. She keeps his letters as a treasure: “The dearest possessions among the souvenirs she carries in her trunk as all the tangible proof of her existence are the love letters she received from her poet husband,(...)” (Hovis 2007: 182). Theoretically ignoring her real age, she has an affair with a teenage boy, and as a consequence she had to leave her job and hometown. The tragic end of her young husband leaves her with a deep psychological trauma. She must face the presence of death many times as her parents and close relatives die at their beautiful old house Belle Reve. The costs for medical help and funerals together with a small teacher's income is a reason why poor Blanche is unable to hold Belle Reve after Stella is gone. Blanche blames her younger sister for leaving their beautiful residence.

Indirectly, she places the guilt for her mismanaged life to Stella: "...And I with my pitiful salary at the school. Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! I let the place go? Where were you! In bed with your-Polack!" (Williams 1947: 27). Blanche acts like Stella was blaming her, but in fact, she did not. She manipulates her little sister's mind. The loss of Belle Reve constitutes the first conflict between Blanche and Stanley. He thinks that Stella should have become some financial part of the big house. As her legitimate husband he feels cheated by Blanche. Since Stella deserves her share of the money from the sale of that ground house. Blanche explains him that all that left from the house are papers from lawyers. As they go through the papers Stanley touches her personal love letters from her dead husband. It is horrible for her that someone, especially someone so primitive like Stanley, should touch it. This fact also shows how much Blanche appreciates the love of her dead husband. Stanley is in high contrast to the edified man she was married to. He is strong, vulgar and direct, a real macho-man. This difference is why he repulses her at the beginning, yet also attracts her at the same time. They are indirectly flirting with each other:

Stanley: "If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!"

Blanche: "Such as what?"

Stanley: "Don't play so dumb. You know what!"(...)

Blanche: (to Stella) "On the contrary I saw him at his best! What such a man has to offer is animal force and he gave a wonderful exhibition of that! But the only way to live with such a man is to-go to bed with him! And that's your job-not mine!"

(Williams 1947: 41, 69)

There is a sexual tension between Stanley and Blanche. It is also a question of power. Blanche functions as a disruptive element in Stanley's household: "Stanley sees Blanche more as interloper than as sexual object. His manner is brusque and his motive readable: he wants what's his..." (Film Quarterly:Spring 2002; 55, 3; ProQuest Direct Complete pg. 34). His position as



a strong man, head of the family, is threatened by Blanche. So he shows her his power with violence. Blanche is not easy to get a label. She is neither an aristocratic belle nor a dirty prostitute. That is why Stanley acts violently because of his confusion: "If Blanche were recognizably and openly a prostitute, then she would be much less threatening to Stanley. Because she is both 'whore' and belle, she occupies a liminal space in which labels are less easily affixed;" (Hovis 2007: 181). In Stanley's world everybody has a given role and because Stella has any, she must be deported later. This play offers a scene of something unmentionable, a social taboo of rape. When Stella is in the hospital with the baby, Stanley rapes Blanche: "Stanley raped Blanche because Stanley was Stanley, a human animal driven by instinct, exactly what Stella loves in her husband." (Film Quarterly:Spring 2002; 55, 3; ProQuest Direct Complete pg. 36). He had showed his power and his dominance. There are even more reasons for the rape because Blanche is not completely without any guilt. The conflict between Stanley and Blanche is central in the play:

"He crushes Blanche brutally and completely in the end, but the anguish she causes him is considerable and should not be underestimated-this tension is the dramatic centre of the play. Blanche does not just put a damper on his poker nights and commandeer his bathroom for hours at a time; she also keeps him from his brand of sexual intimacy with Stella..." (Brooks 2007: 178-179)

Stanley is a beast and you can get seriously hurt when you provoke a wild animal. Stanley is a simple personality, while Blanche is a complicated one. Blanche has no world of her own anymore and tries to enter Stanley's, but that does not function either. This tension had to end somehow and that represents the rape and Blanche's departure to hospital. Blanche possibly thinks that she can manipulate Stanley so he will not send her away: "Perhaps she believes that as long as she maintains his sexual interest, if not his respect, then he will not 'destroy' her or put her out onto the street ." (Hovis 2007: 183).

Blanche and Stanley fight each other, both want to gain a superior force. They call each other nicknames. To justify the act of rape, Stanley must claim her a whore and put her mask of southern belle away:

“ Perhaps, on the other hand, by provoking in Stanley an inappropriate sexual interest, Blanche expects to expose the degree of his crudeness and thereby gain control over him-in the same way that he wishes to unmask and dominate her. Their ongoing battle is largely one of name calling and labeling. He calls ‘loco,’ ‘nuts’ (121), and she calls him a ‘Pollack’ (22), ‘primitive’ (39), an ‘animal’ and ‘ape-like’ (83). Before he rapes her, Stanley pursues a campaign of slander in an effort to ostracize her from the allegiance she enjoys from Stella and Mitch.(...)Before he can rape her, he must penetrate her mask of the belle and confidently label her a whore.” (Hovis 2007: 183)

Blanche seems to be afraid of Stanley’s animal energy and the potential exhibition of it, but it is more the disclosure of her true nature that terrifies her: “As much as the actual rape, it is this unmasking that Blanche fears” (Hovis 2007: 183)

Another man who Blanche is flirting with is Mitch, one of Stanley’s friends. He is different than the other men in the group, for he is dressed a little better and also behaves quite shy and kind. He behaves to Blanche much kinder than the rest. They have also the experience with death in common. Blanche thinks that only people who suffered can be honest:

Blanche: “Sorrow makes for sincerity, I think.”

Mitch: “It sure brings it out in people.”

Blanche: “The little there is belongs to people who have experienced some sorrow.” (Williams 1947: 54)

Blanche is unable to create a normal relationship with Mitch after all. She coquettes with him, but that is all she can do because she carries the guilt of the death of Allan. In fact, in her life no true relationship exists. When Mitch is told

the truth about Blanche by Stanley, he does not want to continue their strange relationship. It is her last chance to find love, peace or some kind of safe feeling. In fact, someone like Blanche could be hardly interested in someone like Mitch. She might only want to be secure and have a “normal” husband: “(...)she wants to marry Mitch not because she loves him but because she wants to secure her future.(...)Someone as complex and perceptive as Blanche would likely not be interested in someone as dull and simple as Mitch, at least not for long.” (Hovis 2007: 178)

When stressed, the old memories of the night when Allan killed himself come back to Blanche’s mind. She always hears the “Varsouviana”, the song which was playing exact at the time as he shot himself. She has never admitted it and it tortures her. She cannot live in the present because she has never let her past go. The past means peace, a haven, a home and love to her, something she knows and feels safe. Sometimes it appears like she is trying to fantasize a way to go back to the past times. Her attitude to her age is also in question. She knows that her youth is leaving her, but she is still acting like she were a young woman. She is afraid of aging and that is why she mostly moves in the shade or in weak light. Blanche is very sensitive and has her own ways how to hide it. She explains that she has to shine and feel good-looking. It could also be explained as manipulation, but in case of Blanche DuBois, the one who she wants to convince is herself.

Passivity is typical for Blanche. She only reacts to what happens in her life. She was losing Belle Reve but she was not able to prevent the loss or to solve the financial problems or ask her sister for help. It is interesting that she comes to her last relative when their estate is definitely gone. When she lost the house she cannot let it go, like everything that happened to her goes with her. The journey with all her failures and traumas worsens because Blanche is not

able to adapt herself. She acts like she was still searching for a perfect young lover. She is still searching for old feelings from her youth. The question is what were those feelings based on. Blanche said that she told him something and then he shot himself:

Blanche: "...There was something different about the boy, nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate looking-... Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty, but had two people in it...the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years..."

...

Stella: "I think Blanche didn't just love him but worshipped the ground he walked on! Adored him and thought him almost too fine to be human! But then she found out-...This beautiful and talented young man was a degenerate." (Williams 1947:95)

It means that her husband was homosexual. He could not reconcile his marriage with his genuine feelings for men and committed suicide as a consequence. In fact, there is no place Blanche can possibly go. She does not fit in her sister's world. She cannot go back to her life of southern belle. The character of Blanche does not have any remarkable development. She only gets more far away to reality and closer to the old times. She is in her upper-thirties, but she behaves like a teenage girl without a sense for responsibility and with a big sense for being in love. She chooses to stay in her thoughts in the past and that is why she is unable to live further in the present. Her journey ends up with her metaphysical death in mental asylum.

### Stella

She is the family connection between her husband Stanley and her older sister Blanche, yet totally dependent on Stan. There is a mixture of sexual tension with emotional loneliness in this dependence: Stella [half to herself]: "I can hardly

stand it when he is away for a night...When he's away for a week I nearly go wild! And when he comes back I cry on his lap like a baby..." (Williams 1947:25). Stella adapted herself to living in New Orleans with Stanley Kowalski. In the contrary to Blanche, Stella decided to leave Belle Reve and make her own life: Stella: "But of course there were things to adjust myself to later on. The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche." (Williams 1947:24, 25). In contrast to Blanche, Stella was the active one, leaving home and starting a new life with Stanley. They are expecting a baby. Their relationship is passionate and dynamic and they love each other in spite of very different backgrounds. Stella puts her husband on the first place and makes no pretensions of superiority. They are not rich and have only a two-room apartment but they have all they need: love, friends, a place to live and work. They are very devoted to each other. Stella is the only one who can calm Stanley's wilderness. Although Stella has physically cut all connections to her past life in the South, mentally did she not. She could have helped Blanche maybe. Instead of it she left and managed her new life. Still, she feels guilty that she could take care of her sister:

"Stella also has a stake in what happens to Blanche. She genuinely cares for her sister and affectionately describes memories of their past lives, but she also bears the guilt of having left Blanche to manage for herself at Belle Reve. The more she learns of the family's decline and Blanche's struggle to keep it afloat, the more she exhibits guilt for having chosen to leave home and find her own way. Blanche's arrival in New Orleans provides her with an opportunity to both help her sister and alleviate her feelings of guilt." (Brooks 2007: 179)

At the end of the play, Stella is thinking about what could she do for her sister. She wants to offset that she did not help her in the past. The right choice, she thinks, is to put her in a mental asylum. Stella thinks that it is a revelation for Blanche, but in fact it is a punishment for being "Blanche". Stella is an antagonist to Blanche in the way of living. Stella lives a good life spiritually, but

Blanche in contrast cannot find a place satisfactory to her standards anywhere and she is taken to a nursing home. There is no place for her in the real world. Stella is in a very hard situation, she lives her own life and Blanche impairs it with her presence and habits which are strange and incomprehensible for all the people around. The loss of the only relative is also worth to mention. Stella is now left alone without its roots: “With the loss of her sister, Stella is left alone in the world with no remnant of her family and its culture...now she is fully immersed on the rough and heterogeneous lower culture of New Orleans.” (Hovis 2007: 184). Stella realises what happens to Blanche and she will have to somehow find a way to live further. She also has to deny the fact of the rape to be able to live with Stanley. Her neighbour and friend Eunice advises her not to believe that her husband raped her sister, she even tells her to ignore it and keep on living: “(...)as Stella confesses to Eunice, ‘I couldn’t believe her story and go on living with Stanley’ (165), after which Eunice instructs Stella in the sort of day-to-day denial necessary for survival on the streets: ‘Don’t believe it. Life has to go on. No matter happens, you’ve got to keep on going.’ (166).” (Hovis 2007: 184)

### The film version

The film was released in 1951, directed by Elia Kazan, with Marlon Brando as Stanley, Vivien Leigh as Blanche and Kim Hunter as Stella. It has won several Oscars, including “Best Performance” of Vivien Leigh and Kim Hunter. The film arises from the written play and the Broadway production because both the performance and the film was directed by Elia Kazan. With the visual medium, he shows us the pulsating noise and crowded streets of New Orleans. He offers us the crowded train station, the loud bowling bar and the fighting and wrangles of the night life. The film also uses the dramatic musical elements, for example, the polish song only Blanche hears together with the old voices in her head. These elements are only briefly described in the play,

whereas they get highlighted with the use of audiovisual means in the film. The use of light comes also in foreground. In the scene where the sisters first meet at bowling, Blanche turns the light away from her not to show her real condition. When Stanley reveals the truth about her, Mitch puts the lantern away and Blanche stands directly in the light for the first time. The scenes are identical as described in the play, the centre is the Kowalski apartment and its surroundings. Due to the arrangement of the scene, the nature of both Stella and Stanley is obvious. She repeatedly runs away from Stanley, but always comes back when she hears him screaming her name. She also comes literally down to his level when she goes down the stairs from their neighbours' apartment. Stanley never comes up the stairs in the same way he never changes his manners. Stella comes from an upper class, but she decides to adjust herself to Stanley's level. The meeting of the two sisters happens when Blanche comes to bowling where she finds Stella. Holding hands, they sit together at a table and talk. Stella asks Blanche if she wants to drink and offers her lemonade, but Blanche wants better scotch whisky. They drink few drinks and Stella hardly keeps Blanche's pace in drinking. It is obviously the first moment of showing a potential alcohol problem which Blanche constantly denies to be a real problem. The film adaptation is being censored in the way that there is not mentioned the homosexuality of Blanche's husband.

## CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

In the play set in Mississippi by Tennessee Williams *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1955, women characters play a decisive role, even though the protagonist of the play is a man. Nevertheless, the title of the play refers to the hero's wife. To be a cat on a hot tin roof signifies that you have to be smart and tough, while managing hard times in your life. Such features are evident in the role of Maggie. Full of mendacity, alcoholism, lies and death, this play shows people's bad features and their inner dark intentions as well as their deep sexual and power desires.

A quite large southern family gets together to celebrate the birthday of Big Daddy, an elderly very rich business man. He has two sons, the older son is nicknamed "Gooper" and the younger is called "Brick". Gooper's family comprises of himself, his homely wife Mae, five children with another child on the way. On the other side there is Brick with his beautiful wife Margaret, usually nicknamed "Maggie", who are without any children. Big Daddy's wife Ida is also part of the family and she is nicknamed Big Mama.

### Margaret, the Cat

Maggie is the most compelling woman character appearing in this play. She is dissatisfied, because everybody blames her for not having any children. Her husband "Brick" does not want to sleep with this highly attractive woman whom even his elderly dad finds, to put it mildly, very good looking:

Margaret: "...In fact!-I sometimes suspect that Big Daddy harbors a little unconscious "lech" fo' me..."

Brick: "What makes you think that Big Daddy has a lech for you, Maggie?"

Margaret: "Way he always drops his eyes to my boobs an' licks his old chops!" (Williams 1955: 19)



Only a few people know, that Big Daddy was being told lies about his health status. Maggie is one of them and she plans for action. She grew up in poverty and then she married Brick, a rich, popular sport star in school and later in professional sports. Maggie is seriously worried about her future now and is trying to win Big Daddy's favor.

“Maggie is a 'cat' on the 'hot tin roof' of patriarchy, moving and dancing and performing to acquire wealth and comfort through the only means available to her: marriage. In her youth she struggles to get out of her family's economic destitution by marrying someone wealthy, but she is hindered in her efforts as a debutante and as a young bride by the fact that she has nothing more to wear than hand-me-down gowns. And her struggles for financial security hardly end once she marries Brick. ...Deliberately indentifying herself again as the cat, as she does in almost every passage about money, she is the only one to confess openly the extent of her schemes and manipulations.”  
(Bibler, 2002: 390)

Maggie does not want to return into a life of poverty. She is not so popular in the family but she is trying to do what she can. Allegorically, she is dancing with wolves, swimming with sharks and balancing on a hot tin roof. Smart as a cat, Maggie is not giving up on her dream, but in this dirty game she will use her soul to achieve her goal. She is determined to get into Big Daddy's last will.

Her *grâce du samp* comes at the end of the play when she makes her mendacious announcement about being pregnant to the whole family. Brick plays the game with her. The actual making of the baby is still in question because this couple does not sleep in the same bed. Maggie uses his drinking as an instrument. After getting it done, she promises to give him his liquor. Finally, as a future mother she will be recognized as a real woman, and what is more, a real part of the family.

### Mae, the Cat's Enemy

Mae, Gooper's wife, is another woman in the play. Theoretically, she appears to be a perfect mother. The two sister-in-laws hate each other. In contrast to Maggie, "Sister Woman" is not pretty, but she has five children and is pregnant with number six. Mae blackens Maggie's name constantly. She and her husband thereby plan to win over Big Daddy's favor. The strongest weapon in their arsenal are their many children, as they naively think, whom they exploit in front of Big Daddy as often as possible.

Mae allegorically may be classified as a dog barking at the cat on the hot tin roof. She is neither as smart as the cat-like Maggie, for she does not go about her goal cleverly: her behavior is more impulsive, overt and half-baked. In her arsenal of skills she does not wait for the perfect moment or plan elaborate actions. Mae thinks that Big Daddy loves her children, but in fact he does not. Mae is unattractive, in contrary to Maggie who has got a strong sex appeal and this characteristic is also relevant to their personalities. Mae's children look and behave like her, having especially short necks, and acting in a cloying way. The more children she has the better woman and mother she thinks she is. Mae knows that Maggie has ambitions and is crafty, so she suspects that she may have some plan. Mae, nicknamed "Sister Woman", takes every opportunity to highlight her and her husband's positive attributes to bring Maggie and Brick's reputation down. She acts like a hotspur and tries to blame Maggie and her husband's alcoholism that they are not sleeping with each other. She exploits their personal problems in front of Big Daddy to explain why they do not have any descendants:

Mae: "...Do you know why she's childless? She's childless because that big, beautiful athlete husband of hers won't go to bed with her, that's why!" (Williams 1955:143)

### Big Mama, the Cat's Mother-in-Law

Her first name is Ida, but has the nickname “Big Mama” for the family. She is a typical housewife and thinks that her life of travelling and wealth is a fairy tale. She cannot stand the fact that her husband is seriously sick and she will be alone. She also does not wish to hear negative issues regarding Brick's alcoholism or any problems in his marriage. She is screaming at the others and pushing them not to speak about it, including Gooper and Mae. Nothing but her husband exists for her and she loves him very much. The fact that Big Daddy does not love her would kill her if she knew it, but only Brick knows this fact.

Not used to adapting herself to new circumstances, Ida is a wife of a rich southern businessman, whose comfortable life has been full of shopping and travelling. She loves Big Daddy with the enthusiasm of a little girl, and everything seems beautiful to her. There were some problems, but now everything is perfect. Big Daddy celebrates his sixty-fifth birthday and the family is together, so things are like they should be. Maybe something similar is in her mind too, because she must convince herself every time that all is going well, because there is no other way to keep her calm and happy all the time. She is ignorant of Big Daddy's knowledge that it is all a big mendacity.

Big Mama is a very naive simply thinking person. She cannot handle the truth or accept it:

Big Mama: “It's all mistake, I know it's just a bad dream.  
...Yes, it's just a bad dream, that's all it is, it's an awful dream.  
...Just a dream, a bad dream.” (Williams 1955: 138, 139)

Being so happy that her husband is not dying, so she is not able to believe that he is actually fatally ill and nothing could be done against it. For her it is not only unacceptable, it is unimaginable. She then tries to silence the rest of

the family from talking about the residence and about the last will of Big Daddy, because it reminds her (and him) of his death:

“Big Mama: ...Big Daddy is not going to die! I want you to git that into your haid, all of you!” (Williams 1955: 139)

Male characters dominate over women in this plot of this play: Brick with his indifference and Big Daddy with his will to live after the behavior of the women who love them. Alcohol was for Brick the only way to not become crazy and Big Daddy felt very strong when he thought that he was not dying.

This play is full of conflicting issues, which many people deal with in their life, universal issues such as a new life, death, diseases, lies, hate and also annoying people and family. These themes make this play so popular. It speaks about themes which touch everybody, but which are rarely discussed so openly. The psychological motives of people's are important. For example, Maggie and Mae struggle the same goal: to win property, but their motives differ. Maggie does not have any other possibility, and she does not want to be poor. Her husband is no security for her, so instead she must care for everything. She must care for him, for herself and also for their future. There is nobody else who would do this, so Maggie must. She is smart enough to wait for the perfect moment and tell all that she is pregnant. That is a walk on a thin ice because it is a lie, but she can take the risk because she knows what to do to make that lie come true. On the contrary, Mae is married to a corporation lawyer and that is more than an alcoholic ex-football player. She just wants property. Gooper is the first-born and it should belong to him (and to her as his wife) according to traditions.

Conflicting goals are represented and the techniques to achieving their dreams are depicted, but the cleverest is the cat on a hot tin roof. The world is

sometimes also like a hot tin roof. What makes it so hot and hard to walk on it? It is not for any weakling, so one must be determined to accomplish anything, as one feels the temperature going higher and higher. The winner is the one who can walk on it longer than the others. The ability to plan your steps calmly is a key issue in this game of life. Maggie, generally stays calm while Mae is blackening her name and reputation. She listens quietly when she accuses her of lying. When the right moment comes, Maggie hits her in the most painful subject: a baby. Big Daddy is very happy and Big Mama too. At this point, Mae and Gooper lose their biggest advantage. Brick's drinking problem is left, but the baby represents big hope that maybe Brick will somehow handle it. Maggie convinces him to make the baby and he agrees. She is a resolute strong woman.

“Margaret: Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you-gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of-and I can! I'm determined to do it-and nothing's more determined than a cat on a tin roof-is there? Is there, Baby? [She touches his cheek, gently]”  
(Williams 1955: 158)

### Changes to Act three

This final act was rewritten by the author at the request of the director Elia Kazan. Only because Williams wanted to make it famous and more popular.

Firstly, in the original version Big Daddy is missing in this act. His painful cry heard in the backstage constitutes his only presence. The director wanted this impressive male character not disappear in the end of Act Two. Secondly, Brick should “undergo some apparent mutation as a result of the virtual vivisection that he undergoes in his interview with his father in Act Two.” (Williams 1955: 124). Finally, Margaret should be more sympathetic to

the audience as the author describes the reasons. The most remarkable change is the character of Big Daddy as he acknowledges Brick in his last will after Maggie's announcement of being pregnant.

### The film version

Dramas are not supposed to be read, but performed. I will analyse the text. In my thesis I combine this (written text and performance).

In the first Act, Brick and Maggie have a long dialogue. There are two moments where there is violence between them. Firstly, when Maggie wants to sleep with Brick, although he does not want to and secondly as they are talking about Skipper. Brick gets very angry and he even throws his crutch out of frustration.

In this famous play of Mississippi, a philosophy of life is omnipresent. Big Daddy, as his nickname indicates, wants to hand his plantation and fortune to his popular, but second born son Brick and that means there must be someone who will continue the family ancestry, a baby. Gooper and Mae tell the truth about Maggie's and Brick's physical relationship. To tell the truth means to lose in this game because life is a mendacity. Big Daddy tells Brick that life is like this and that he has been living like that all his life, such as his love for "Big Mama" etc. That is a philosophy of life! Mendacity, lies!

At the end of the play, Maggie tells all that she is pregnant, although it is a lie. From a lie arises a new life. Maggie is decided to make that lie true. This new life is a lie and it is a happy ending. Williams tells with his play that life is fake and you have to live with that. Once you tell the truth you lose, but if you play the game, you will succeed.

Actually we cannot be sure if they really make that happen and have a baby because of Brick's potential homosexuality:

“And we can't decide whether he is going to sleep with Maggie because his friend Skipper's earlier admission of his own homosexuality casts suspicion on his friendship with Brick and, consequently, on Brick's sexual identity as well.” (Bilber, 2002)

After all, one thing we can be sure and that is the fact that Maggie will stay on a hot tin roof as long as possible until she reaches her goal.

## **THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA**

The plot of this play is set in Mexico, 1940. All the action is centered in hotel Costa Verde, its verandah and cubicles. Maxine Faulk is the manager there. One day her old friend Shannon comes by bus full of women tourists.

The women characters are all connected with the main male character, the reverend T. Lawrence Shannon. All the women are set around the centre point of him. He is like a caretaker of them and connected with them all. The women are described by his words and by the dialogues with him. All want him for their own different reasons. He is the alfa and the omega of this play. He will help to understand the behaviour of the women and their motives.

Firstly, there is a group of women travelling with Shannon, as he works for the travel agency, and there is Miss Fellowes who hates him and Charlotte who adores him. Secondly, there is his old friend Maxine Faulk, who lost her husband and wants Shannon as a substitution. Thirdly, there is Hannah Jelks, who travells with her grandfather, a deserving old poet. These are the main circles around Shannon.

The last women characters are Frau Fahrenkopf and Hilda whose names are only for completeness as they are not present in the film production.

### Maxine Faulk

Maxine is one the main characters in this play. She is the manager in the Hotel Costa Verde. She is described as a 45-years old woman who is affable and lustful. Her physical appearance goes together with her personality. She is sturdy, strong and aggressively attractive, a very direct person. She is not shy or moderate. She is sensual and natural like a rain forest with all its sun, storms and



wet. Her vixenish laughter is typical for her. She is dressed in jeans and blouse, in a very informal and seductive way. The loss of her husband had a huge impact on her life. Maybe it was bigger than she can confess. Maxine has financial problems now. She loved her husband, even when they did not make love or even talk for a long time. Her physical needs fill up the young Mexican boys who work in her hotel. Maxine's husband must be very perceptive to her. He was her antipole. Maxine is wild, he was calm. That is exactly what she needs: balance, anchor or harbour. Wilderness needs to find peace which it does not have in itself and which needs to be found somewhere. Nevertheless, there is also the question of money and worry. Fred took care about managing the hotel and Maxine is now very helpless and worried. That is why she wants Shannon to stay with her:

MAXINE: „C'mon up here, Shannon. I want to talk to you.“

SHANNON: „What d'ya want to talk about, Widow Faulk?“

MAXINE: „Let's go down and swim in that liquid moonlight.“

SHANNON: „Where did you pick up that poetic expression?“

MAXINE: „Shannon, I want you to stay with me.“

SHANNON: „You want a drinking companion?“

MAXINE: „No, I just want you to stay here, because I'm alone here now and I need somebody to help me manage the place.“

(Williams 1961: 126)

Her relationship with Shannon is very friendly, even if they have their own way of communication full of light impertinent hints. He jokes about her clothes and she gossips about everybody around her, including Shannon.

Maxine is very caring towards Shannon, sometimes too much and he does not like it, because of her directive method „do this, do that“, for example, when she wants him to take Fred's shoes, socks or sleep in his cabin. She misses Fred very deeply:

MAXINE: „...I had just lost my husband and he'd left me in

such a financial hole that if living didn't mean more to me than money, I'd might as well have been dropped in the ocean with him." (Williams 1961: 47)

Maxine takes every opportunity to touch Shannon, for example when she helps him with shaving. Shannon comments Maxine's roughness even when she is asking for help. Her style of communication is very sharp, mostly when she is angry. If she is being touched uncomfortably, she makes her „Ha!“ and changes the topic or ends the conversation.

Maxine also does not understand Shannon's „passion“ for young girls. She would like to have him for herself and she is jealous that he does not want a real woman, like she is.

MAXINE: „You know I'll help you, baby, but why don't you lay off the young ones and cultivate an interest in normal grown-up women?“ (Williams: 18)

MAXINE: „Why do you want the young ones-or think that you do?“

SHANNON: „I don't want any, any-regardless of age.“

MAXINE: „Then why do you take them, Shannon? [*He swallows but does not answer.*]-Huh, Shannon.

SHANNON: „People need human contact, Maxine, honey.“ (Williams: 22)

She is upset because he does not want her, a real woman. Hannah Jelkes is aware of Maxine's jealousy. Maxine swims with Mexican beach boys, makes love with them, even if she knows she loses their respect for her. This act of night swimming is for her only physical. On the other hand, the relationship with Fred was spiritual or mental for her, because they do not have physical relationship for a long time.

Maxine considers Hannah as a potential danger. She sees that they have understanding for each other and Hannah is even a little bit younger than

Maxine. Their personalities are also completely different, Maxine's southern temperament and Hannah's calm behaviour. Maxine offers Hannah to stay even longer than one night if she promises to keep her hands off Shannon. Hannah is for Maxine a real competitor.

### Hannah Jelkes

She is a very special woman in this play. Travelling with her grandfather, the oldest living poet, her life is not ease. She has to take care of him and try every day to sell some of her watercolours and quick portraits to hold her grandfather's dream of finishing his poem. She often behaves unpredictably, but after the first impression, her motives become to come on light. The first thing which comes together is her peaceful, calm behaviour. Harmony and light are typical for her, better expressed it is her calm manners and way of her speaking and appearance. She is almost like a creature from a different world, especially when she appears for the first time. Through the play it is more and more evident that she is really just a normal human being, just only very strong and reconcile with her fate. Her destiny is to be a granddaughter and to take care of her grandfather, a famous poet. She seems to be the only one who chooses her destiny and who is satisfied with her choice. She made a decision and she acts according to it. That is why one hates her and another adores her. The reason why Hannah and Nonno travel the world is not clearly expressed. One of the explanation could be the idea of escaping from something. It could be hard for them to stay at one place. Hannah has a peaceful personality which she shows in dialogues with other characters, especially with Shannon. Hannah and Shannon are both emotionally exhausted. The dialogue between Shannon and Hannah, their short but deep spiritual relationship, is eminently essential in this play. Shannon considers Hannah to be a real lady, when she offers him her last cigarette without hesitating.

Another point is that Hannah is his only true listener: „*Iguana*, stands apart from the other plays, for in Hannah Jelkes, Shannon finds a sympathetic audience who does not spurn his story.“ (O’Connor, Jacqueline: Bloom’s modern critical views)

This is absolutely crucial for the whole play and for the heroine of Hannah Jelkes: her understanding. Literally, it means that she does not judge anyone. The way how Hannah talks about herself confirms her behaviour. She has invented methods which she uses in difficult situations: taking a deep breath, drinking poppy seed tea etc. She also talks about the signification of „home“. Shannon is very curious about Hannah’s love life. When they share the intimate dialogue on the veranda, Hannah tells him about her experiences. The Maxine-Shannon-Hannah triangle also must be mentioned. In this situation stands Shannon between the two women, Maxine who pulls him to herself and Hannah who gently sends him towards Maxine. He himself is attracted more to Hannah, but she has her own destiny.

#### Charlotte Goodall

This young Medea, as Shannon calls her, is a very attractive young woman. She is like a child who found that there is love and making love for the first time. She is stubborn, wild and wants a man very badly. She seduces Shannon, but as she is very young, the one who gets in trouble is Shannon. Her appearance is rather static in the play. She functions as Shannon’s sin and temptation and Miss Fellowes’ ammunition against him. She behaves childishly and she cannot control her new-found sexuality. Charlotte is obsessed with Shannon, like a child wanting a candy stubbornly with screaming and kicking around on the floor. She constantly misuses her innocent look, especially against

the helpless Shannon. He blames her for disclosure of their affair:

SHANNON: „How does Miss Fellowes know what happened that night? Did you tell her?“

CHARLOTTE: „I didn't tell her, she guessed.“

SHANNON: „Guessing isn't knowing. If she is just guessing, that means she doesn't know-I mean if you're not lying, if you didn't tell her.“

CHARLOTTE: „Don't talk to me like that.“

SHANNON: „Don't complicate my life now, please, for God's sake, don't complicate my life now.“

CHARLOTTE: „Why have you changed like this?“

SHANNON: „I have a fever. Don't complicate my . . . fever.“

CHARLOTTE: „You act like you hated me now.“

SHANNON: „You're going to get me kicked out of Blake Tours, Charlotte.“

CHARLOTTE: „Judy is, not me.“

SHANNON: „Why did you sing 'I Love You Truly' at me?“

CHARLOTTE: „Because I do love you truly!“

SHANNON: „Honey girl, don't you know that nothing worse could happen to a girl in your. . . unstable condition. . . than to get emotionally mixed up with a man in my unstable condition,huh?“

...

CHARLOTTE: „All I know is you've got to marry me, Larry, after what happened between us in Mexico City!“

...

CHARLOTTE: „I don't believe you don't love me.“

(Williams 1961: 52-53)

The high emotional acting of Charlotte graduates in few moments and Shannon reminds her that it was her who seduces him:

SHANNON: „(...) When I brought you home that night I told you goodnight in the hall, just kissed you on the cheek like the little girl that you are, but the instant I opened my door, you rushed into my room and I couldn't get you out of it, not even when I, oh God, tried to scare you out of it by, Oh God, don't you remember?“ (Williams 1961: 53)

### Miss Fellowes

She is the one who watches on Charlotte. The first reason why she hates

Shannon. She think he seduced her, but it was, in fact, completely vice versa. The seductive element was Charlotte. Miss Fellowes thinks that young Charlotte is innocent and that Shannon is a dirty seducer and liar. She is a perfectionalist, who hates unprofessionality and irresponsible people. Shannon is a cheater in her opinion. Every time these two characters appear at the same time on the same place, a big loud debate follows:

MISS FELLOWES: „Yes, *cheat!* You haven't stuck to the schedule and you haven't stuck to the itinerary advertised in the brochure which Blake Tours put out. Now either Blake Tour is cheating us or you are cheating Blake Tours, and I'm putting wheels in motion-I don't care *what* it costs me-I'm. . . .“ (Williams 1961: 92)

Maxine comments Miss Fellowes and her female companions in a very rude way.

Topics like love, human contact, jealousy, lust, religion and God, spirituality, morals, spiritual and physical love, self-identity are all touched by the women characters. There is a situation between a widow and a virgin. It could have be named as fight, but it is not a real fight, as the one is not fighting. Hannah Jelkes is a silent calm traveller who fights only her inner resources of energy, on the contrary, Maxine Faulk fights mostly outside: to win Shannon, to win Love, not let Hannah to take Shannon away. The delineation of sexuality comes in contrast in the view of Hannah and Maxine. For Hannah, it means something more spiritual, she experienced two times something sexual for her, but she is still virgin. Maxine puts the physical love on top, even if she feels it is only a part of real love. The one part is missing, and that was Fred, her husband. She divided love between a silent alliance with Fred and a loud animal love act with her employees.

### The film version

The film was released in 1964 and directed by John Huston. Maxine Faulk played by Ava Gardner, Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon by Richard Burton, Charlotte Goodall by Sue Lyon, Hannah Jelkes by Deborah Kerr and Miss Fellowes by Grayson Hall. The film has won the Oscar for “Best Costume Design”. The main difference between the play and the film is the omission of the German family and the Nazi imminence. The character of Charlotte functions also very differently than in the play. Whereas being more passive in the play, Charlotte seduces Shannon actively in the film. After being taken away by Miss Fellowes in the play, Charlotte is not seen anymore. In the film she goes to the beach drinking and flirting at first with the Mexicans and also with Hank. Whereas in the written text, Shannon looks like a seducer, in the performance there is no question that the seducer is really the young Charlotte. She literally panders to Shannon and when he rejects her, she starts to flirt with Hank. Miss Fellowes is also shown differently when she relinquishes the responsibility for Charlotte and gives her the freedom of doing whatever she wants. In the film also Maxine offers Shannon and Hannah to stay in the Hotel and manage it together, while she would like to go back to the US. Hannah rejects this offer and leaves. The film also offers the exterior scenes of the singing bus of women tourist, the swimming in the ocean and the image of hot summer weather.

## **SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH**

The main character of this play is Chance Wayne, a man in his late twenties who is coming back to his hometown, while the lead women character is an aging actress who is fleeing from a dark reality of aging. *Sweet Bird of Youth* begins and ends in the city of St. Cloud. Alexandra Del Lago, also using the nickname Princess Kosmonopolis, comes with Chance Wayne in the town to the Royal Palms Hotel. They both use several drugs and drink alcohol. Chance is the caretaker of Princess. He wants to make a big career and finally, take away his dream girl from St. Cloud. After his arrival, George Scudder visits him. Doctor Scudder tells him that Chance's mother died a couple weeks ago. They cannot reach him and the church collected some money to make her a nice funeral. The main thing is that Chance is seriously warned to go away from town because of what has happened in the past. There are several conflicts which create a genuine drama: „*Sweet Bird of Youth*, like its companion pieces, is comprised of intersecting triangles: Chance, Heavenly, and Heavenly's father, Boss Finley; but far more important, Chance, Heavenly, and Alexandra del Lago.“ (Clum: 39)

### Alexandra Del Lago, alias Princess Kosmonopolis

As an aging actress travelling with her younger companion Chance, Alexandra abuses alcohol, pills and drugs to forget about who she is and what has happened. When her film was released she fell off the stairs. Her failed comeback led to her escape. Unable to take care of herself, she even forgets Chance's name or where she is any moment. Princess is so fed up with her real name that she cannot stand even hearing it aloud. She tries to distance herself from her identity. While Chance is making a phone call and uses her name, she cannot stand it:



PRINCESS [*shouting*]: “Don’t use my name!”(...)  
PRINCESS [*shouting again*]: “Don’t use my name!”(...)  
PRINCESS: “Hang up!”[*He does He comes over with his drink and the bottle to the PRINCESS.*] „I want to forget everything, I want to forget who I am ....” (Williams 1959: 26)

She seems to be easily manipulated, because of her temporary nervous and physical blackouts. She is drunk most of the time or she just sleeps or looks for pills or oxygen mask. Chance, who wants to be an actor through Alexandra’s possible influence, is trying to gain a advantage by using unethical means. Princess is blackmailed by him with his secret record of her talking about drugs. Alexandra shows him her domination and endurance: „When monster meets monster, one monster has to give way, AND IT WILL NEVER BE ME. I’m older hand at it ... with much more natural aptitude at it than you have.”(Clum 2007: 43). Her strength comes from her experiences, and what is more, from her financial and influential power. There is the woman in dominant role and Chance, a male gigolo is shaming himself for being a woman’s toy:

„Chance is a gigolo, a man who lives off the money of the women who hire him for sex and companionship. The gigolo is the most fascinating case of reversal of the sex/gender system. The woman is in financial control and pays the financially dependent man to service her physically and emotionally.”(Clum 2007: 40).

There is no absolute agreement in the relationship between Princess and Chance. They both are monsters in their own ways. Princess seems to be confused because of her drinking and taking drugs yet she is much wiser and more experienced than Chance. She knows how to give orders and care about money. Chance is also her lover but only in that case she could forget about her worries. As she says to him, it is the only way she is able to forget. Their relationship is possible because they both can get something from each other.

Chance's goal is to be an actor and win his old love, Heavenly, while Princess wants to forget her past and get her sexual satisfaction: PRINCESS: "Now get a little sweet music on the radio and come here to me and make me almost believe that we're a pair of young lovers without any shame." (Williams 1959: 48). Princess has an understanding for Chance and she wants to help him. "The play celebrates the endurance of Alexandra del Lago, capable of honesty with herself and others capable of shining moments of compassion, even love" (Clum 2007: 42). "Chance, you're a lost little boy that I really would like to help find himself"(Williams 1959: 57)

What makes Alexandra so strong and capable of survival is her art of adaptability. She is a real star. Her movie acting „can fight time.(...)Alexandra's triumphs still exist even when her career is almost over.“ There is a desire to fight time and morality. Alexandra fights with the help of her acting which can do this, indeed. She also uses sex and sexuality: "Sex, too, momentarily transcends time, but only momentarily." (Clum 2007: 42). The next issue is the idea of castration which bears upon Chance, Heavenly and also Alexandra. Chance faces it in reality and also in the way of being a sexual toy of Princess, Heavenly undergoes a metaphysical castration by the physical surgery of abortion and Alexandra possibly faces it thanks to her aging. She answers Chance's accusation of „her forcing him to perform sexually with the notion that: "Age does the same thing to a woman" (Clum 2007: 42). Clum also claims that the real centre of the play is Alexandra, and not Chance: "(...)Alexandra, is the core of the play, not Chance...Like many of Williams's heroic women, Alexandra has the strength to face an uncertain, potentially bleak future." (Clum 2007: 43). She thinks that her career is gone because she feels old. Chance, as her young lover, gives her some kind of value, but only until she gets to know that her last movie is a huge success. After that, she no longer needs Chance, she only needs a driver to take her towards her fame.

## Heavenly

Heavenly, the beautiful daughter of Boss Finley, an influential politician, is the reason why Chance is in town. She was with him as they were young and had undergone an abortion. Her father thinks it was Chance's fault but his daughter assures him that he was not guilty. Heavenly blames her father for Chance's fall and her inner death:

HEAVENLY: „Don't give me your 'Voice of God' speech. Papa, there was a time when you could have saved me, by letting me marry a boy that was still young and clean, but instead you drove him away, drove him out of St. Cloud. And when he came back, you took me out of St. Cloud, and tried to force me to marry a fifty-year-old money bag that you wanted something out of-

BOSS: „Now, honey-

HEAVENLY: „-and then another, another, all of them ones that you wanted something out of. I'd gone, so Chance went away. Tried to compete, make himself big as these big-shots you wanted to use me for a bond with. He went. He tried. The right doors wouldn't open, and so he went in the wrong ones, and- Papa, you married for love, why wouldn't you let me do it, while I was alive, inside, and the boy still clean, still decent?“ (Williams 1959:71)

She also reproaches him that he was not honest and broke her mother's heart:

BOSS: „Are you reproaching me for-?“

HEAVENLY[*shouting*]: „Yes, I am, Papa, I am. You married for love, but you wouldn't let me do it, and even though you'd done it, you broke Mama's heart, Miss Lucy had been your mistress-“

BOSS: „Who is Miss Lucy?“

HEAVENLY: „Oh, Papa, she was your mistress long before Mama died. And Mama was just in front of you....“ (Williams 1959: 71)

Heavenly still feels stressed because of her operation. She cannot have children anymore. She would like to commit suicide but she does not want to embarrass her father any more. Instead of it she wants to become a nun:

HEAVENLY: „Papa, I´m sorry my operation has brought this embarrassment on you, but can you imagine it, Papa? I felt worse than embarrassed when I found that Dr. George Scudder´s knife had cut the youth out of my body, made me an old childless woman. Dry, cold, empty, like an old woman. I feel as if I ought to rattle like a dead dried-up vine when the Gulf Wind blows, but, Papa-I won´t embarrass you any more. I´ve made up my mind about something. If they let me, accept me, I´m going into a convent.“ (Williams 1959:73-74)

Her father does not agree with that. She is his daughter and she has to represent him correctly, and such an action would kill his political career. Heavenly does not want to obey his orders but he is definitely ready to hurt Chance Wayne who is back in town.

Her ethereal name makes Heavenly unreachable. She is not only Chance´s love and his dream girl, but above all she represents the fact that he has already lost his best years of beauty and prime: „Unlike Alexandra del Lago, Heavenly is an impossibility. Her father will never let Chance take her away and she is nothing but a 'dream of youth,' broken and rendered sterile by the venereal disease Chance gave her, now forced to marry the doctor who cut her diseased womb.“ (Clum: 41)

#### Aunt Nonnie

As Chance´s probably last relative, she worries about him. She thinks that Chance lives in a dream and that it could have a tragic end:

AUNT NONNIE: „I’m not going to talk about it. I just can’t talk about it. Your head and your tongue run wild. You can’t be trusted. We have to live in St. Cloud....Oh, Chance, why have you changed like you’ve changed? Why do you live on nothing but wild dreams now, and have no address where anybody can reach you in time to-reach you?“ (Williams 1959:81)

She is also referring to the fact that she could not reach him to tell him about his mother’s death. She sees how Chance takes pills and warns him to get out of St. Cloud. His aunt is probably the only one who truly cares about him and his future, but she cannot do anything to stop him.

### Miss Lucy

She is the mistress of Boss Finley. He regards all people around him as his property, giving jewelry to women and orders to everybody. Miss Lucy does not want this anymore. She writes a message on a mirror in ladies’s room, which anybody could read: „Boss Finley,....., is too old to cut the mustard.“ (Williams 1959:68). She thinks that Boss Finley is not able to succeed. Later, she meets Chance in a lounge bar. She welcomes him in a quite friendly way. She has similar plans: to succeed through someone else’s influence and she is also unsuccessful. In contrast to Chance, she seems to accept it with a smile on her face.

### The film version

The plot of the play begins at the hotel room. The film starts with a scene showing Chance driving a car, while leaving Florida. Alexandra is in the back seat and Chance buys her vodka at the petrol station. The main difference is at the end of the film. The play ends up with Chance’s final word to the audience and the film closes with a happy end of Chance leaving the town together with Heavenly. In the final scene Tom Finley hits Chance in the face. In that moment Boss Finley arrives with

Heavenly in the car. She runs towards Chance, while her father chooses rather to answer the phone from governor . Heavenly cries and holds Chance whose face is half covered with blood. He tries to calm her down. She smiles and they run away together in the car. Boss Finley does not understand how she could leave him. Aunt Nonnie says that he could go to hell and she also leaves. She is happy that Heavenly finally left the house. She was possibly the only reason why Nonnie stayed in Finley's residence. In this scene is prominent that Heavenly is only a tool in her father's business. He worries only about his reputation and career, he does not care about his daughter or her happiness.

## **THE GLASS MENAGERIE**

Focused on the members of one urban family, this play is set in St. Louis, in 1945. There are still relics of the financial crisis. The atmosphere of despair is ubiquitous. Traditions like men looking after the family persist, but it is not unusual for a woman to work. Still, the position of a man in society is very dominate.

This play is unique in many ways according to other Williams' dramas. Firstly, one of the main characters also functions as narrator. The story is narrated retrospectively as a memory. Secondly, according to the opening of the first act, this play is, as the author himself claims at the beginning, unrealistic. This corresponds to the fact that the characters do not eat real food, do not use real dishes and do not type on a real typewriter. They only pretend to perform these activities. The next point is that the portrait on the wall changes during the play. At first there is just the father but later also other people can be seen. Williams also includes autobiographical elements: he had a close relationship with his sister, who was hospitalized with mental illness and underwent a lobotomy.

The plot of the play is situated in the small apartment where the Wingfields live and the nearby surroundings, like the emergency stairs. The father of Laura and Tom is present only on a photograph. The two live together with their middle-age mother Amanda. Tom's co-worker, along with the other male characters help to narrate the story of Laura and her mother. The plot functions as Tom's explanation regarding why he left the family.

## Amanda

The mother, Amanda, a tragicomic figure, whose husband left her many years ago, struggles to making a living. She is centered on getting her daughter a husband so that Laura would be secure and Amanda as well. Since their income is very limited, the mother sees only one possible option: to find Laura a wealthy husband. Amanda lives in the past: she no longer has a future so she returns to the past quite often in her outdated stories. She repeatedly tells her children how she was young, beautiful and charming and how many gentleman callers she had (and how rich they all were).

In short, Amanda exaggerates how beautiful she was and makes her daughter feel hopeless by comparison. She does not earn money so she directs Laura to go to work, not in order to make money but to attract a man. According to Amanda's beliefs, a woman exists to be wanted. A woman should attract many men, not reveal if she is in love, and then choose the best one which usually means the richest one. She repeatedly mentions the number of military men who were chasing her. In the South, soldiers were highly desirable as potential husbands, for they were strong, clean, brave men, almost the romantic ideal of a man. However, Amanda herself married an alcoholic who left the family in the end. It is almost a mystery how Amanda could end up with such a man when she retells stories of men of much greater quality showing an interest in her. Although her youth is gone, she wants to behave like a woman from a family with a certain social status. Her former lifestyle is considered as the only possible standard. This view is projected into her children's lives. Tom should be a young perspective gentleman and Laura should be a young lady ready for marriage and family life. Amanda's memories do not fit into her current situation of poverty and abandonment.



Tom and Laura do not live in a past which they have never experienced. Tom especially hates his mother's outdated stories and her hunting for a man for Laura. In contrast, Laura excuses Amanda's behaviour, trying to do what her mother wants. All Laura wants to do is to please her. Amanda gives orders mainly to her son, Tom, even though he is a grown man. She is criticizing his lifestyle all day long. Maybe that is why he escapes daily to the cinema, so as not to listen to it:

“Her 'constant directions,' as Tom calls them, also include advice about health, work and success. At various points in the play, for example, Amanda tells Tom to eat a good breakfast, drink less coffee, and spend less money on cigarettes, so that he will be a more productive worker. Elsewhere, when Tom informs his mother that he goes to the movies because he 'likes adventure,' Amanda tells him that 'Most young men find adventure in their careers' or 'they do without it!' Amanda insists that Tom conform so that he can work his way up the corporate ladder.” (Babcock 1999: 23)

Amanda thinks her son inherited all the exterminatory features from his father like drinking alcohol and going out at night. She believes that a real man should not have these animal instincts. A good Christian, as she convinces herself, does not behave like an animal. Amanda pushes her children to conform to the expectations of the traditionally organized Southern society. Do what you are expected to do: work, have a husband, a family, and earn money.

None of her children is fulfilling her dreams. Tom has his flights to poetry and movies. Laura, though, might want to be a proper girl and please her mother, but she is unable to do it. Amanda projects her dreams into her children's dreams, she is frustrated that her life goals were not fulfilled so her only hope lies in her children to be more successful than she was.

Unfortunately, her projection of her broken dreams into her incapable

children is a beforehand lost game. Both of the siblings are very poetic who love art. The dramatic part is represented by the hyperactive always talkative mother: "...every dramatic element in the play emanates out from the mother, Amanda. Dream and its repressions, guilt and desire, have remarkably little to do with the representation of Amanda in the play, and everything to do with her children." (Bloom, 2007: 7).

Amanda has never left the traditional southern world in her mind and memories. Although this world is slowly vanishing, Amanda still tries to keep its values like a well-dressed charming woman, marriage and prosperity. Unfortunately, her effort falls flat and no happy end happens. She maybe used to be a belle of the South and therefore she might serves as a caricature of the southern world:

"Of course, the world of Williams's dramas is not the Old South but his contemporary America, an ethnically and culturally heterogenous urban world, a setting in which Williams's belles appear comically out of place. As a remnant of the antebellum South, their presence serves to reenact the dynamics of that earlier culture within a contemporary context and thereby ctitiques both the earlier culture and its continuing presence in the contemporary world." (Hovis, 2007: 173)

### Laura

Laura is a shy and quiet young lady. She does not have any boyfriend or even any acquaintances. She passes time with her glass collection of animals which her mother calls "glass menagerie". Her mother wants her to marry a young gentleman, but Tom reminds his mother that Laura is not like other girls:

TOM: "Laura is very different from other girls."

AMANDA: "I think the difference is all to 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.”

AMANDA: “In what way is she peculiar-may I ask?”

TOM: “She lives in a world of her own-a world of little glass ornaments, Mother... She plays old phonograph records and-that’s about all-” (Williams 1945: 80,81)

Because of her physical disability, she is reclusive. Laura’s self-confidence is therefore very low. More than company, she plays with her glass animals, listens to old records or visits art museum and Zoo bird house. Her mother wants her to become a perfect woman, which means being charming, giving compliments to men and serving them. Laura is under constant social pressure and she feels her limp being worse than it actually is. She thinks she is a cripple, but she is not; she can even dance. She makes a big handicap out of a minor problem. That corresponds to her psychosomatic problems like vomiting in typing school:

“Unable to conform, however, Laura spends her days on the margins of the culture she cannot join. She goes to the 'art museum,' the 'bird houses at the Zoo,' and the 'big glass house where they raise hothouse flowers.' Yet Laura’s problem-her inability to standardize herself-only arouses feelings of frustration in her mother/manager, whose solution is to marry Laura off to a 'normal' man, Jim O'Connor.” (Babcock 1999: 24-25)

The climax of this play is definitely the visit of Tom’s co-worker Jim. Amanda makes huge preparations like it was almost a wedding. When Jim arrives, Laura recalls that she was in love with him at high school. Of course he did not know about it, but he remembers her.

At the beginning of the visit, Laura is very shy, but Jim is very kind to her and she opens herself up a little. She has a big fear of intimacy deep inside herself, probably grown with the help of her mother and her Christian beliefs.

After all, Jim persuades Laura to dance with him. He also speaks about confidence and flatters her with lots of compliments. They dance and even kiss. For Laura it is a dream she never believed would come true. However, as they are dancing, they break one of the glass animals: the unicorn. His horn is broken. Babcock explains the symbolism:

“As an artifact, the unicorn represents the antithesis of Jim’s instrumentation. On one level, it symbolizes the hand-made craft of mercantile capital. More important for Tennessee Williams the artist, however, is that the unicorn symbolizes the position of the art object (and therefore the artist) in an increasingly mechanized world. It is the opposite of the mass-produced shoes, gum, newspaper sports heroes that are associated with Jim O’Connor...The unicorn must become ‘like all the other horses’ because, as Jim says, ‘Unicorns-aren’t they extinct in the modern world?’ Laura’s renunciation of her difference is made complete with the breaking of the horn. Although Jim destroys the horse, Laura will ‘just imagine he had an operation’: ‘The horn was removed to make him feel less freakish....Now he will feel more at home with the other horses, the ones that don’t have any horns.’ Ultimately, Laura cannot conform to the values of either business or marriage, so she renounces the real world in favor of the couch, where she plays with her glass figures and listens to records.” (Babcock 1999: 27-28)

Jim starts to apologize for himself and, the second disaster is that after a while, he admits he has got a girlfriend. Jim is so charmed by Laura that he even forgets he has a girlfriend. They are engaged and he is going to the train station for her. Laura is an opposite of his fiancée Betty. Even Laura’s name indicates something romantic. Jim gives her a nickname “Blue Roses” which “itself signifies her affinity for the natural-flowers-together with the transcendent *blue* flowers, which do not occur naturally and thus come to symbolize her yearning for both ideal or mystical beauty and spiritual or romantic love” (Cardullo, 2007: 66). She loves art and nature, it goes along with her collection of glass animals, which joins both of them. Her collection is as fragile and pure as she is. Her destiny is the same as the destiny of the unicorn. A materialistic world represented by Jim kills something that cannot survive in the current world. The unicorn means

something romantic and there is no place for romance in the world oriented on achievement and conformity. The fabulous animal dies, it becomes one of the group of normal animals, but it means his metaphysical death to be like others. The same waits for Laura: "Indeed, Laura's physical as well as emotional frailty betokens an early demise, if not a death-wish on her part—a death that would bestow upon her the ultimate union with Nature so prized by the Romantics and so elusive or unattainable in life." (Cardullo, 2007: 68-69). In other words, it criticizes the society in which anything romantic cannot exist. Maybe it could only exist in life after death.

When Jim destroys her beloved animal, Laura behaves calmly as usual. She never really believed she could be loved. She gives Jim the unicorn and he leaves. After he leaves, without a word, Amanda is shocked as she sees Laura alone in the room. As she finds out the truth, she is angry at Tom that he has brought an engaged man. All preparations were useless and Amanda has to start over a new plan. She continues to sell magazine subscriptions and Tom leaves the family. Being far away he cannot forget his beloved sister Laura. At the end of the play, when Tom has his final speech, the audience can see Laura blowing out candles which symbolizes her fate:

"Indeed, at the end of the play Laura herself blows out the candles that Jim had brought to their encounter, and she does this in recognition not only of her brother Tom's departure from her life, together with that of her father before him, but also of the Gentleman Caller's leave-taking. The implication is that no gentleman caller will ever enter her life again; none will ever be gentle enough among an American people so crassly materialistic to perceive her inner beauty, to appreciate her love for beauty, to understand her unnatural, if not supernatural, place in a world ruled by science and technology instead of heart and soul." (Cardullo, 2007: 73-74)

An important aspect in the play is also the lighting of Laura. She is beautiful and unique and the light shining on her emphasizes it: "As her gentle caller speaks, Laura is aptly bathed in the soft light coming from the new floor

lamp her mother has especially purchased for the occasion.” (Cardullo, 2007: 68). There is almost a biblical element of the lighting and that also illustrates Laura’s ethereal nature. As Cardullo also notes:

“...the lighting of Laura Wingfield...is as poetic or expressive as its quotations and signifies just how different or special, if not heavenly, she is...Williams writes that 'the light upon Laura should be distinct from others, having a peculiar pristine clarity such as light used in early religious portraits of female saints or madonnas.' (9-10)” (Cardullo, 2007: 72)

The sibling issue is a key thing in this play. It is hardly influenced by the personal experience of Williams and his relationship with his sister Rose, whose name also represents something romantic. This drama is an honour as well as William’s way how to align with such a hard family situation. As mentioned before, it is also a criticism of the emotionally depleted society.

#### The film version

Amanda Wingfield really comes to life in the presentation of Katharine Hepburn in the special stage-to-screen production of *The Glass Menagerie*, filmed in 1973. She proves that Amanda is the main dramatic element in the play. Her stories about gentleman callers sound like fairy tales, hollywood movies leading to a happy ending, only that Amanda’s happy end did not come. Excited about her beauty and charm in the past, she seems similar to the character of Don Quixote who fights a forelost absurd battle and who also lives in the romantic past. Amanda cannot change the basic principle of Laura. This shy girl speaks more with her eyes than with words. The conciliation can be seen in the way she looks on the world. She feels sadness because of her mother’s trying but she cannot change herself. Well, she could, but that would have meant death for her, as well as for the broken unicorn, who is an usual animal without his horn. She could conform herself but she would be like others and her

essential spirit would die. Anyway, she has no future in this world.

When the mother finds out that Laura lied and she went to museum instead of the typing school, she gets mad at first. Laura tries to explain and Amanda surprisingly listens. It is hard for her to believe that Laura is a shy girl. Laura behaves and moves mostly in a calm way, but some kind of horror can be seen in her eyes when she imagines she would have to go back to school where she fell on the floor. The similar situation happens when she finds out that her high school love is coming to dinner. Paralyzed by the information, she is not able to move or speak. Laura literally shines when she speaks about the beauty of art and nature. She can only live in a world full of beauty, art and music.

The lighting of Laura, as described in the play, is in the film not so obvious. Even though the last scene with the candles is there.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis analysed the women characters in selected plays of Tennessee Williams. The analysed plays were *A Streetcar named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Glass Menagerie* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*. The transformation of the plays into film version as well as the transformation of the women characters was also described and analysed. The film as a different kind of medium offered an extended opportunity of delineation of the characters. The individual transformations of the women characters are noted. Women characters represent an important element in the plays of Tennessee Williams. His wide scale of women characters could have been possibly influenced by his personal life, including his mother and sister. The fact of his homosexuality could also give him the ability to describe women in a complex way as mothers, sisters, seducers, housewives. He was able to describe their layers and not only the surface. His women stand mentally naked in front of the audience. One after another, their inner layers are revealed and most of the women characters, being both strong and vulnerable at the same time, stand in front of the audience to expect understanding and accepting them. Williams uses women in several archetypes from vulnerable to strong women, from seducers to old maids, from reasonable to insane characters. Some of the characters show similarities and several types could be distinguished, such as: seducers, strong women, insane women, household women and etheric women.

### Seducers

These kind of women has a strong sexual desire. Their purpose is to seduce a man, to use all available means to win his love and express their sexuality. They are dynamic and active, attractive and aware of their beauty, sexuality and charms. Seducing women rely on their physical appearance and smartness. In this category belongs Charlotte Goodall in *The Night of the Iguana* and Blanche DuBois in *A*



*Streetcar named Desire*. Charlotte seduces Shannon and Blanche seduces mostly young boys.

### Strong women

This kind of woman is rational, intelligent and persistent. They often fight for survival or independence. They have a goal and are prepared to do whatever it takes to achieve it. Such a determined woman is Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Standing on the border with insanity or illusion stands also Amanda from *Glass Menagerie*. Alexandra del Lago in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is also a strong woman who controls her life even when abusing drugs.

### Insane women

This category dominates Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* with her image of ex-southern belle and her tragical end in the mental asylum. On the border stands also Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* as a former southern belle as well.

### Household women

These women carry about their families, children and husbands. They try to keep the family together. They are devoted wives and mothers. Here belong devoted Stella Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Amanda Wingfield in *Glass Menagerie*, Big Mama and Mae in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

### Ethereal women

In this category belong Hannah Jelkes in *The Night of the Iguana* and Laura Wingfield in *Glass Menagerie*. They behave calmly and are interested in art. Both of

the concrete women expresses a certain kind of sad beauty and conciliation with their destiny.

These archetypes of women can help to understand Williams' work and his views on society. The division of the types of women helps to find similarities in his plays which does not have to be evident. The analysis of the women characters could be possibly compared with the analysis of the women characters in the plays of other significant playwrights of the twentieth century like Arthur Miller or Eugene O'Neill. The position of woman now and then could also be a possible topic. The rest of Williams' dramas could also be analysed. The similarity of the archetypes could also be a good question.

## CZECH SUMMARY

Téměř v každé z pěti her Tennesseeho Williamse zmíněných v této práci se vyskytuje nějaká výrazná ženská hrdinka. Hlavní postavy nejsou ploché a povrchní, ale naopak mají obvykle bohatý vnitřní život a často se musí vyrovnávat s nelehkou minulostí a nejistou budoucností. Každá z analyzovaných ženských postav to řeší svým vlastním způsobem, od přizpůsobení se maskulinnímu nelítostnému světu až po zapouzdření v minulých světech, kde lze ještě nalézt zbytky jejich osobnosti. Autentičnost jednotlivých postav také umocňuje prostředí zalidněných měst, míst, která sám autor důvěrně znal. Scény jednotlivých her jsou jednoduché, kdy se většina dialogů soustředí na jednom místě a nejbližším okolí. Ve filmových adaptacích je pak celkový obraz ještě rozšířen o exteriérové scenérie a většími možnostmi zobrazení a dokreslení představ např. zalidněných a hlučných ulic, vlakových stanic, barů a podbně.

Williams čerpal náměty na své hry jak ze svého mládí na americkém jihovýchodě, kde se narodil v Columbu, ve státě Mississippi, tak ze svého pozdějšího života v New Orleans a St. Louis. Rovněž je patrná také inspirace jeho vlastní rodinou. Jeho otec byl obchodní cestující, který byl často pryč. Tato skutečnost se odráží ve hře *Skleněný Zvěřinec* z roku 1945. V této hře, která je silně autobiografická, se objevuje sám autor v podobě mladého Toma, který vzpomíná na svou sestru. Williams měl ke své sestře úzký vztah a tato hra mu sloužila jako možnost vyrovnat se s pocitem, že jí opustil, když sestra prodělala lobotomii kvůli psychické nemoci. Také postava matky, Amanda Wingfieldová, byla inspirována jeho vlastní matkou, bývalou jižanskou kráskou. Otec, jak již bylo řečeno, není fyzicky přítomen, na zdi visí pouze jeho podobizna.

Jeho pravděpodobně nejslavnější a nejznámější hra *Tramvaj do Stanice Touha* se odehrává v rušném prostředí New Orleans. Zde vyčnívá především postava Blanche Duboisové, bývalé jižanské krásky, která přijíždí navštívit svou mladší sestru Stellu a jejího manžela., polského přistěhovalce Stanleyho

Kowalskiho. Neschopna žít dál bez své mladické lásky, Blanche neustále utíká do představ o své kráse a neodolatelnosti. Není schopna se adaptovat na prostředí bowlingových heren, kasin a rušných ulic New Orleans, tolik odlišných od jejího bývalého aristokratického života. Kvůli aféře s mladým studentem je vyhozena z místa učitelky a jede proto navštívit svou sestru. Postupně se odkrývají jednotlivé vrstvy její osobnosti a vyplouvá na povrch, že Blanche není ani jižanská kráska ale ani děvka, jak se jí snaží očernit Stellin manžel, který jí nemůže snést. Ve hře je zajímavý způsob zobrazení sexuality, která je do jisté míry tabuizována a za což je Blanche odsuzována. Také znásilnění Blanche jejím švagrem stojí za zmínku. Stella se rozhodne tento fakt ignorovat, aby vůbec mohla žít dál se svým manželem, s kterým čeká dítě. Cítí se ale provinile, že nedokázala své sestře pomoci a ta musela být odvedena do bláznice, což se v jejím případě rovná smrti, jelikož Blanche není schopna přežít v tehdejší světě.

Mezi další hry, které přispěly k Williamsově věhlasu, patří bezesporu *Kočka na rozpálené plechové střeše*. Tato hra také proslavila na Broadwayi Elizabeth Taylorovou, která dokonale ztvárnila postavu Maggie a přidala jí na důrazu. Kvůli touze po kladném přijetí hry, Williams na radu režiséra Elia Kazana změnil třetí akt, kde dal více prostoru postavě Velkého Tatky, který po oznámení Maggiina těhotenství ustanoví svého mladšího syna Bricka jako svého dědice. Autor také chtěl zjemnit postavu Maggie, aby byla publikem lépe přijata. Za *Tramvaj do Stanice Touha* a *Kočku na Rozpálené plechové střeše* dostal Tennessee Williams Pulitzerovu cenu.

Mezi jeho další hry, kde vystupují ženské postavy patří *Noc s Leguánem* a *Sladké ptáče mládí*. V *Noci s Leguánem* dominuje postava Maxiny Faulkové, smyslné majitelky hotelu Costa Verde. Její živelnost vyvažuje klidná éterická Hannah Jelkesová. Okolo ústřední mužské postavy reverenda Shannona se točí také mladá svůdkyně Charlotta Goodallová a její opatrovatelka slečna Fellowesová. Ve *Sladkém ptáčeti mládí*, reprezentováno Chancem Waynem zase

vyčnívá postava stárnoucí herečky Alexandry Del Lago, která je přes svou prvotní zmatenost z důsledku zneužívání návykových látek, schopna si udržet zdravý rozum.

Williams vytváří ve svých dílech širokou škálu žen. Jeho pohled na ženu jako takovou byl pravděpodobně ovlivněn jeho výchovou, kde hrála jeho matka významnou roli, jeho blízkým vztahem k vlastní sestře, tak i jeho vlastní homosexualitou, která mohla podpořit jeho komplexní pohled na ženy. Hrdinky jeho her často bojují o přežití všemi dostupnými prostředky. Některé jsou úspěšné, jiné podnikají pouze zoufalé pokusy. Williamsovy ženské postavy jsou, stejně jako ženy v reálném životě, silné a zranitelné zároveň. Často se musí určitým způsobem zapřít, aby byli schopné v životě obstát. Některé z nich volí únik do světa představ o světě, který již dávno neexistuje, v těchto dílech jde především o jižanský svět plný plesů, velkých sídel a zašlé krásy. Jeho postavy možná vyznívají depresivně, ale rozhodně působí přesvědčivě, obzvláště v podání vynikajících hereček jako Elizabeth Taylorové nebo Viven Leighové, která za ni dokonce dostala Oscara, nejvyšší herecké ocenění. Elizabeth Taylorová byla rovněž nominována, sošku ale nezískala, i když podle mnohých si ji za tuto roli skutečně zasloužila.

Williamsovo psychologické drama zobrazuje nejhlubší lidské touhy, dotýká se i na tehdejší dobu ožehavých témat jako sexualita, znásilnění, homosexualita atd. Williams své hry často přepracovával a upravoval, aby zajistil větší úspěch u publika. Dával také prostor režisérům, kteří dost často vytvořili typický hollywoodský happy end, například v *Kočce na rozpálené střeše* nebo *Sladkém ptáčeti mládí*. Mnoho slavných herců a hereček si vybírali jeho hry, které jim pak zajistili věhlas. I když ke konci života nezaznamenal Williams výraznější úspěch, jeho dílo významně přispívá k americkému dramatu a jeho hry se dodnes hrají po celém světě.

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