



**Universidad**  
Zaragoza

**Undergraduate Dissertation**  
Trabajo Fin de Grado

**Gender and Sexuality in the 1950s: Social Outcasts  
in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams**

Author

**Estíbaliz Ruiz García**

Supervisor

**Mónica Calvo Pascual**

FACULTY OF ARTS  
2017/2018

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Biographical influences

Thomas Lanier Williams, known as Tennessee Williams by most, was born in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911 but moved with the rest of his family to St Louis, Missouri, which meant that he lived in the South of the United States for most of his life, although he died in New York in 1983. The play under analysis, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was his second most successful play and awarded him a Pulitzer Prize in 1955. Williams was one of the most prolific authors of the time, being acclaimed as the world's most eminent living dramatist by *Time* in 1962 (Adler 1-5).

Concerning his plays, and more importantly, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, it is very important to take into account the autobiographical elements Williams introduced in his writing. The presence of the South in the play is so relevant that it could almost be considered another character; the play does take place in Mississippi, where Williams was born, and thus the values of the South that Williams learned through his mother are present in the play. In addition, we also find some characters that represent Southern types, such as Mae and Big Mama, the traditional Southern ladies, and Maggie, who shares the physical characteristics of the Southern Belle. Another biographical element incorporated in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the controversy around Brick and Skipper, who are going to be analyzed in further detail in this dissertation, as possibly homosexual characters and the suffering this sexual condition brought to the people at the time, which is related to what Williams was suffering during the 1950s due to the historical phenomenon known as the Lavender Scare.

Williams's sexual orientation is also relevant to this play and his career as a writer. Although his homosexuality had to be hidden at the time he made it a relevant

component of some of his plays. Not only that, but he made misfits relevant in his plays, favoring the outcasts of society. Due to his sexual condition he felt an empathic connection towards them, as a homosexual writer who had to hide his sexuality because of the time. Moreover, some of the most recurrent themes in his career are “human isolation, sexuality as means of transcending aloneness, [...] and the need for a non-judgmental compassion for those whose moral systems are different from one’s own” (Adler 2), which can be easily seen in the play at hand. This representation is key in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, where both the main characters are alienated from society and where Williams projects some of his anxieties about homosexuality and the South where he had grown up and whose values he was supposed to inherit. Furthermore, he does so in a way that denounces a society focused on punishing misfits, and by giving voice to these characters, the outcasts, who were usually silenced and not given the opportunity to explain themselves. Thus, my dissertation will attempt to demonstrate that Williams offered a challenging aspect of the stereotypes of the time and a revolutionary critique upon society’s views on certain standpoints that were changing, all of which will be achieved through the analysis of the main characters from both a queer and a feminist perspective.

## **1.2. Historical Context and the Lavender Scare**

The historical context in which this play was written and Williams’s place in society are also very relevant to the analysis of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* for a deeper understanding of the text. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* belongs to the 1950s as it was published in 1955. This was a time of unpredictability and hostility in the United States due to several factors, like the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare. The former was related to the prosecution of

Communism in the government that extended to other areas, like cinema or even writing; Arthur Miller, another well-known playwright of the time, had to testify in front of the House of Un-American Activities Committee. The latter took homosexuals as security risks for the government of the United States.

The 1950s was a difficult time for both genders. After the Second World War, during which women had occupied traditionally male jobs and entered the labor market for the very first time, they had become significantly more independent in comparison to the years before; however, this changed quickly as soldiers returned home and to their former jobs, thus pushing women back home and forcing them to abandon their jobs to be, as demanded by the American hegemonic ideology, good mothers and wives — that is, to take care of the family and the house. The consequence of this was a growing sense of despair in the female population of the country, as is partly seen in Maggie's character — although for different reasons — and the beginning of a movement known as the Second Wave of Feminism. Even though Maggie will be analyzed later in further detail, this is related to her frustration and her growing sexual demands towards Brick, threatening the traditional patriarchal society which did not allow women to question male self-confidence (Blackwell 12); until then, there was no place for insecurities in the male sphere as they were considered the strongest sex. This role reversal is also portrayed in Maggie and Brick.

Aside from these changes in society or the growing anxiety in which the United States were at the time, the *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) reports by Alfred Kinsey saw the light and gave way to unease: they reported, among other things, an increasing homosexual activity among the male population in the United States. At least 40% of males admitted to

having engaged in homosexual intercourse, something that had a destabilizing effect upon the social norm (Adler 5). It also reflected a liberation of female sexuality against a belief that women do not have sexual desire the same way men do. All of this brought about a controversy in the United States as these statements threatened a traditional lifestyle and certain male expectations so there was a consequence to this. Besides the mass media and advertising industries calling for a more traditional masculinity based on stereotypes and a reinforcement of their dominant position in a patriarchal society, this was accompanied by the Lavender Scare. It was also known as the “purge of the perverts”, “moral weaklings” or even “sexual misfits” and it was based on the ideology that homosexuality was a sin and, furthermore, that homosexuals posed a security risk (Johnston 1-2). The origin of these events is placed at the beginning of the Cold War, which took place following the ending of World War II — and involved both the United States and the Soviet Union <<http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/red-scare>>. As the opponents took the side of Communism, the States saw themselves as possible targets, and thus the prosecution of possible communists or left-wing sympathizers began. The next group to be targeted would be homosexuals, as they were considered a threat to the government because of their predisposition to being blackmailed by communist societies in return for not revealing their sexuality. This is what led to the Lavender Scare.

The nature associated to homosexuals, as explained above, represented a threat not only to the government but also to the customary way of living that was characteristic of the times. This movement targeted a whole sector of the population and inside that, it prosecuted men more than women. Similarly to the Red Scare, accusation was marked with guilt by association and naming people in order to save oneself; everybody was under suspicion in those years. This led to many people losing their jobs

and was even the cause of many suicides, linked to the government security program to protect the United States' integrity (Johnston 12, 147-148). Because of this situation, Williams was at risk as a homosexual playwright so he had to hide his sexuality, but that did not stop him from portraying these struggles that people like him were living at the time in his plays, as he does with Skipper and Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

## **2. ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY**

### **2.1. Summary and Themes**

The play at hand consists of three acts and it deals mainly with Brick and Maggie's marriage and their stay with their relatives at Big Daddy's home, in the South of the United States, with the purpose of celebrating Big Daddy's birthday. The gathering soon turns into a competition between the two brothers and their wives and the strong presence of Gooper and Mae's children, who represent the contrast against the lack of intimacy between the members of the other couple. However, Brick cannot seem to forget the death of his friend Skipper and his father's terminal illness, so he has resorted to alcohol as a way to evade himself from these situations.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* does not only deal with this main plot, but has an ideology hidden between the lines, developed sometimes in the plot itself but also in the stage directions. Before focusing on the main characters and the oppression they face in the course of events, it needs to be taken into account how the play deals with certain phenomena that were taking place historically in the United States, as mentioned above. Tennessee Williams almost always incorporated political issues or his own views into his plays, and in the case of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* it was almost inevitable for this to happen given the fact that it deals with some matters that were historically relevant in

the 1950s. This play showcases, according to Adler, “how he reacted to the social climate of his times but also patriarchal repression and exclusion of minorities (sexual and other), [and] constitutional hypocrisy” (36); this is something it has in common with the drama from the 1950s because, as explained above, it was impossible for playwrights to ignore the atmosphere that affected them in one way or another so there is a persistent subtext in the plays of the time, be it political, social, etc.

In *Cat*, Williams takes several concerns into account, and one of them is gender roles and masculinity, which will be dealt with in further detail later; the 1950s represented a change in the power dynamic of the domestic or private sphere (Adler 36-38) in the way women had taken male jobs only to be forced to go back to the domestic realm after WWII. It was a time when people were in need of nonconformity and this is showcased in the play by showing the negative contrast of Gooper and Mae and even Big Mama, who follow the norm imposed by society. Maggie and Brick have their roles reversed in such a way that Maggie seems to be, at first, the dominant one in their relationship whereas it was supposed to be the other way around, as some type of rebellion against what was traditionally imposed. This also challenges the time’s construction of a toxic masculinity that remains nowadays, based on an exclusively heterosexist view of men which was a “reaction against the feminization of the American male” (Adler, 46): women occupying men’s jobs during the Second World War and the labor market staying active during their absence created feelings of uselessness and lack of self-confidence. This is inherently related to a traditional view on genders, as explained in *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, whereby females were seen as weaker and both physically and psychologically unable to perform the same jobs as men. The realization that this “weaker” gender had taken over the labor market during the war years gave as a result a feminization of the male, as if they were



not needed anymore. This is showcased by Brick, a former athlete who has not been successful for many years and lives off his old glory and has become an alcoholic to forget about his failure as a man; although he is physically the traditional stereotype for American masculinity, his actions display a weak person who needs to rely on others' social approval. Besides, his sexuality is seen as ambiguous.

Williams takes into consideration this dilemma about sexuality around Brick and his friend Skipper. Bak argues that, whereas Skipper was a homosexual, Brick had never desired that for himself, that his only wish was to have Skipper by his side. Nevertheless, this is what makes Brick susceptible to be labeled as homosexual (Adler, 47) and it forces him to adopt a position of homophobia in order to follow the social norm in an atmosphere where homosexual people were being prosecuted for their sexuality. The concept of the homosocial bond they shared is seen as pure by Brick, but his marriage with Maggie, even though it is loveless and lacks the intimacy and complicity he shared with his friend, is seen as more valuable in social terms. His fear of suspicion is what leads Brick to let Skipper die, as the atmosphere of suspicion is a strong influence in him. Brick feels the need to prove that society's label on his sexuality is wrong, which puts the private and public spheres in contrast and opposition, the personal choice against the group values which are not as positive as society tries to make them. The play has a subtext focused on the negative consequences of conforming to the group and how this can corrupt the individual into mendacity, another important topic in *Cat*.

On the other hand, Maggie, who seems to be a very unlikeable person in the main plot, is also a victim in the subtext of the play. Along with her husband, she does not conform to society's view of the female role as submissive and subjugated within

the private sphere. She is presented in contrast to Mae, whom she seems to hate and often calls a “monster of fertility”; in a play where fertility and sterility are very relevant, both regarding the land of Big Daddy’s plantation and the bearing of children, Mae and her five children are the ones conforming to the standard while Maggie and Brick’s lack of progeny marks them as different and even immoral. Maggie is regarded as a failure because of this and it seems that there is something wrong with their marriage, hence the relevant presence of Skipper throughout the play even though he has already passed away when the plot takes place.

All of this is related to Tennessee Williams’s portrayal of the South of the country, always looked upon as a heavily traditional place. The addition of the highly conservative historical background of the 1950s in which many practices were condemned makes it an even more cautious community and this is what Williams wanted to portray. Big Daddy seems to be the exception to this and even conveys the impression of being tolerant regarding homosexual relationships, as it is made evident in the second act of the play through his conversation with Brick, discussing issues such as his possible homosexuality or Jack Straw and Peter Ochello’s relationship: “Brick, nobody thinks that that’s not normal!” (Williams 65); he even makes a remark about having had homosexual experiences himself and he does not see it as much of a problem as his son does: “I knocked around in my time” (61). Despite this, not even Big Daddy has a negative opinion on both of them hating their wives: relationships between men are way more important and society still condemns women for being women; both male characters despise their partners but do not see the problem in that, as women’s feelings or the nature of women-and-men relationships and power dynamics are yet to be discussed and acknowledged.

This conservatism of the South and the 1950s in general affects both the main characters of the play and even a third character who does not even appear physically in the story, Skipper, and that is why it can be said that they are both oppressed by the social standard, which is going to be explained in further detail below.

## **2.2. Broadway Adaptation: the Third Act**

The polemic arose around this subject when it came to adapting *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, as controversial as it was, in a climate of prosecution and insecurity given the topics the play addresses. Therefore, when it was time to bring Williams's story to the theater they had to be taken into account, representing how the ideology of the time would be as powerful as to modify what made the play so open to debate in the first place. It was the representation of *Cat* in Broadway which granted the play the title of "commercial success" and helped Williams win his second Pulitzer prize, but there are differences to the original script that must be revised, and which are relevant both to its successfulness and a new understanding of *Cat*. To review this, it has to be considered that the author, Tennessee Williams, worked together with the well-known Broadway director Elia Kazan in adapting the script to its later performance in both the stages and the first movie in 1958, starring Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman. Even though it was a big commercial success, it is necessary to analyze if it is due to Williams's talent as a playwright or if it is thanks to Kazan's particular adaptations <<https://www.gradesaver.com/cat-on-a-hot-tin-roof/study-guide/the-second-third-act>>.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* was not their first work together, as Kazan had already helped Williams with the adaptation of his other blockbuster, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which also dwelled on controversial issues. Granted the trust William had in Kazan's

viewpoint, he agreed to certain changes to the original play that would make it a success in the director's eyes, but that would also change some of the key aspects of *Cat's* ending that are relevant to the final message Williams transmitted and, in a way, the feelings perceived through some of the characters. This included textual variations that brought with them a different understanding of key issues in the plot that, given the beliefs the Cold War background and Lavender Scare brought with them, would have made the exposure of the original script almost dangerous, even though Williams ended up publishing both versions. Therefore, Kazan considered it necessary to rewrite almost entirely the third act of *Cat*, which was the most questionable one, and Williams's desire for a Broadway hit after the failure of *Camino Real* (1953) and his trust in Kazan was what led him to agree on these changes.

As expected, the topics which were the most modified were Big Daddy's absence during this third act, Maggie's personality and Brick's homosexuality. Regarding Brick, it was clear that the plot could not leave the theme of his sexuality unresolved, so Kazan opted for him having a change of heart in the third act; Williams was particularly opposed to this, since he did not believe "a conversation, however revelatory, ever effects so immediate a change of heart or even conduct of a person in Brick's state of spiritual disrepair" (93). While the presence of Big Daddy in this rewritten third act is not so relevant, the change in Maggie and Brick's relationship at the end of it is: the original third act showcases a Brick who does not exactly give in to Maggie's requests, but a Brick who is resigned to spending the rest of his life with his wife and questions her love for him, as he knows about her ambition for Big Daddy's fortune. His answer for Maggie's "I do love your Brick, I *do*!" is a sad "wouldn't it be funny if that was true?" (91), which ends the play not exactly clarifying if the couple is going to make the lie true. However, the new third act offers two different people: a

more sympathetic Maggie – or at least not as demanding as the original – and a Brick who is more than willing to go to bed with her, which contrasts completely with what was seen in the first act. He no longer seems to despise Maggie, but even takes some of the actions from the original Maggie as if he wanted this too: he encourages Maggie to turn off the lights, sits on the bed first and even utters an “I admire you, Maggie” (118) which would never come out of First-Act-Brick.

These incongruences, especially in Brick’s character, make this Broadway adaptation of the third act become inconsistent; as was explained by Williams, who ended up accepting these changes although they resulted in what could be called a misinterpretation of his play, this forced revision of Brick’s inner turmoil concluding in an unexpected tolerance and even admiration for his wife is not believable as a product of his conversation with Big Daddy (Corber 63). More so, it clearly depicts a change in a script which would not have been well received in the 1950s, with Elia Kazan removing those topics that left *Cat* in an ambiguous light and could be considered controversial at the time. This heteronormative ending called for a broader audience and made it easier for Williams to achieve fame and success, but also emphasizes the challenge that this play and these topics meant at that time.

### **3. ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS AS SOCIAL OUTCASTS**

#### **3.1. Queer Perspectives and Brick**

Given the presence of two, or at least one, homosexual character, the play can be read from a point of view that takes into account a queer perspective. Considering the atmosphere of the Lavender Scare and the fact that Williams himself was a homosexual

and had a tendency for giving these types of characters a voice in his plays, it cannot be ignored. It can be said that *Cat* is the first American play to confront the subject directly (Shackelford 70).

It has been argued by several authors, like Clum, that the queer relationship between Brick and Skipper the play deals with, or even the “closet space” of the characters, is often relegated to an offstage position or the stage directions, which are crucial in this topic, but is never dealt with in the play’s dialogue itself (89, 91). The only character to speak about it freely in the play is Big Daddy, who openly says that seeing the two previous owners’ love is the source of his tolerance towards same-gender relationships. Big Daddy also speaks directly about the reason of Brick’s alcoholism: “You started drinkin’ when your friend Skipper died” (Williams 60). He is both a “macho” character and the carrier of gay sensibility, which makes him “a mix of misogyny and anti-homophobia” and Brick the “castrated male” (Adler 91), as discussed above. Jack Straw and Peter Ochello’s openly gay relationship, so similar in all terms to a heterosexual one, along with the fact that they provided Big Daddy with financial stability as well as a house, portrays an ideal of love, companionship and a concept of family that is not shared by the rest of the relationships in the play. Showing a monogamous homosexual relationship as the ideal over “regular” ones is a radical move on Williams’s part, and it can even be considered the first representation of a gay “family” in American drama, given the fact that Big Daddy becomes their surrogate son (Shackelford 77-78).

Regarding Brick and Skipper’s relationship, it is safe to say that at least one of the parts was interested in having something more than just friendship, while Brick’s case is left without an answer in the original version of the play, whereas the rewritten

third act points to a heterosexual awakening of the character after his conversation with Big Daddy, as explained above in further detail. Although Skipper is not present physically in the action he is constantly mentioned by the couple and Brick makes it clear with his reactions – “Maggie, shut up about Skipper. I mean it, Maggie; you got to shut up about Skipper” (Williams 25) – that his death is a taboo subject, apart from the reason why he has become an alcoholic. The only character to address it directly is Maggie, who is probably trying to get a reaction out of Brick by confronting him and their relationship, which according to Maggie was “love that could never be carried through to anything satisfying” (26). Brick is highly offended by this as he considers it an attack against their friendship, which he deems ‘pure’ and refuses to have Maggie name it ‘dirty’; this points to the fact that he considers relationships between men impure if they are referred to as more than friendship. Both male friends resort to drinking as means to “run from their inner selves” (Shackelford 71), although it is never clear that Brick harbored romantic feelings for Skipper. Yet Brick tried to escape from the reality that Skipper saw him as more than a friend. This attitude is revealed fully when he receives that phone call from Skipper the night he commits suicide: he plays a huge role in his death as the play suggests his friend confessed his feelings toward him that night, and his rejection and hanging up on Skipper brought about his downfall, rather than his being a homosexual. However, this guilt and perhaps the fact that he rejected Skipper is what makes Brick resort to drinking as a way to evade himself from his actions and what could have been, and also as a kind of self-punishment.

It is Maggie the person whom Brick seems to blame for what happened and what he did, and she is the receiver of his hate and guilt; she is the only one who does not accept his behavior and knows where the origin of the problem lies, which is on Skipper’s death and what it was related to, while other members of the family like Big

Mama attribute his drinking to Maggie not being able to satisfy Brick in bed. Her straightforward accusations of Skipper's homosexuality ("Skipper and I made love [...] because it made both of us feel closer to you" (25) or "'SKIPPER! STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE'S GOT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM!'" (27)) and the fact that Brick himself could feel the same way ("what were you thinking of when I caught you looking at me like that? Were you thinking of Skipper?" (10)) only make Brick angrier, as he does not let anyone question his masculinity and heterosexuality, not even Big Daddy. He makes it evident at all times that he despises Maggie, as far as telling her that she should find herself a lover or that he has no desire of sleeping with her: "but how in hell on earth do you imagine – that you're going to have a child by a man that can't stand you?" (30). However, he does not leave Maggie himself, perhaps due to a fear of being perceived as a homosexual or the reaction of his family and society. Nevertheless, Maggie uses these abnormalities in their relationship to blackmail Brick in a way, as happened in the Lavender Scare, into having a child with her, as this would be the only chance he has to confirm that there are no problems in their marriage and that he still loves his wife, denying any rumor involving Skipper which come even from Mae and Gooper, according to Brick's conversation with Big Daddy. Their connection with Straw and Ochello through sharing the bedroom and the bed that belonged to them and disliking each other — while the homosexual couple had a happy relationship — is evident in all the contrasts that can be found between the two couples. Williams is subversive enough to manage to make the gay couple the only truly happy one in the play especially in opposition to Brick and Maggie: "I'm not living with you. We occupy the same cage" (15).

Williams does not only address the topic of homosexuality but also manages to project his vision of Brick as an attractive young man through Maggie's eyes; this



appeals both to the gay and straight readers as Brick is supposed to represent a traditionally American masculinity. The fact that readers are forced to see his attractiveness through Maggie's eyes, as exposed by Shackelford, leads to an erotization of Brick, and the audience "becomes involved in the subversive eroticization of the male body" (73), both with Brick and Skipper. Apart from this, the addition of hints that this character may have had sexual desires for another male and that they were almost perceived as a couple, is radical for the time in so far as it questions this masculinity and traditional values which did not see homosexuality and masculine stereotypes as compatible.

### **3.2. Feminist Perspectives and Maggie**

The play can also be read from a feminist point of view, not only because of the female characters that are given voice and relevance, but also because of certain topics addressed by the author and how the questions are solved in an innovative and unusual way. A feminist perspective does not necessarily mean that *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is a feminist play, but that it can be read and studied from that viewpoint.

On one hand and as explored above, the main couple in the play is based on a deconstruction of masculine and feminine identities: the traditional gender roles, which are clearly present in the other married couples, are subverted in the figures of Maggie and Brick and therefore we see her as the dominant one in their relationship. This is closely related to Brick being seen as the weak one and hence as a feminized character, the opposite of what was required of that gender in the 1950s, and there is an unwanted effect of 'castration' placed on Brick. Consequently, Williams endows Maggie with what would be considered traditionally masculine traits in order to make her the one in

charge, the strong one, such as an aggressive pursuit of sexual satisfaction, which would be usually expected from men: Maggie is the one who seeks sexual fulfillment and needs to almost force Brick into it. However, this is closely linked to Kinsey's report and how women started to have a voice in sexual matters and talked about an existing female sexual desire which was unknown until then, so it does not necessarily mean a masculine trait; yet the violence that Maggie showcases is. According to Kundert-Gibbs (in Adler 85), the castrating female represented by Maggie and this role reversal inherently cast a negative light on both characters: feminization is an annulling trait on Brick because it does not allow him to accomplish realization as a man and the masculinization of Maggie is a negative trait as that is not how a woman was supposed to behave in the 1950s, and masculine attributes such as their violence or sexual desire were only positive and alluring when applied to a man.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that Maggie is regarded in a revolutionary feminist light given the atmosphere of the time, as her ultimate desire is to have children with her husband. Her constant seeking for Brick — “lean on me” (11); “feel embarrassed! But don't continue my torture. I can't live on and on under these circumstances” (15) — is not only a longing to fulfill her sexual appetite as she also finds an impulse in having a progeny of her own to aim for Big Daddy's inheritance. Her hatred for Mae and Gooper's kids (“yep, they're no-neck monsters, all no-neck people are monsters...” (2)) is not representative of this; she just does not like their children because she considers them a nuisance. It does not mean that she wants to be childless, as she makes many references to being completely capable of conceiving children although it is not clear if it is a desire of her own or a way for her to feel close to Brick, or even the means to get the fortune, and she tells Big Mama about this: “I do SO like children! Adore them! – well brought up!” (17). Maggie is deeply concerned

with this topic during the first act: “I’ve been completely examined, and there is no reason why we can’t have a child whenever we want one. And this is my time to conceive” (29). Her preoccupation in this regard even makes her a little hysterical seeking her husband’s attention, although he ignores all of her advances completely. Even Big Mama is uneasy about the topic of progeny and her younger son, and blames Maggie for the lack of it as well as for Brick’s alcoholism: “you’re childless and my son drinks!” (20). The concern about Maggie not being able to satisfy Brick’s sexual needs is immediately connected to the worldview of the time prior to the publication of the Kinsey report and a traditional stereotype of heterosexual relationships which Maggie is quick to break: “why don’t you ask if he makes *me* happy in bed? [...] *It works both ways!*” (20) is what she replies to Big Mama’s accusations, a subversive move on her part that confirms her as a woman rebelling against a man-made world.

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* represents a change in the treatment of topics like motherhood and traditional female conventions by speaking about them, giving voice to women who have a story of powerlessness, oppression, economic dependency on men and sexual objectification, as far as being treated as heir-creating machines (Adler 78, 86). Mae, on her part, acquires the role of the traditional Southern woman in her own way, but in a manner that is closer to Big Mama’s than to Maggie’s and giving continuity to the conception Maggie is trying to break. The play portrays Mae as a selfish woman and even allows the reader to laugh at her, as it is evident that she and her children are disliked by Big Daddy, the authority in the house; Maggie jokes about the fact that if she and Brick were to have children, they would be the inheritors of the estate. *Cat* plays with all these stereotypes of different Southern women and subverts some of them, leaving them to express themselves individually, and in Maggie’s case,

having a leading role in her relationship and being able to talk about her feelings and thoughts.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The conclusion to the topic that has been discussed throughout this dissertation is that Tennessee Williams, by arguing about issues such as homosexuality, homophobia and the traditional roles of men and women in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, wanted to denounce these aspects in the light of the society of the time; a proof of this is the fact that the play was actually changed for its representation in Broadway, as it was too subversive. On one hand, the topic of homosexuality and rejection of a person's own identity or feelings talks about a growing problem regarding the social views on non-traditional relationships, and also serves as a critique upon an American Cold War ideal of masculinity and gender roles that went as far as ruining people's lives, as happens with Brick and Skipper. He even goes as far as dealing with a suicide caused, broadly, by society's pressure on the individual and the importance of cultural parameters regarding social relationships in a time of prosecution and uncertainty. In addition to this, the author also takes into consideration the role of women in the 1950s society where they were regarded as inferior to men and their only purpose was to bear children, to a point in which their aspirations and feelings were not taken into account; in a culture where men and their feelings were the most important, Maggie imposes herself as someone who will not allow being stepped on and wants to raise her voice about issues such as maternity or female sexuality. Taking all these aspects into account it is easy to see how Williams tried to explore and defend these "outcasts" and give them a voice, as well as denounce a society that, in his own words, "rapes the individual" (Frost).

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