"THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH" IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' PLAYS

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INTRODUCTION

Most of Tennessee Williams' characters can be characterized as being of the "fugitive kind." From what do they flee? They flee from the "now" to the past or to a future which is not at all dependable; they flee from the "here" to another world; above all, they flee from truth or reality. Each character has his own "truth," his own "something unspoken,"[1] just as each has his heart; once this conception is hurt, he

[1] Tennessee Williams has used this phrase as the title of a one-act play.

is crushed.

What covers up the truth assumes various appearances. Some characters have illusions. Some indulge themselves in their past glory. Nearly all, though, try to turn their eyes aside from facing the truth as much as possible. However, their desperate efforts fail, for always, in spite of themselves, another effort to break the wrapping of illusions or sweet memories is made by someone trying to discover the truth. At a lower level, below their illusions and attempts to escape reality, they themselves are often trying to discover the facts.

Apart from Williams' plays, " the discovery of the truth " has been the focus of the plot of many plays ; these plays become tragedies when that discovery brings forth a disastrous result. The conception of " the discovery of the truth as a focus of plot " came from *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles, and Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he concentrates on *Oedipus Rex*. In this " Tragōdia," when the truth about the king's birth, and the fact that he murdered his own father and is married to his own mother, though he has throughout been manipulated by the oracle, are discovered, disastrous results occur. His mother kills herself. Oedipus himself gouges out his eyes, deserts the throne, and goes to wander the world in atonement.

In *Hamlet*, the prince's discovery of the truth about his father's death is also presented by Shakespeare as the focus of the play ; this discovery is the major cause of Hamlet's affliction and so of the succeeding deaths of many characters.

Ibsen's adoption of " the discovery of the truth " theme may be seen in *Ghosts*. Mrs. Alving has concealed the truth about her dead husband, his dissipated life. When she does finally tell the truth, the cause of the son, Oswald's, " vermoulu " and the secret about the birth of Regina, a maid (really a daughter of Mr. Alving), she destrays Oswald's idealized figure of his father. Oswald's death from disease is thus seen as inevitable. After these " truths " are told, Regina's degenerate life in the future and Mrs. Alving's suicide may be anticipated.

In traditional tragedies, such as *Oedipus Rex* or *Hamlet*, the plot and the actions of the characters move toward the discovery of a truth which

concerns all the characters. In Tennessee Williams' world, however, the movement or stream is not so simple; the purpose of the plot does not always correspond to the purpose of the protagonist's actions, but sometimes contradicts that of the actions of the lead.

I want to study this movement of the characters, focussing on the nature of truth. This movement becomes more and more complex from one play to the next. I want also to examine Tennessee Williams' attitude toward the two sides which battle with one another, one wishing to discover the truth and the other wishing to hide it. It is interesting to see how these two attitudes, which conflict with each other, come to coexist in one character; that is, for instance, a man who wishes to escape from his own truth may at the same time be one who tries to expose the truth about the other characters.

Chapter I
The Glass Menagerie

In Tennessee Williams' early writings, that which screens the desperate truth is more tender and more beautiful than that which does so in such later plays as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, written in 1943, when Williams was thirty-two, the situation itself is a mingling of truth (or reality) and illusion. This is an autobiographical play in which the author is identified with Tom Wingfield, who is the narrator of the play as well as a character in it. The play begins with his reminiscent monologue. His sister, Laura, is an exquisitely fragile, timid, somehow transparent girl. She herself is like an inhabitant of a glass menagerie which is cut off from the actual world. She is so easily broken, so delicate, like her glass animals, that she cannot endure the burden of actuality. Her crippled leg is both a symbol and a cause of her uncertainty.

The mother, Amanda, however, will not even admit that her daughter is crippled. She says, "Don't say crippled! You know that I never

[1] Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, Tokyo: The Eihōsha Ltd., 1961, Scene V, p. 62.

allow that word to be used!"[1] Even after her husband deserted the family and they were driven into miserable conditions, she does not face the facts but always turns her thoughts back to the past, when she was surrounded with many jonquils and many "gentlemen callers."

Tom himself, though he wants to face facts, also seeks to escape from this state. He does not make any conspicuous effort to reconstruct their life, but only goes to see movies every night.

This precarious situation is shaken by a "gentleman caller" Jim O'Connor, who is a friend of Tom's in the warehouse and who used to be a high school classmate of Laura's. Though Amanda wants her daughter to marry Jim, he destroys this hope or dream. For several minutes he steps into Laura's world; he looks at the glass animals with her and dances with her. Just after he kisses her, however, he calls himself a "stumble-john," lights a cigarette, and pops a mint in his mouth, while "she sinks on the sofa with a bright, dazed look."[1] Her happiness is soon destroyed when he confesses that he is already engaged to another girl. Then "the sky falls"[2] for Laura. Jim steps out of her world forever, back to the actual world. Laura is like a glass animal which has glistened for just a brief moment, catching the light. Her family then recognizes the transience of their dream and the severity of actual life. This attempt to face reality is in vain, however; they do not forgo all their transient and weak hopes; thus, the truth of this family's miserable state is not clearly disclosed, and their dream-filled situation remains much as it was before.

Tennessee Williams has Jim entered into this family circle as an embodiment of the actual world in contrast with the Wingfields. Here, Jim takes the role of a messenger from the realistic, actual life, one who then again returns to his own world, leaving the crushed behind him. It is true that Jim destroys Laura, just as he happens to destroy the glass unicorn which has been her most precious possession, and that he happens to force the Wingfields to face the truth of the "present situation," However, he does not have any ill feeling toward this family, nor does

[1] Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, Scene vii, pp. 108–109.
[2] *Ibid.*, Scene vii, p. 115.

he actively try to pull them down from their dreams to the realities of life. On the contrary, he shows rather a sympathetic attitude toward them, especially toward Laura. Therefore, there cannot be found here any violent contrasts nor evident struggles between those who try to cover the truth and those who try to bring it to light. All the characters drift around the truth.

A Streetcar Named Desire

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the corresponding " truth " is the past of Blanche DuBois, the heroine of this play. This truth (or reality) is covered up with lies, illusions, and romantic dreams.

Blanche has led a corrupt life, just like that of a prostitute, since the suicide of her young husband. As the rumours of her conduct have spread throughout her home town, Laurel, she has been forced to leave it. She has lost not only the family estate, called Belle Reve, on a mortgage, but also her position as a high school English teacher. Taking a streetcar named Desire, she comes to live with her younger sister Stella, who left her home town after her marriage with a Pole, Stanley Kowalski. The couple live in a poor section of New Orleans. Stella has, however, adjusted to her new circumstances and gets along well with her husband.

Blanche does not say a word about the true reason why she has quit school before the summer holidays. She eagerly wishes to have a peaceful life. Her relief, however, does not last long, because, unlike Stella, she cannot adjust herself to the new raw, coarse environment. At last, Stanley exposes her past conduct in Laurel and destroys the growing romance between Blanche and Mitch, a friend of Stanley's. He thereby destroys Blanche as well. With her heart wounded and her mind deranged, she is compelled to leave the house. What awaits her is life in an asylum.

In the course of the development of the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, we face " the discovery of the truth " twice. One happens on stage and is spread before us from the beginning to the ending. The other happened off stage long before the curtain rises; we learn of it

through Blanche's reminiscences.

First of all, the discovery of the truth in the past should be looked at, for this was the fatal turning point in Blanche's life and determined her present mode of being. When she was a young girl, Blanche married a boy whom she admired very much; she even worshipped him. He was a poet with " a nervousness, a softness, and a tenderness."[1] However, her faith, her love, and her worship were betrayed. The boy was the lover of an older man with whom he had kept company for years, since before his marriage to Blanche. When Blanche found this out by accident, she was so shocked that she could not pretend to be ignorant of it. She declared in his face, " I saw! I know! You disgust me...."[2] She made thus an honest and straightforward speech, though Mary McCarthy says that Blanche " has never spoken an honest word in her life."[3] Here, it is Blanche who exposed the truth. However, what was brought about by this disclosure of the truth was bad, even fatal. In the midst of a dance, the Varsouviana, he broke away from Blanche and shot himself in the mouth. At this very moment, she recognized the horrible and disastrous element harboured within the truth. This fatal experience had made her, perhaps unconsciously, avoid confronting the truth directly. It was then that her degenerated life began. Because she was so keenly afraid of the truth, she indulged herself in liquor, wandered from one man to another, and cherished delusions. Coating all these facts with pretensions and lies, which are to be torn off by Stanley in the guise of " the discovery of the truth," Blanche comes to the " Elysian Fields " of New Orleans.

The second discovery of the truth is evolved on the stage as the central stream of the play. The plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* moves toward this discovery, which can be said to be the " purpose " of the plot in

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[1] Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire, in New Voices in the American Theatre*, Modern Library Books, New York, 1955, Scene vi, p. 70.

[2] *Ibid.*, Scene vi, p. 71.

[3] Mary McCarthy, " Streetcar Called Success," *Sights and Spectacles* (New York, 1956, p. 133), quoted in Signi L. Falk, *Tennessee Williams* (*Twayne's United States Authors Series*, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman), New York, 1962, p. 87.

terms of Francis Fergusson's view of tragedy, originally propounded with reference to *Oedipus Rex*. Also in *A Streetcar Named Desire* there can be found what Fergusson calls " the seeking action of the play "[1]; his comment on *Oedipus Rex* can be partly applied to *Streetcar:* " The protagonist and his antagonists develop the ' purpose ' with which the tragic sequence begins."[2] As for *Streetcar*, however, Williams entwines the plot with characters in a more complex way. Though in most plays which involve " a seeking action " it is the protagonist who searches in *Streetcar*. Blanche, the protagonist, does not take the attitude of " seeking " the truth; rather, she tries to conceal it. It is Stanley, the antagonist, who attempts to bring the hidden truth to light. Moreover, by adding the characters Stella and Mitch, who are sympathetic to both Blanche and Stanley, the author forms an intricate situation. In this situation, Blanche, who once stood as an exposer and who thus destroyed a man completely, is now crushed, exposed, ironically enough, where she wished not to be touched.

With the above-mentioned structure, in what way does *Streetcar* show an advance over *The Glass Menagerie?* Firstly, the hidden truth as an object over which two different views of life collide is described not as a vague " situation " but as an evident fact. Secondly, the characterization of the persons who are opposed to each other becomes clear, this opposition focussing on the " truth." In this second respect, Williams portrays each character admirably, with a firm command of symbolism. Even if we restrict our observation to the contrast between Blanche and Stanley, we notice Williams' free use of symbolism. He describes the atmospheres of the two in general in terms of color, Blanche as white and Stanley as a stronger, primary color. At the scene of their first meeting, Stanley removes his sweaty shirt, for instance, while Blanche says she must put powder on her face. Later, she says she " was fishing for a compliment,"[3] while he does not " go in for that stuff."[4] She

[1] Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1953, p. 42.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[3] Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene ii, p. 26.
[4] *Ibid.*, Scene ii, p. 26.

puts the paper lantern on the bare electric bulb lest her aged face should be seen; at the end this is snatched off by Stanley. She never has a date with Mitch in the daylight but always in darkness, because "her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light."[1]

When we regard the contrast between the two as that between idealist and realist, we find quite symbolical scenes. For instance, Blanche describes the ideal relation of man and woman which she has cherished in her heart:

> This man [Shep Huntleigh, who was once her admirer] is a gentleman and he respects me. What he wants is my companionship. Having great wealth sometimes makes people lonely! A cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding, can enrich a man's life—immeasurably![2]

This ideal relation is quite far from that of Blanche and Stanley, whom she calls a pig or an ape. Sexual relations between a man and a woman that do not contain any such ideal quality constitutes rape. It is ironical that a few minutes after Blanche says this, Stanley rapes her.

Toward these characters who are thus curved in relief, what attitude does Williams take? He contrasts Blanche and Stanley, who have a hatred for each other; he makes her the defeated and him the "winner." The winner deprives the defeated of all comfort and illusion. There is no mutual understanding between them. The playwright feels a deep affection and sympathy for Blanche, who is destroyed on account of the cruelty of the truth and a lack of understanding. However, viewed from another angle, though he places himself in Blanche's position, feels anger against Stanley, and regards him as a man who damages the sensitive, Williams does not always regard Stanley as worthless. On the contrary, it seems that he even has some admiration for his strength and vitality. For instance, the author makes Blanche say, "Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve."[3] Williams' admiration for Stanley may also be gathered from Blanche's

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[1] Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene i, p. 7.

[2] *Ibid.*, Scene x, p. 96.

[3] *Ibid.*, Scene ii, p. 30.

unaccountable feeling, in which awe, contempt, curiosity, a kind of respect, and sexual desire are all mingled.

The Rose Tattoo

Let us now consider *The Rose Tattoo*. It must first be said that there is an essential difference in the nature of " truth " between the plays already treated and this play ; that is, in *The Rose Tattoo* the main character does not know the nature of the " truth " until it is exposed. Therefore, seen from the point of view of plot, this play is more simple and straightforward than either *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*. A hidden " truth " plays an important but brief role in the intrigue or sequence of the play. Thus, a pattern similar to those previously examined can be found: a discovery of the truth occurs, and it is attended with " peripeteia."

In *The Rose Tattoo*, Serafina's husband, Rosario Delle Rose, died because of a traffic accident while he was driving a truck. She has lived on, cherishing memories of him, for three years. During this period she has never doubted his love or his fidelity to her. However, the fact is that he had another woman. This fact has been known by all the neighbours, though not by Serafina herself; it is alluded to by them in the former part of the play. This play's central moment comes when the fact is evoked by Alvaro Mangiacavallo, who is also a truck-driver and who comes to love her. Her beautiful and stainless memories of her husband are shattered like the urn in which Rosario's ashes have been placed. Her way of thinking and way of living are revolutionized, with this discovery of the truth as a turning point. She throws off her beautiful and idealized memories of Rosario and receives Alvaro's love. She allows her daughter to love a young sailor, though previously she has strictly prohibited her from even going out with him.

In this play there is no gloomy strife between the characters over the exposure of the truth. The " exposer " Alvaro discloses the truth and batters Serafina's memories, which have grown from idealization to something like idolatry. However, his conduct stems chiefly from his

good will, though he also has a rather selfish desire to win Serafina as his wife.

Judging from these plays, Williams develops the plot of his plays using something like a dramatic archetype. In *The Rose Tattoo*, however, the discovery of Rosario's affair with another woman is treated as a factor which is important from a merely technical point of view. In his next play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams pours into the hidden "truth" some deeper meaning which directly concerns the way of living and the very being of a man; moreover, he not only treats the discovery of the truth as a climax of the plot; he also regards it as "a true quality of experience."[1] In other words, while in *The Rose Tattoo* the author uses the "discovery" as a measure to heighten the dramatic effect, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* "the discovery of the truth" is itself the main theme of the play. As Signi L. Falk says of the play, "There is much talk of finding the truth that motivates people's actions—an insight that might explain the tragic waste or unhappiness of their lives."[2] In the next chapter, I shall try to look at this group of characters, all of whom are stirred by the truth; I shall also examine from the dramatic point of view, Williams' way of treating the discovery of it.

Chapter II
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

"Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant. . . ."[3] Margaret, the heroine of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, says this to her husband Brick Pollitt. In this play, the growth of this malignant silence corresponds to the movement of the plot. At the very moment when "silence" is broken and the "pus

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[1] Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (*Five Plays by Tennessee Williams*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1962). Act Two, stage direction, p. 61.

[2] Falk, *Tennessee Williams*, p. 103.

[3] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 10.

of a thing" is exposed as the result of the swelling of the malignant mood, the movement of the plot reaches its climax.

The "truth" of this play contains a deeper significance, and it functions more effectively, than in the three plays discussed in the preceding chapter. Moreover, what covers up the "truth" Williams calls "mendacity," so it is no longer a sweet and tender thing such as Amanda's dream or Blanche's "magic (she cries out, "I don't want realism. I want magic!"[1]) In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* a man who is dying of cancer and a group of people who gather to "celebrate" his sixty-fifth and last birthday weave through this play until all of them recognize his true situation.

The curtain rises. In the summer dusk, and against the sound of a shower, a conversation between Brick Pollitt and his wife, Margaret, begins. Some deep troubles of the whole family, especially that of this couple, are soon revealed to us.

The previous night, at an early hour, Brick tried to jump hurdles alone on the high school athletic field and failed, breaking his ankle. Now, he clings to the crutch, just as he has long clung to alcohol. He used to be a football hero in his college days. Thus this man who used to find life worth living in "fighting" is now physically not able to jump even a hurdle, while spiritually he was given up the fight. What in the world has driven this man to such a state of living? The answer to this question is another "something unspoken," a concealed truth. It is his wife, Maggie the cat, who attempts to bring it to light in the course of Act One.

She comes from a poor family, as she confesses: "*Brick, y'know, I've been so God damn disgustingly poor all my life!*"[2] It was by marrying Brick, the son of the proprietor of the "biggest an' finest plantation in the Delta,"[3] that she acquired her present status and money. She, however, is likely to lose them now. Big Daddy, the father of Brick, is dying of cancer. Though Brick is his father's favourite, he is steeped in liquor,

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[1] Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene ix, p. 89.

[2] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 24.

[3] *Ibid.*, Act One, p. 24.

has thrown up his job as a sports announcer, and has no children. Therefore, it seems apparent to all the family except Maggie that Brick, in his present state of living and mind, is not fit to inherit and manage such a big estate. Meanwhile, his brother, Gooper, and his wife, Mae, intensely want to inherit the property and estate. Maggie refers to all this when she says:

> So this is Big Daddy's last birthday. And Mae and Gooper, they know it, oh, *they* know it, all right. They got the first information from the Ochsner Clinic [where Big Daddy was examined]. That's why they rushed down here with their no-neck monsters [as Maggie calls their five children]. Do you know something? Big Daddy's made no will? Big Daddy's never made out any will in his life, and so this campaign's afoot to impress him, forcibly as possible, with the fact that you drink and I've borne no children![1]

Maggie is obsessed by the thought that she must now bear a child and so get the inheritance. Nevertheless, at present, this hope has little possibility of coming true, because Brick has refused to sleep with her. The reasons for the deep gulf between the two, for Brick's alcoholic indulgence, and for his renunciation of a vivid and active attitude toward life are vitally concerned with the hidden "truth" mentioned before.

When he was a student at "Ole Miss," Brick had as his closest friend Skipper, who belonged to the same fraternity and was on the same football team. After graduation, they organized a pro-football team, the Dixie Stars, in order, in Maggie's words, to "keep on being teammates forever." This intimacy of Brick with Skipper aroused Maggie's suspicion of a homosexual relationship. Above all, she wondered if Skipper "harboured even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure."[2] Therefore, she urged the drunken Skipper, in the absence of her husband, to make clear the relation between him and Brick. He was shocked. He even tried to make love with Maggie so that he might prove that there did not exist any such dark relation between them, but unfortunately the effort ended in failure. From then

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[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 23.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act One, p. 27.

on, he was captured by liquor and dope and in time he died. When Brick learned of the course of affairs, he also began drinking and said he would never forgive Maggie.

All the characters, including Doctor Bough and the caricatured Reverend Tooker, know the gravity of Big Daddy's illness and so circle the wished-for inheritance. However, the central person, Big Daddy, around does not know that he himself is dying of cancer. He and his wife, Big Mama, believe the report that his sickness is merely a spastic colon. He fancies that he will henceforth seek pleasure and so enjoy his remaining life. That Big Daddy is dying of cancer is thus another " some- thing unspoken " in the play.

In Act Two these two hidden truth are disclosed in the conversations between Brick and Big Daddy. The father presses his son hard with questions as to why he drinks so much and why he refuses Maggie. With reluctance, the son answers that he drinks because he wants to forget everything around him which is corrupting and disgusting. He does not believe any thing is true. It seems to him that all the world is thronged with " lying and liars." He names this " mendacity." Big Daddy, however, makes clear that Brick's " disgust " at the world is nothing but an excuse for his disgust at himself, a disgust which budded in his mind when he refused to help Skipper. Brick, in return, declares that Big Daddy also lives surrounded with many kinds of deception; his birthday party is the best example. He blurts out that his father's death by cancer is approaching. Once again, then, each perceives the deception which whirls around them. Both Brick and Big Daddy stand alone, bereft of all comfort and protection.

In Act Three the family crisis is recognized by every character. After Big Daddy goes to bed, Gooper and Doctor Bough inform Big Mama that her husband's sickness is really a malignant cancer, and that he is nearing death. It is a terrible blow for her after she has been in such high spirits at the false report from the clinic. She calls on Brick for help, but, as his detachment has returned, he pays no attention. Gooper and Mae then begin to broach the matter about the management of the estate. They want to shut Brick and Maggie out. They reveal

their true characters—their pretending to love Big Daddy and their meanness in eavesdropping on the nocturnal quarrels between Brick and Maggie. Neither Big Daddy nor his wife wants to hand the plantation over to Gooper. Though they wish Brick to inherit it, however, he himself does not have any intention of " straightening up." Brick's parents and Maggie have been thinking that if only he could beget a child, all would be well. Therefore, Maggie tells the desperate lie that she has conceived a baby. This announcement brings rapture to Big Mama and rage to Gooper and Mae. As Big Mama goes to inform her husband of the news, Gooper and Mae leave the room calling out to Maggie, " Liar ! " After some deliberation, Maggie locks up all of Brick's liquor and hurls his crutch over the rail. Thus, while Big Daddy's suffering begins, Brick and Maggie are left alone in the room. She takes up Brick's pillow from the sofa where he has slept for several days and puts it on the bed. She says, "And so tonight we're going to make the lie come true. . . ."[1] Brick's detachment, however, remains as it was before.

The Nature of the Discovery of the Truth

Just as in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a discovery of the truth has occurred in the past in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; the collapses accompanying it have deeply affected the main characters, Brick and Maggie. She once declared to Skipper, " STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE'S GOT TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM ! "[2] She herself says, " In this way, I destroyed him, by telling him the truth. . . ."[3]

When Brick was informed that Skipper had made love with Maggie in order to prove what she had said was not true, but that his "pitiful, ineffectual little attempt "[4] had ended in failure, his way of living itself as well as his view of life took a sudden turn. He threw " his life away."

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[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act Three, p. 91.
[2] *Ibid.*, Act One, p. 28.
[3] *Ibid.*, Act One, p. 28.
[4] *Ibid.*, Act One, p. 28.

However, the true motives of the affair, and especially the deeper reason why Maggie had dared to act in such a way, have never been fully talked over between the couple; indeed, even Skipper's name has been taboo. Everything concerning the affair and Skipper has remained a "half-told truth." Now, however, Maggie talks about it thoroughly, after the long "silence." She says:

> This time I'm going to finish what I have to say to you. Skipper and I made love . . . because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you. You see, . . . you asked too much of people, of me, of him, of all the unlucky poor damned sons of bitches that happen to love you. . . . You—superior creature! . . . And so we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us! Yes, yes, yes! Truth, truth! . . .[1]

She takes the first step of "seeking action" toward her husband. The next step is taken by Big Daddy in Act Two, for she does not succeed in exposing the true reason, kept in the inmost depths of Brick's heart, why he threw his life away. Under Big Daddy's cross-examination, Brick answers that he drinks in order to kill his disgust at the "mendacity"—lying and liars—which he finds all around him; he cannot stand it. Through his talk about mendacity and his confession of the circumstances of Skipper's death, Big Daddy gets to the bottom of his son's disgust. The truth is thus discovered.

When Skipper telephoned him long distance after his affair with Maggie and made a drunken confession, Brick hung up. Big Daddy now insists:

> Anyhow now!—we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself.
>
> *You!*—dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!—before you'd face the truth with him![2]

In his act of hanging up, there is implied much the same cry as Blanche's "You disgust me!" Brick gave Skipper neither warm understanding nor a helping hand; rather, he refused to talk, thus implying criticism

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[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 26.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act Three, p. 67.

as from a stranger. As Skipper could not " pass the buck " on to anyone but to himself, he suffered alone and died.

It may be supposed that Brick reproached himself, that he accused himself of having driven the person dearest to him to death, and then lived on, pretending to innocence. It may also be supposed that this self-reproach amounted to self-disgust. He had committed an act of treachery against what he himself calls the " one great good true thing "[1] in his life. Brick, however, has averted his eyes from the truth and escaped to the illusion of peace created by drinking, until that truth is unearthed by his father.

Just after the disclosure of the truth for Brick, another truth succeeds it. Brick makes the same reproach to his father, that he also cannot face the truth. He reveals that Big Daddy is dying of cancer and that everybody (except Big Mama) who has gathered to celebrate his birthday knows it already. The cruelty of this " truth " tears from Big Daddy all the comfort and all his hopes for his remaining years.

The Stream of the Play Centering on Each Discovery

Thus, the truth of Brick's past is exposed by Maggie *one-sidedly* in Act One. In Act Two, on the other hand, a *mutual* dislcosure of the truth is made between the son and his father, the truth concealed deep in Brick's heart and the truth of Big Daddy's approaching death. It is natural that the second, mutual discovery should be more violent and more intense than the first. In what way, though, does the author make the nature of each discovery emerge? How does he increase the momentum from the first exposure to the next? How does he intensify the feeling and atmosphere?

At the first disclosure, Brick's " detachment " has not yet been broken. Unconsciously and latently he tried to keep away from the truth. Thus he is apt to *hold his tongue*. On the contrary, Maggie is, essentially, a woman who does not fear to face the truth ; rather, she tries to approach

[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 27.

the truth. Therefore, she *talks*. The situation which is brought about by one who wants to keep silent and one who tries to speak is, by its very nature, a virtual " monologue."

Brick does not want to tell the truth; neither does he want to *hear* it. Communication cannot be smooth between these two. To describe the lack of communication, Tennessee Williams uses repetitions and parrot-like talking. For example:

> Maggie: Of course it's comical but it's also disgusting since it's so obvious what they're up to!
> Brick: What are they up to, Maggie?
> Maggie: Why, you know what they're up to!
> Brick: No, I don't know what they're up to.
> Maggie: I'll tell you what they're up to, boy of mine!—They're up to cutting you out of your father's estate, and. . .[1]

These characteristic features of Act One—monologues, repetitions, and exchanges which fail to produce communication—are effectively used to express the essential attitudes of Brick and Maggie, and the nature of the one-sided disclosure when a confrontation of " exposer " and " concealer " exists.

The second, mutual discovery is the center of this play. At the moment when Big Daddy mentions " something not right " in the relation between Brick and Skipper, his son's " detachment is at last broken through."[2] It becomes difficult to find any one such dominant feature as monologues, repetitions, or parrot-like talking, as the movement draws near to the mutual discovery of the truth. The attitudes of trying both to talk and to listen, attitudes which has gradually been born between them, bring the father and son to the heart of the matter. Such attitudes increase the tension surrounding the exposure of the truth.

When the movement of the characters and that of the plot are looked at as a whole, apart from detailed observation of speeches, the following pattern may be perceived:

Act I 1. Private talk between Brick and Margaret

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[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, pp. 2–3.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act Two, p. 61.

Act II 2. Conversation of the whole family and others
3. Private talk between Brick and Big Daddy
Act III 4. Conversation of the whole family and others
5. Private talk between Brick and Margaret

This alternate pattern of talking serves to intensify the contrast between the general talking, which is full of deception and hypocrisy, and the private talking, which has few lies but, which rather, focuses on the truth.

Characters in Relation to the Truth

Big Daddy and Big Mama are at first described as characters who *do not know* the truth. They do not, for instance, know the real reason for the marital discord between their son and his wife. They are not even informed of the fact that Big Daddy is dying of cancer. Neither, but especially Big Daddy, recognizes the existence of real " love " between them. Therefore, the change in their attitudes after the disclosure of the truth is the most conspicuous. Big Mama is, indeed, given too difficult a demand by the playwright; she " almost stops being fat "[1] after she comes to know of her husband's real condition, Gooper and Mae's intention, and what she must do. As for Big Daddy, though he is crushed and driven to desperation when he learns the " truth " about himself and about " all the lying dying liars "[2] swirling around him, he does not belong to Williams' series of tragic heroes and heroines. He is, rather, of the same kind as Stanley Kowalski. He combines the vitality and coarseness of a Mississippi red-neck with some sensitivity; besides, he is tolerant.

Almost all Maggie's attitudes toward life, love, and truth are shown in Act One. She *knows* about the cancer of Big Daddy, and she knows of Brick's past and the intentions of Gooper and Mae. Above all, she knows herself—what she was and what she is; what she wants and

[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act Three, p. 76.
[2] *Ibid.*, Act Two, p. 70.

what she must get. She will not conceal it. She is not afraid of " truth," nor has she any illusions. She is practical and aggressive. Benjamin Nelson says, " Margaret is not related, not even distantly, to Blanche DuBois."[1] Indeed, she can stand in " the strong light." In addition to these qualities, Williams gives her much tenderness and love and describes her more sympathetically than the Margaret Pollitt figure in his first treatment of the theme, the short story " Three Players of a Summer Game." There Margaret's masculine characteristics were emphasized, from her brown skin, bare strong arms, and her short hair, to her " assurance and vitality."[2] On the contrary, " Maggie the cat " is all woman.

Brick's attitudes are complicated. Though he *knows*, in a sense, more than Maggie, he does not face the truth, rather, he tries to hide it, especially the truth about himself. However, once he finds it inevitable, he tells his father the truth candidly. The author pictures him at that moment as " a broken, ' tragically elegant ' figure telling simply as much as he knows of ' the Truth ' "[3]

About the recognition of Maggie's love for him, it is similar to that of Big Daddy with regard to Big Mama's love. These two couples are parallel. The author's presentation of them as similar may be perceived by the following speeches:

Big Mama: In all these years you never believed that I loved you?
Bid Daddy: Huh?
Big Mama: And I did, I did so much, I did love you!—I even loved your hate and your hardness, Big Daddy!
Big Daddy: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true. . . .[4]

Similarly in the final scenc, Margaret says:

Margaret: —what you want is someone to—take hold of you.—Gently, gently, with love! And—I do love you, Brick, I do!
Brick: Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?[1]

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[1] Benjamin Nelson, *Tennessee Williams: His Life and Work*, London: Peter Owen, 1961, p. 179.

[2] Tennessee Williams, " Three Players of a Summer Game " (*Three Players of a Summer Game*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), p. 11.

[3] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act Two, p. 66.

[4] *Ibid.*, Act Two, pp. 40–41.

Gooper and Mae are portrayed as thorough inhabitants of the world of " mendacity." Though they have a complete knowledge of Big Daddy's cancer, they make their children sing, dance, and fawn upon him. They cover " poisons " and " venomous thoughts and words "[2] with hypocrisy. These thoughts and words are finally revealed, nevertheless. They, too, are forced to face facts during the second family conversation, the facts that Gooper never liked Big Daddy, nor Big Daddy his son and family, and that they are mean in themselves. It is thus ironical for Gooper to utter, "A family crisis brings out the best and the worst in every member of it."[3]

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams arranges various characters with various attitudes toward the " truth " and its " discovery." The way he arranges them in the play is different from the method of *The Glass Menagerie*, in which people drift about between reality and illusion, or that of in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which has a rather polar opposition between one who covers the truth and tries to escape from it, and one who exposes it. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the interplay of the characters is more complete and more organic. As the actions, speeches, and feelings of all the persons interpenetrate, every character gets wounded in some way or other. Therefore, no clear-cut denouément emerges, no denouément in which the defeated and weak cannot survive, while the strong can. Even Big Daddy, who can be said to be an analogue of Stanley Kowalski, is forced to face the truth about himself, and so be thrown into despair.

In order to live on after a man knows the " truth," it is necessary for him to believe, like Maggie, that " My only point, the only point that I'm making, is life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is—all—over. . . ."[1]

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[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act Three, p. 92.
[2] *Ibid.*, Act Three, p. 84.
[3] *Ibid.*, Act Three, p. 85.

There is some concealed truth. Some character is engaged in "a seeking action" toward it. This leads to the discovery of the truth, which amounts to the climax of the plot. Some results follow.—Using these movements, which can be said to be an archetypal technique of plot development, Tennessee Williams has made up many of his plays. In the construction of *Orpheus Descending* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, for instance, in addition to the plays taken up in this paper, we find the same stream of plot. Williams, however, does not simply rely on "the discovery of the truth," an element which has been a focus of plots since *Oedipus Rex*. In Williams' plays, the pattern is not one in which some "truth" *unknown* to the protagonist is discovered. The "truth" in his plays, except for *The Rose Tattoo*, is *known*, as in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, or it is at least vaguely perceived by the main characters, even though they deliberately cover it.

What is the nature of this "truth"? What is it that covers the truth? Who escapes from it, and how? Who exposes it? After the "discovery," in what situation does each character find himself? With what attitude does Williams regard him? I have asked these questions of each play, and I notice a transition in his answers to them.

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom Wingfield says, "I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."[2] Blanche DuBois says in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, "I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth."[3] Amanda and Laura escape from actuality or truth, the former to the past and the latter to another world. It can be said that qualities of both Amanda and Laura are crystallized in Blanche, but the way she escapes is more complex than theirs. To Amanda, her past consists only of her youth, her prettiness, and the happiness which she associates with a bunch of jonquils and "*seventeen* gentlemen callers."[1] On the contrary, Blanche never recalls her past without associating it somehow

[1] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Act One, p. 27.
[2] Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, Tokyo: Eihōsha, 1961, Scene i, p. 13.
[3] Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Scene ix, p. 89.

with the suicide of her young husband. Therefore, although she clings to her past, the past is of *her own making*. She rather attempts frantically to escape from the past in which certain events have happened. She is a fugitive who flees from both the past and the present to a world of delusion.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the character who is most closely related to Amanda, Laura, and Blanche is Brick Pollitt. He escapes from the past, the present, and from himself, in a sense, to another world, one created by drinking, in the hope of obtaining serenity. He, however, is more conscious of the way he flees, which is neither romantic nor dream-filled, for he sees the world and himself more clearly than did the earlier heroines. The other characters do not deliberately inhabit the world of illusion, nor do they indulge in memories of the past in order to evade the "present." Not that they all recognize the truth and face it. Rather, they live surrounded by deception, hypocrisy, and the veil of ignorance; that is, they live in "mendacity." Maggie the cat tries to confront it, however.

Thus a change in Williams' view of what covers up the "truth" may be seen. Nevertheless, what has not changed is the thought that the "truth" is something desperate, and that it is inevitable to face it. Thus in various ways the hidden truth is brought out into the open, though, as a result, some characters are defeated.

In *The Glass Menagerie* and many of the one-act plays in 27 *Wagons Full of Cotton*, Williams shows sympathy for those who are sensitive, who cannot face facts, and who are fated to be crushed, just as he shows indignation at and contempt for those who are indeed "realistic" but also so insensitive as to force the sensitive persons to face the truth. As he has written on, however, he seems gradually to have come to cherish a feeling of admiration for the latter type.

Stanley Kowalski might be considered a character born from these mingled emotions. Thereafter, this admiration for a person who is full

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[1] Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, Scene i, p. 17.

of vitality, strength, and the courage to face truth appears in more definite figures, that is, in Margaret and Big Daddy, a new type of character. The new elements in them Nancy M. Tischler calls " healthy."[1] Williams had previously contented himself with deploring the lack of true communication and understanding between the strong and the weak. Now he more positively tries to realize such communication and understanding between Brick and Big Daddy, and between Brick and Maggie.

As for the relation of characters to the discovery of the truth, Williams builds up a new relation in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. He makes two different and opposite elements coexist in one character, one trying to discover, the other, to hide the truth. He does not set up characters in opposition who hate one another; rather, the " opponents " now love each other. Nevertheless, they hurt one another. Brick and Big Daddy exemplify–and themselves realize–the author's idea that " we even destroy each other because of this always somewhat thwarted effort to break through walls to each other."[2]

Even if the wound is given by one's beloved, though, even if it comes after a mutual understanding of one's truth, the character must face his disaster by himself. Williams keeps his eye upon the *individual*—Laura, Blanche, Brick, and Big Daddy, in each of whom resides at least the seed of a tragic result. Each can share it with no one; each has no Horatio to attend him.

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[1] Nancy M. Tischler, *Tennessee Williams, Rebellious Puritan*, New York: The Citadel Press, 1961, p. 214.

[2] Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Five Plays by Tennessee Williams*, Foreword, p. ix.

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