

Chapter 1

Tennessee Williams and the Context for the Study

The Argument

This study attempts to analyze Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) in terms of the life of Brick, one of the major characters of the play as well as other characters from the perspective of nihilism. Nihilism is a theoretical idea that focuses on the meaninglessness of human life. Brick, the favorite son of Big Daddy and Big Mama, once a good athlete, has now become a sport announcer. He is completely indifferent towards his wife and other members of the family. He always talks about 'the click', which he is searching all the time, but is unable to get. He is rich; he has a beautiful wife; and his mother loves him very much, but still he is in pain. Furthermore, the study raises the question on the futile attempt of individuals to run their life in the so-called meaningful way to get success and happiness. Through this play, Williams shows that human life is meaningless, incoherent and without purposes regardless of piles of social and family methods and materials.

The plot of the play revolves around Brick who was a popular football player, but later on due to his broken ankle, he settles as a sports announcer. Though he is the favorite son of the family, after the death of his close and homosexual (as told by other members of the family) friend Skipper, he becomes alcoholic, indifferent and aloof from all. He is indifferent even towards his wife Margaret, both physically and spiritually. Although the family gathers to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday, he is not interested to involve in family conversation rather he involves in drinking alcohol all the time. Williams tries to show the crisis in the relation between Brick and his wife Margaret (in the play she is usually called Maggie or "Maggie the cat"). The main reason behind the problem in their marital relationship is due to his nihilistic attitude

towards the world. Williams has presented Brick as a character without any goals and ambition of life. He does not want any property of his father, nor does he want to have babies. Brick is emotionally and spiritually far away from family matters. Gooper, who is the elder brother of Brick, and Mae, the wife of Gooper are trying to get all property from Big Daddy; but the favorite son of the family is completely indifferent both in the relationship as well as in family property.

According to nihilism, all invented values, rules, and moral are pointless. A nihilist is a person who strongly assumes that the principles, moralities and values were falsely originated, so they are worthless. Though these codes of morality and civilization are made to make human life meaningful, coherent and purposeful, in reality nothing can make human life meaningful, coherent and purposeful. Brick does not care about these norms and assumptions. As a result, he even ignores his beautiful wife instead of showing love and care for her. Most of the time, he is found half-naked and always tends to be far away from the reality of life. The whole story of the play primarily revolves around Brick, who is isolated from everybody and everything, and remains aloof and silent.

The play can be interpreted from different perspectives. However, this study focuses mainly on nihilistic attitude that is found not only in Brick but also other characters of the play through their attitude and perspective towards life.

Critics on Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has been analyzed by different critics from different angles. This play is one of Williams' personal favorites. It won the Pulitzer Prize for play in 1955, and Tony Award in the same year. In 1958, its big screen adaptation was made by MGM, directed by Michael Billington. For this film, Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman had received Oscar nomination for their

performance who played the role of Margaret and Brick respectively. Eric Bentley, a famous author, comments on this play that “the play was heralded ... as the play in which homosexuality was at last to be presented without evasion. But the miracle still hasn’t happened” (qtd. in Quinn 65). He means to say that Williams has just touched homosexual aspect, but he has not shown this issue in a clear way.

Michael Billington interprets the play with reference to the philosophical aspect that life is the interplay of truth and illusion.

First, its worth reminding ourselves what it’s actually about. At its most basic, it confronts the issue that runs through all great American play, From Eugene O’Neill onwards: the conflict between truth and illusion. Set on rich Mississippi plantation, Williams’ play shows the conflict from many angles. Brick, an alcoholic ex-athlete, refuses to sleep with his vivacious wife Maggie, Supposedly, Brick’s father, a towering patriarch known as Big Daddy over inheritance the family squabbles, is equally unable to fade up to the fact he is dying of cancer. The two illusions meet head-on in the great father-son confrontation in the second act. But, although the play offers a social critique and rich southern humor, it finally asks whether it is better to lives by lies or truth. (Para. 2)

Billington holds that conflict between truth and illusion is its subject matter.

Similar to Billington, Susan Neal Mayberry from Alfred University describes the play as a piece of work, which centers on the major conflict between appearance and reality but the reality in the winning side:

Although the Southern dialect, mannerisms, and setting apparent in *Cat on a Hot Roof* reveals Tennessee Williams’ usual regional focus,

the idea feelings and restricted but, on the contrary, are of universal import. The play depicts the feelings and consequences of greed, frustration, guilt, desire and hypocrisy, but most importantly it deals with the conflict between appearance and reality and its resolution in truth. Williams is concerned with man's drive to escape his problems either by totally ignoring them or by effecting a façade of illusion.

(365)

Mayberry indicates that the play does not only limit the values of the South but it is about the universal subject matter. It describes the universal feelings and human emotion. He opines that Williams tries to depict how humans tend to avoid problems either by ignoring it or by living in illusion.

Creed Bowlen, analyzes the ambiguous character of Brick as:

My research prior to rehearsal clarified many key elements of the play and defend my most significant acting play 'ambiguous?' My training at UCF convinced me those specific choices to play the decisively ambiguous Brick Pollitt as a man in active avoidance of the people, hard truths, and doubts that surround him. Avoidance became my flesh and blood understanding and active passport to the central ambiguity of literary character. My characters need for active avoidance begins before my initial entrance onstage. (70-71)

Analyzing the character of Brick, Bowlen considers him as an ambiguous and indifferent character who distances himself away from the chaos.

Claire Nicolay interprets the play as a parable of the changing American dream and its effects on masculinity, which in turn affects the structure of the family and the lives of women. He further comments that particularly, the 'Notes for the

Designer' and offstage Presence of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello; Big Daddy's meditation on his hobo past; the relationship between Brick and Big Daddy and their troubled marriage; Maggie's assumption of power, all are part of a subtle yet persistent historical narrative (Para. 1). Here, Nicolay comments on the family aspect of the play criticizing on masculinity and American dream. He finds that the play is somehow like a typical play, which includes a conflict between family members, envy among blood relation, deception, lack of peace of mind, and lack of understanding among people.

Margaret Lynne Quinn observes the theme of irony in play as:

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof's setting in time and space makes an ironic comment on its "mendacity" theme: the entire action of the play takes place on Big Daddy's birthday, a celebration of life based on the lie that Big Daddy is suffering not from terminal cancer, but from a "Little spastic condition, "the day on which he must confront a knowledge that, as he points out, man alone must bear- the knowledge that he is about to die.... The single set is Maggie and Brick's shared bedroom in the Pollitt plantation house; the 'big double bed'... is one of the focal points of the set, the place of love-making, yet, ironically, the lack of love – making and the reasons behind it are the salient feature of the Brick- Maggie marriage, and the "big double bed" is used by a single person, Maggie. (43)

Lynne has touched upon the ironical aspect of the play. He points out that the play is full of irony. On the 65th birthday of Big Daddy, everyone is talking about cancer (upcoming death) of Big Daddy. The "big double bed" in Brick and Margaret's room is ironical in the sense that even in love there is no romantic relationship between

Brick and Margaret.

Similarly, Amy Brooks in her thesis talks about the troubled relationship between Brick and Maggie:

Brick's refusal to maintain "a socially approved sexual relationship" with his wife, a form of conscientious objection made concrete by the specter of vacant double bed, is the most controversial of his violation. This resistance torments Maggie, chagrins his parents and siblings, thwarts the propagation of an heir to the Pollitt estate, and expose him to continued suspicion of a homosexual attachment to Skipper. (25)

Amy talks about the troublesome sexual behavior of Brick and Maggie. Brick is not interested in sexual relation with his wife though sexual relation between husband and wife is legal and approved by everyone. Brooks has picked out the homosexual relation of Brick with Skipper as the reason behind his not having close relationship with his wife.

These various responses of different critics show that the play is analyzed from different perspectives but not exactly from the nihilistic approach. So, this study aims to explore the nihilistic way of life in the life of the characters of the play especially focusing on Brick.

Outline of the Study

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the major focus of the study. It hints towards the futile attempts of the characters to make their life meaningful. It includes the background of the study, different critics' interpretations and the outline of the study.

The tool for the analysis of the play is nihilism. So, in the second chapter, overall theoretical concept and meaning of nihilism in relation to contemporary

human issues is discussed. This chapter also illustrates the concept of nihilism and how it has become the reality of today's world.

The third chapter analyzes the play on various grounds by using the theory of nihilism. The dialogues from the play are used for substantiating nihilistic attitude of the characters and themes. The last chapter is the conclusion of the study in which major points are restated and presented in a condensed form.

Chapter 2

Nihilism and the Study of Literature

Nihilism: The Concept

Nihilism is a philosophical doctrine that advocates the meaninglessness of life. The term came from a Latin word 'nihil' which means nothing. So, nihilism denies the existence of meaningful aspects of life. According to the theory of nihilism, life holds no certain meaning, no objectives, purposes or intrinsic values. It rejects everything which is called meaningful. It supports the idea that nothing is permanent in this world. All the rules and regulations, morals and principles, even the advancement of science and technology cannot make human life meaningful, coherent and happy.

The nihilists believe that it is futile attempt of an individual to search coherence, meaning and purpose in life because life itself has no certainty. According to this theory, every reputedly meaningful aspects of life is falsely created. In the real sense, the theory denies all the philosophies, and believes that nothing can be known or communicated.

Nihilism has its origin associated with Friedrich Jacobi who used the word to denote negative characterization of transcendental idealism. The word 'nihilism' became popular after its evolvment in Ivan Turgenev's novel *Father and Sons* (1862). This novel is taken as an important book on the philosophy of nihilism. Bazarov is a nihilist character in the novel. This novel has defined a nihilist as "a man who declines to bow to the authority or to accept any principles on trust, however, sanctified it may be" (23). The history of nihilism is somehow associated with the Russian revolutionary movement that had rejected the authority of the state, church and family. In the introduction part of the novel, relationship between French

revolution and nihilism is shown in this way:

Strictly speaking, a nihilist believes in nothing, but as we are told, they believed in the denial of all authorities in the cause of freedom and social justice. Turgenev came to regret his revival of the word nihilist- it had first been used to designate political radicalism in Russia in 1840- because he thought he had given his opponents a stick to beat him with. Howe's view of Bazarov's impoverishment as revolutionary is itself a twentieth- century echo of contemporary objections to the novel on its first appearance. The context of its publication is vital.

(VI)

While analyzing the history of nihilism, it is connected with many other philosophers and scholars, too. Many philosophers believe that there is connection between existentialism, nihilism and absurdism. Existentialism believes that there is no meaning in the universe. One has to construct meaning oneself. An Absurdist believes that this world is meaningless and an attempt to make life meaningful is also meaningless. Among different categories, existential nihilism believes that the world is without meaning and purpose, and every individual is an isolated being thrown into the undefined universe.

By the late twentieth century, even the postmodern philosophers and scholars are said to have similar perspective to nihilists. They also see that the world is meaningless and one should accept the way it is and should live within the problem itself. Relating with these postmodern perspectives, *World Book Encyclopedia* has defined nihilism as:

... the name used for variety of extremes, negative philosophical and political views. The term nihilism comes from a Latin word meaning

nothing. The most radical nihilist would deny that anything exists. A slightly less radical view which is usually called skepticism that anything can be known. (218)

This book has defined nihilism as a philosophical doctrine which carries extremist and radical concepts. Radicalism can be seen in politics as well as in philosophies.

Some of the scholars have connected nihilism with spirituality. It means, by rejecting everything, one can get salvation. Freydish explains nihilism in this way:

Nihilism is primarily skepticism coupled with reduction, but in practical reality it takes on more than one facet which often leads to a confusion of definitions. In the most general sense nihilism has two major classifications, the first is passive and usually goes by the term existential or 'social' nihilism and the second is active and is termed 'political' nihilism. (Para. 2)

Regarding these two types of nihilism, Freydish further explains the existential nihilism as a "passive world view which revolves round such topics as suffering and futility". In a more direct sense existential social nihilism is manifest within the sense of isolation, futility, angst, and the hopelessness of existence increasingly prevalent within the modern digital world, an effect referred to as the 'downward spiral'. A direct way to describe it might be 'detachment from everything' (Para. 2-3).

So, existential nihilism is related with pessimistic view towards life. It rejects every meaningful aspect of life whereas political nihilism is the radical one that revolts against the powerful authority. Anyway, the essence of nihilism is to believe that everything is meaningless, nothing is permanent and all the attempt of people to make life meaningful is also futile.

Nihilism in Literature

Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher whose works of literature are often considered as nihilistic. Nietzsche's *Will to Power* is taken as one of the important books on nihilism. Many scholars have analyzed this book and other work of Nietzsche in their own ways. Bernard Reginster has analyzed Nietzsche's notion of nihilism by showing the relationship between pessimism and nihilism:

Contrary to the prevalent interpretation, the bulk of Nietzsche's analyses of the concept of nihilism support an interpretation of it in terms of despair. In fact, the passage about the 'devaluation of the highest values' I cited previously is one of few in which nihilism is explicitly presented as acclaim about values. By contrast, the view that despair is Nietzsche's primary conception of nihilism is confirmed by much of his unpublished discussion of this concept. (28)

Many scholars and philosophers have associated nihilism with pessimism similar as in this book. They point out that nihilists devalue everything. They devalue everything, which they get in their life; relationship, property, future planning, dreams, etc. As a result, they just want to lead their life without any optimistic idea.

In the same book, Reginster has talked about the nature of nihilism connecting it with willingness, as:

Nihilism is simply a new term for an idea encapsulated starkly in 'the terrible wisdom of Silenus': the view that it is better not to be, the 'will to nothingness.' And although he deplores the residual influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner in a late preface to that book its objective was at least to alter significantly their pessimistic outlook to substitute a 'strong pessimism' for their decadent one. (52)

Reginster also notes that, although Nietzsche in the book is silent on Christianity, it “advocates a ‘Dionysian spirit’ that is already radically *The Birth of Tragedy*, may be interpreted as a concerted effort to circumscribe more precisely the nature and sources of nihilism and to refine his response to it accordingly” (52). Nietzsche associates human instinct with Dionysian or irrationality. The nihilists prefer irrationality in many aspects and lacks will to perform any kind of works on the rational basis. It means nihilists are not interested even to do their daily activities in usual ways.

Another feature of nihilism is to be far away from the reality. Nandita Bishwas Mellamphy includes the points of German philosopher Muller- Lauter in this way:

Just as the radical nihilist rejects reality [insofar as he denies the life], the Overman’s affirmative openness must be equally total. His Yes must extend to the whole world, after the nihilist has condemned this whole. If the Overman’s affirmation were only partial, the nihilist would be right with regard to the excluded part. Since the sole world comprises a seamless complex, a ‘half- Yes’ would be just as inconsistent as s’Half –No’. Whoever says ‘Yes’ to one fact must affirm all facts, if his Yes is to be a genuine Yes. For the affirmed fact exists only with all others, through all others... The Overman must, then affirm even the nihilistic condemnations that he himself condemns. (74)

The concept of ‘the overman’ for Nietzsche is the way to face the reality not in direct straight forward way rather indirectly, with a mix of them. Lauter strongly affirms that nihilism means to deny the reality. It means that nihilists reject the reality of the life. They want to be far away from the real circumstances. It is very difficult for

nihilists even to accept simple reality of their own daily life. Thus, they try several ways to be far from the realistic world. As a result, they involve in such imaginary life through the use of drugs, alcohol or some nihilists who have positive vibes even go for meditation to be far from the reality.

Often willingness to death is connected with nihilism. It is the belief that nihilists do not care about physical body. As a result, they choose death directly or indirectly. Mellamphy, connects nihilism with death in the following expression:

In several passages, Nietzsche extols the ‘willing at the right time to die’; death.- One must convert the stupid physiological fact into a moral necessity. So to live that one can also will at the right time to die! Not every or just any act of willing self-annihilation is in accordance with the criteria necessary to overcome nihilism. The general intention to kill oneself is not what Nietzsche means by ‘free death’. Freedom towards death as the necessary criteria for willing the over-coming of nihilism is only available to the one who has already destroyed all faith and belief in present human morality. Nietzsche thus suggests that the metamorphosis between negation and affirmation happens as an accident. (79)

It shows that Nietzsche praises “willing to die at right time”; he is in support of those who think it is their right to kill themselves. It means that nihilists believe that it is their right to end life when they want. In this way, willing for death is one characteristic of the philosophy of nihilism. Nietzsche has made deep analysis on “willing to die” on right time in a positive way.

Different scholars have defined nihilism in their own ways, but the essence of nihilism is meaninglessness, pessimism, nothingness, rejection of the reality, willing

to death, destruction, radicalism, and even futile attempt of an individual to make life meaningful. This idea of nihilism has been used in this study to analyze Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Chapter 3

Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: A Nihilistic Perspective of Life

Relationships no Longer Work

Brick, one of the main characters of the play, shows nihilistic attitude through his behavior. He was a popular football player, but due to an injury on his ankle, he settles as a sport announcer. Despite being the main character of the play, he lacks objective, meaning and purpose in life. Throughout the play, he demonstrates the nihilistic attitude that causes his indifference towards his wife and other members of the family.

Another striking thing about Brick is that he can neither accept his homosexual (as told by other members of the family) relation with Skipper nor can he maintain his marital relation with his wife in a normal way. He is unable to face the reality of life. His distinctive perspective of life is not understood by his family members, as can be seen in the following dialogue between the husband and the wife:

BRICK. One man has one great good true thing in his life. One great good thing which is true! - I had friendship with Skipper. -You are naming it dirty!

MARGARET. I'm not naming it dirty! I am naming it clean.

BRICK. Not love with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper was that one great thing, and you are naming it dirty! (1.1.315)

Brick says that Skipper is just his friend not more than that but after the death of Skipper, he is ruining his life in alcohol. He is not interested in his wife. All the members of family are busy in celebrating sixty fifth birthday of Big Daddy but the favorite son of the family is avoiding conversation with family members and is busy in alcohol all the time.

So, Brick is trying to escape from the reality of life in alcohol. Not only this, he is not even aware about his being alive. It might be that he even wants to die rather than to live, as most of the nihilists do.

BRICK. I'm sorry Big Daddy. My head don't work anymore and it's hard for me to understand how anybody could care if he lived or died or was dying or cared about anything but whether or not there was liquor left in the bottle and so I said what I said without thinking. In some ways I'm no better than the others, in some ways worse because I'm less alive that makes them lie and alive that makes me sort of accidentally truthful- I don't know but- anyway- we've been friends. (2.1.352)

Thus, Brick's conversation with Big Daddy reveals his desire to be far away from life. He even does not want to accept that he is alive. He himself tags as less alive. It means that he wants to be far away from one of the important and big reality of life, that is, to be alive. He denies calling himself as alive. His only concern is in alcohol. He always drinks alcohol though he knows the harm of excessive drinking.

Williams has presented Brick as a frustrated, pessimistic, depressed and unsatisfied character with everything and every relationship that is regarded as normal. This pessimistic attitude can be seen with his statement, "I don't have do anything I don't want to do" (1.1.303). Pessimism is one of the key features of nihilism and it is seen in his character. People with pessimistic nature do not want to do anything because they do not believe in it. As a result, they lose interest and activeness. Brick shows this that makes him a nihilistic character.

Williams has shown Brick as a character exhibiting nothingness. He has no aim and no future plans to achieve but ruins his life by doing nothing. This can be

seen in the following dialogue:

BRICK. I don't remember thinking of anything, Maggie.

MARGARET. Don't you think that- ? Don't you-? - Think I know that?

BRICK. Know what, Maggie? (1.1.298)

Brick does not think about anything. It means that he loves nothing. He is even not interested towards the property of his father. He has no enthusiasm to do any everyday activities, maintain his relation with and closeness to his father. This lack of the interest of father-son closeness is shown as in the following dialogue:

BRICK. Well, Sir, ever so often say to me, Brick, I want to have you, but when we talk, it never materializes. Nothing is said. You sit in a chair and gas about this and that and I look like I listen. I try to look like listen, but I don't listen, not much. Communication is- awful hard between you and me, it just don't- happen. (2.1.333)

Here, Brick says that when they talk, their talk never materializes. It means that there is no meaningful sharing in their communication. He says that nothing is said. As his life, his dialogues are also full of nothingness.

Brick is not interested in anything. He even does not have interest in his wife. He has not touched Margaret till now. That is the reason why they do not have a child. On the other hand, Margaret is desperate to get love from her husband.

BRICK. Then jump off the roof, jump off it, cats can jump off roofs and land on their four feet uninjured!

MARGARET. Oh, yes!

BRICK. Do it! - fo' God sake, do it...

MARGARET. Do what?

BRICK. Take a lover!

MARGARET. I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed; I just see You! Why don't you get ugly, Brick, why don't you please get fat or ugly or something so I could stand it? [She rushes to hall door, opens it, listens.] The Concert is still going on! Bravo, no- necks, bravo! [She slams and locks door fiercely.]

BRICK. What did you lock the door for?

MARGARET. To give us a little privacy for a while.

BRICK. You know better, Maggie. (1.1.305)

Margaret wants love from her husband and even tries to seduce him for love making. She to closes the door in order to have some private time with him, Brick is not interested even to talk romantically with her.

In this way, Brick is totally uninterested in his beautiful wife. If he is homosexual, why he does not clearly state that? He always denies his homosexual relation with Skipper. Thus, the reason behind his problematic relation with wife is not his intimacy with Skipper, but it is his nihilistic attitude towards everything.

Avoiding Reality with Illusion

Another character of Brick is to be far away from reality. He is unable to face his real life. As a result, he keeps himself away from family conversation and spends his whole time just by spending time in alcohol. The following conversation between father and son reveals it:

BRICK. No, I can't. We talk, you talk, in circles! We get nowhere, no where! It's always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don't have a fuckin' thing to say to me!

BIG DADDY. Nothin' to say when I'm tellin' you I'm going to live

when I thought I was dying?!

BRICK. Oh- that! - Is that what you have to say to me? (2.1.339)

Brick's conversation with Big Daddy too reveals his attitude to be far away from reality. He even does not want to accept that his conversation with his father is meaningful. He is not interested even to talk with his father.

Brick seems to be far away from reality all the time. He avoids conversation with family members.

BRICK. The click I get in my head when I've had enough of this stuff
to make me peaceful... Will you do me a favor?

MARGARET. Maybe I will. What favor?

BRICK. Just, just keep your voice down!

MARGARET. [in a hoarse whisper] I'll do you that favor, I'll speak in
a whisper, if not shut up completely, if you will do me a favor
and make that drink your last one till after the party.

BRICK. What party?

MARGARET. You know this is Big Daddy's birthday!

BRICK. No, I don't, I forgot it.

MARGARET. Well, I remembered it for you. (1.1.302)

Brick always talks about the click that he is searching all the time, but unable to get. He is rich; he has beautiful wife and loving parents, but still he is not satisfied. He frequently mentions 'the click', which he might get after drinking alcohol, avoiding the reality of life because he is unable to adjust himself with his daily life. He is incapable to get satisfaction despite having property, beautiful wife and loving parents. He thinks that he might get it by drinking alcohol and making himself aloof from the world.

Brick was a popular football player. Later on, due to being injured on his ankle, he settled as a sport announcer and started his married life. He did these to make his life happy. But still, he is missing something and is making futile attempt to fulfill it by drinking alcohol. Drinking has become his mechanical way of life as he admits, "A click that I get in my head that makes me peaceful" (2.1.337). For him, that 'click' gives peace and goes on drinking until he gets that.

According to Brick, he gets a click or satisfaction by drinking alcohol. He confesses that he will continue to drink up to the time he does not get peace in his mind. He is neither interested to talk with his wife nor with his father. What he wants is just to drink. But he cannot get peace by drinking alcohol, it is only his addiction. Nihilist people often make futile attempts to make life purposeful and peaceful.

Nihilism advocates that all code of society is useless. Moral, principles, system are made by human and they are useless. Mae and Gooper's absurd reaction towards cancer (upcoming death) of Big Daddy too makes this play nihilistic. If this code of society was real, Gooper and Mae would look after Big Daddy. Their first priority would be health of Big Daddy. They would be sad and emotional after listening about cancer of Big Daddy, but in contrast, they only have evil eyes on his property. Mae is very much conscious of the affair between Brick and Big Daddy. But Big Daddy does not like Mae's interference. Rather, he wants privacy. He wants to avoid her as he says:

... and I don't want you. I want some privacy here, while I'm having a confidential talk with my son Brick. Now it's too hot in here to close them doors, but if I have to close those fuckin' doors in order to have a private talk with my son Brick, just let me know and I'll close 'em. Because I hate eavesdroppers, I don't like any kind of sneakin' an'

spyin'. (2.1.329)

There is conflict between Big Daddy and Mae. Mae wants to know what Brick would say to daddy about his affair with Maggie but Big Daddy becomes bothered of it as he expresses, "you was just nothing but sspyin' an' you know it". Big Daddy knows that Mae has been spying over the young couple's relation and wants to impress him by telling him about that. Here, Mae is busy in convincing Big Daddy that Gooper too is capable of handling his business and property. She requests Big Daddy not to love Brick only, but to give some love and attention to her and Gooper. She says so to get his property. But Big Daddy is aware of her selfishness and he so shouts at her.

Unlike Mae, Brick is full of aloofness,' I have to hear that little click in my head that makes me peaceful Usually I hear it sooner than this, sometimes as early as-noon, but-Today it's -dilatary....-I haven't got the right level of alcohol in my bloodstream yet!"(2.1.338). He is not concerned with the property but only with alcohol.

Marriage and Relationship No Longer for Happiness

In the play, Big Daddy and Big Mama looks perfect couple from outside. People think that they are a very happy couple because they have spent forty years together. Their marital relation and the family look perfect for the society. Big Daddy is a rich head of Big Plantation Company, and they have two sons. They have everything that modern human beings wish for happy and significant life. But the reality is not as it seems to the society. The couple has a problem in their marital relation opposite to the reality though for the society, it is a model of a successful, rich and happy life. Big Daddy does not even talk with Big Mamma in a kind way. Thus, there is a problem not only in the marital relation of Brick and Margaret, but also in the relation between Big Daddy and Big Mama. There is some sense of gloominess as

it can be seen in the following dialogue:

BIG MAMA. In all these years you never believed that I loved you?

BIG DADDY. Huh!

BIG MAMA. And I did so much, your hate and your hardness, Big

Daddy! [She sobs and rushes awkwardly out onto the gallery.]

Big Daddy. [to himself] wouldn't be funny if that was true...(2.1.327)

This conversation between Big Daddy and Big Mama suggests that their marital life is also deprived of the sense of happiness. Big Daddy does not believe in love of his wife even after many years of marriage.

The above conversation in the play dismantles the concept that marriage binds people happily. The continuation of married life, having children and sufficient property are the basic criteria of a happy and successful life. But in reality, they are the false construction. Marriage is also falsely constructed as suggested by this play, Big Daddy says "That's right, a ball, a ball! Hell! - I slept with Big Mama till, let's see, five years ago, till I was sixty and she was fifty- eight, and never even liked her, never did!" (2.1.335). People usually believe that marriage gives romantic and happy ties between two people, but in this play, it has been challenged.

Big Mama and Big Daddy who have spent several years together are also not satisfied with their relation. Big Mama admits openly that she loves Big Daddy but Big Daddy, rather than believing in Big Mama expresses that 'never even liked her, never did'. Big Daddy does not love Big Mama. Thus, the prevalent concept of marriage has been dismantled. People mostly believe that marriage means to love each other, to be faithful with one another but it is not found in this play neither in the marital relation of son and daughter -in-law nor in father and mother.

Nihilism does not believe in marriage-like concepts of society. It denies that

true love ever happens between people. Marriage is also falsely constructed as suggested by Williams in this play. Therefore, this play depicts nihilistic attitude directly or indirectly. Nihilism suggests that life is meaningless and useless despite all the constructed social codes, or the infrastructures invented by people and society. Society has constructed codes of marriage and family in order to make people happy, satisfied and social but in reality, they are taken as negative attributes. As a result, many young couples like Brick and Margaret as well as old couples are ruining their relationship by different reasons. Thus, this play tries to dismantle the purpose and meaning of social and family codes constructed by the society since the long past.

Disparate Human Life beyond Hard Work and Devotion

At the end of the play, Big Daddy's hard work and dedication go in vain when he neither can save himself from cancer nor enjoy a harmonious relation with the family members. He regrets of his entire attempt:

BIG DADDY.....I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! I did all that myself with no goddam help from you, and now you think you're just about to over. Well, I am just about to take over a God damn thing. Is that clear to you, Ida? Is that very plain to you, now? I've had the goddam exploratory operation, and nothing is wrong with me but a spastic colon- made spastic, I guess, by disgust! By all the goddam lies and liars that I have had to put up with, and all the goddam hypocrisy that I lives with all these forty years that we

been livin' together! (2.1.327)

Big Daddy is recollecting his struggling days and his futile attempt to make his life meaningful but at last, he is unable to save his own life. He narrates his past that due to poverty he quit his school at the age of ten. He even worked in the field as a nigger. He rose from zero to hero with his own hard work. He then worked hard to be rich by himself. When he knows that he is suffering from cancer, he feels very sad. He feels guilty of the past hard work.

He becomes very sad knowing that he is dying soon. He feels sadder when he realizes that he could not save his life with his money. At last, the head of the Mississippi Delta's Plantation Company becomes helpless. He now realizes that money is nothing. However, still he is searching meaning of life, "seen all things and understood a lot of them, till 1910. Christ, the year that- I had worn my shoes through, road, slept in a wagon of cotton outside the gin- Jack Straw an Peter Ochello took me in. Hired me to manage this place which grew into this ne." (2.1.346)

Big Daddy's realization of life also makes this play a nihilistic one. The most striking point here is that Big Daddy is being frustrated even with his family members. He knows that Gooper and Mae are looking for his property and waiting for his death for it. But he is also being unfaithful towards his wife. Thus, it is not hard to say that Big Daddy is being a nihilist in his old age. His frustration and depression after knowing his condition can be realized in the following dialogue:

BIG DADDY. You git you a piece of land, by hook or crook, an'
things start growin' on it, things accumulate on it, and the first
thing you know it's completely out of hand, completely out of
hand!

BRICK. Well, they say nature hates vacuum, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY. That's what they say, but sometimes I think that a vacuum is a hell of a lot better than some of the stuff that nature replaces it with. Is someone out there by that door? (2.1.329)

Big Daddy seems to be a completely nihilistic here. He says that he loves vacuum. It means he loves nothing. He hates the stuff. He says that he likes the vacuum without its replacement with any stuff. Here, he might refer to relationships, property, and hard work as stuff in the life. In his old age, he realizes that life is the vacuum without stuff and meaning and purpose.

Unconventionality in the Setting and Costumes

The Playwright describes the stage and room:

Perhaps the style of the room is not what you would expect in the home of the Delta's biggest cotton-planter. It is Victorian with a touch of the Far East. It hasn't changed much since it was occupied by the original by owners of the place, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, a pair of old bachelors who shared this room all their lives together. In other words, the room must evoke some ghosts; it is gently and poetically haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon. (1.1.291)

The setting of the play matches the plot and mind- set of characters of the play. Thus, it is not too adventurous and larger than life. Simple and not so attractive settings of the play too reflect nihilism directly and indirectly.

While the play is watched on television, most of the scene is of Brick's room which is simple. Minimum decoration can be seen on stage to match with pessimistic, frustrated, and futile attempt of characters. As it is mentioned in the following lines: "TV set and liquor cabinet, bearing and containing many glasses and bottles, all in

one piece, which is a composition of muted silver tones, and bottles, all in one piece” (292). The drinking habit of Brick is also reflected by the setting of the play. The description of several types of glasses represents his excessive drinking habit:”This piece of furniture(?!), this monument, is very complete and compact little shrine to virtually all the comforts and illusions behind which we hide from such things as the characters in the play are faced with...” (292). The description of the monuments reflects the characteristic and nature of the entire family. Monuments have not been described clearly; it is denoted with question marks while describing in the book. However, this may symbolize that the play is not about positive and optimistic things. These types of illusionary things are described in Notes for the Designer in the play in order to give instruction to the designer for creating setting which could help reflect random emotion of characters. They are nihilistic in nature in direct or indirect ways.

Dress worn by the characters also represents nihilistic spirit. For instance, Brick is almost semi-naked most of the time:

He stands there in the bathroom doorway drying his hair with a towel and hanging onto the towel because one ankle is broken, plastered and bound. He is still slim and firm as a boy. His liquor hasn't started tearing him down outside. He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle. But now and then, when disturbed, something flashes behind it, like lightning in affair sky, which shows that at some deeper level he is far from peaceful. Perhaps in a stronger light he would show signs of deliquescence, but the fading, still warm, light from the gallery treats him gently. (294)

The above description suggests that Brick is still handsome by outside. The line “His

liquor hasn't started tearing him down outside" means he is depressed by inside but his outlook is still attractive. At heart, he is lacking peace; he is very much frustrated inside.

As a result, he accessibly drinks alcohol ignoring about his health and family. He is aloof in nature. His only company is his glass of alcohol, which he carries all the time. One can notice nihilistic attitude like pessimism, frustration, and meaninglessness of Brick even by looking at his customs. As described in the note, "Brick is still on the gallery. Someone below calls up to him in a warm Negro voice, "Hiya, Mistuh Brick, how yuh feelin'? Brick raises his liquor glass as if that answered the question"(313). Many times Brick just ignores others. If somebody calls him, he does not give responses. In the above lines, Brick is showing this kind of responses in the play, he tries to ignore conversation with other members of his family. Margaret speaks thousand words with him but in response Brick only utters one or two lines showing no interest at all.

From the above analysis of the play it can be concluded that Williams adopts nihilistic attributes directly and indirectly from the beginning to the end. The main character Brick is a pessimist and frustrated man who loves nothing, which proves that he is leading his life in the nihilistic way. Not only Brick, other characters including Big Daddy do not present themselves as active, optimistic and enthusiastic ones. The plot, stage, costumes and dialogues of character show nihilistic attributes sometime in direct and sometime indirect ways. There is a problem not only on the relationship between Brick and Maggie's marital life but there is some sense of gloominess even in the relationship of Big Daddy and Big Mama. They are all suffering with some sense of unfulfillment, unkindness and lack of understanding even from their nearest and dearest ones.

Chapter 4

Life as a Meaningless Pursuit

Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* projects meaninglessness, of life. Brick, for instance, is full of nihilistic attributes – frustration, depression, nothingness, pessimism and inactivity. He was a popular football player, but due to his injured ankle, he settled as a sport announcer. He married Margaret, but he is connected with her neither spiritually nor physically. He is suspected of having homosexual relationship with his friend Skipper, but he refuses that relation on the ground of only having intimate friendship. What he does, how he acts, how he wears clothes and how he treats his wife and others reflect his nihilistic attitude.

The play shows a kind of crisis in the relation between Brick and his wife Margaret as well as also between other members of the family. Especially, Brick likes to be isolated from the family affair, rather he spends most of his time in alcohol. The crucial reason behind the problem in his marital relationship is due to his nihilistic attitude towards life and the world. Williams has presented Brick as a character without any objectives, meanings, purpose and plans. Another striking thing about Brick is that he can neither accept his homosexual relation with Skipper nor can he lead his marital relationship with wife in a normal way.

Brick is always frustrated, depressed and unsatisfied with everything and everyone. All the time, he tries to escape from the so-called reality by drinking alcohol. He does not want to do anything. It means that he loves nothing. He is neither interested towards his father, mother and wife nor towards his father's property. Indifference to life, relation and the future is the characteristic of nihilistic person. Throughout the play, Brick shows these types of nihilistic attitudes in his dialogues and behavior. The dialogues uttered by him are nihilistic. He declines to bow to

authority. He does not care about society's assumptions and rule, and regulations. As a result, he is not interested in running his life in a smooth way.

Other family members like Big Daddy, Big mama, Gooper, Mae and Margaret make attempts to make their lives meaningful, happy and satisfied, but they prove to be futile. Family members' absurd reaction towards cancer (upcoming death) of Big Daddy too makes this play a nihilistic. Gooper and Mae are not sad about Big Daddy's sickness, but they have eye only on his wealth. This scene in the play dismantles close family relationship, and social codes on which people usually believe. It shows that blood (or family) relationship is also not natural, but constructed, so relationships cannot maintain true love and affection, caring and sharing among the members. Nihilism assumes that all the codes of society, morals and the modes of relationships are meaningless and falsely created. Neither the relationship nor hard work makes human life meaningful and happy. Big Daddy is unable to save himself from cancer in spite of being Delta's biggest cotton planter. In this regards, money matters nothing in real life though it is the center of attraction for all except Brick.

The play adopts nihilistic attributes directly and indirectly from the beginning to the end. It is not only Brick who is pessimist, frustrated and loves nothing, leading his life in a nihilistic way but also other characters, as well as the stage of the play, dress worn by the characters, description of the setting etc. also represent nihilistic attitude and behavior. Brick is almost semi-naked most of the time. There is a problem not only in the relationship between Brick and Maggie's marital life but there is some sense of gloominess even in the relationship of his parents, Big Daddy and Big Mama. Though all the characters are busy in their attempts to achieve their goal in their life in their own way, at the end they achieve nothing.

On the whole, the plot of the play is revolving around nihilistic features of the major characters especially of Brick's reaction towards his own life, family and relation as well as the futile and absurd life of all of the characters though vary in degree. Brick's absurd reaction to his marital life, Big Daddy's cancer, Big Mamas gloominess, Mae and Gooper's quest for wealth, Big Daddy's desperate condition in spite of his hard working and prosperous past make life a meaningless pursuit.

Works Cited

- Billington, Michael. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: Tennessee Williams' Southern Discomfort." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. 30 Sept. 2012. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Brooks, Amy. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Dec, Gender, and the Nuclear Family." MA thesis. U of Massachusetts, 2016. Print. 03 May 2017.
- Creed, Bowlen. "The Estate of Mendacity: An Interpretation of Williams' Most Ambiguous Character." MA thesis. U of Central Florida. 2002. Web. 15 June 2017.
- Freydish. "What is Nihilism?" *CounterOrder.com*. Sept. 2009. Web. 05 June 2017.
- Mayberry, Susan Neal. "A Study of Illusion and the Grotesque in Tennessee Williams." Alfred U. n.d. Web. 15 May 2017.
- Mellamphy, Nandita Bishwas. *The Three Stigmata of Friedrich Nietzsche: Political Physiology in the Age of Nihilism*. Canada: Macmillan, 2011. Print.
- Nicolay, Claire. "Hoboes, Sissies, and Breeders: Generations of Discontent in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*." *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*. Web. 05 June 2017.
- "Nihilism." *The World Book Encyclopedia (International)*. New York: World Book, n.d. 218. Print.
- Reginster, Bernard. *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. New York: Harvard UP, 2006. Print.
- Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Fathers and Sons*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996. Print.
- Williams, Tennessee. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." *Elements of Literature*. 4th ed. Ed. Carl H. Klaus. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. 291-373. Print.

Quinn, Margaret Lynne. "Mendacity in Four Plays of Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Small Craft Warnings*." MA thesis. Mc Master U, 1973. Web. 06 June 2017.