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**SEXUALITY AND BLACK DESPONDENCY: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL  
STUDY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' SELECTED PLAYS**



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**Abstract**

Tennessee Williams' plays often depict psychological struggles, gender role confusion, and suppressed desires. This research aimed to examine the themes of sexuality and black despondency in *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). This study explores sexuality and black despondency through a psychoanalytical lens. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of id, ego, and superego has been used. A close textual reading of the plays has been conducted using a qualitative approach. Primary sources include the selected plays by Tennessee Williams, while secondary sources consist of psychoanalytical texts, scholarly articles, and critical essays relevant to Freudian theory and literary analysis. Through a detailed textual analysis, the study investigated how psychological conflicts manifest in character behaviors, mental health struggles, and distorted personal relationships, particularly highlighting the impact of repression and internalized desires. The characters' repressed desires and psychological conflicts push them toward despair and symbolic death. This study concluded that Williams' plays serve not only as personal narratives but also as cultural critiques, revealing how psychological suffering is shaped and intensified by rigid social norms and expectations. It is recommended that future researchers explore Freudian defense mechanisms in more depth or analyze different plays or playwrights to expand the understanding of psychological themes in literature.

**Key words:** *Black despondency, Death, Escapism, Gender, Psychological complexes, Sexuality*

**INTRODUCTION**

This research analyzes Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), focusing on the recurring themes of sexuality and black despondency. It explores how repressed and expressed sexual tendencies shape the characters' behavior, psychology, and relationships. Williams, a playwright with innate theatrical talent, reflects social concerns like identity loss, alienation, and loneliness. (Zizek, 1991)

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) examine absurdities, conflicting desires, and outdated views of sexuality and black despondency. These themes are analyzed through Freud's psychoanalytic theory specifically the id, ego, and superego. Each excerpt reflects one of these elements: the id pursues immediate desire, the ego balances desire with reality, and the superego upholds moral values. Black despondency denotes deep depression and despair, while sexuality in literature often symbolizes themes of morality, human nature, and the human condition. Psychoanalytic theory examines how desires and experiences shape characters' actions. In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), a memory play narrated by Tom Wingfield, themes of black despondency and desire emerge through his reflections on life with his mother Amanda and disabled sister Laura. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), conflicting desires especially between Margaret and Brick expose a failing relationship. (Freud, 1965).

This study examines Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *Cat on a*

*Hot Tin Roof* (1955) to explore themes of black despondency and sexuality. It analyzes the characters' unconscious behaviors and sexual patterns through a Freudian lens, focusing on the id and its primitive instincts. Using a deductive approach, the research moves from general psychoanalysis to specific elements like sexual cravings, the death of desire, and black despondency, aiming to uncover the characters' hidden psyche and psychological struggles (Dugošija, 2023).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

This study explores the complex link between sexuality, the passage of desire, and black despondency in Tennessee Williams's plays by examining the motivations and consequences behind the characters' actions. It analyzes how power, desire, and the human psyche interact within Williams' narratives, focusing on sexuality as a means of manipulation and empowerment. The research also investigates the psychological forces that drive some characters to embrace death as a form of fulfillment or escape.

#### **Aim of the Study**

This research aims to explore the role of sexuality in Williams' selected plays as a means of enabling and controlling others to fulfill psychological or physical desires. It also investigates the characters' minds to uncover their desire to embrace death and the emergence of black despondency. Additionally, the study applies Freudian psychoanalytic theory to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), with a central focus on sexuality and black despondency.

#### **Research Objectives**

The main objectives of the current study are:

- To study how the element of sexuality has been central throughout Williams' selected plays to empower and manipulate others to gain their own desires whether they are physical or psychological.
- To investigate the psyche of different characters to dig out their black despondency.

#### **Research Questions**

The purpose is to investigate the author's rationale for developing such characters, using the Freudian personality triad to analyze the selected plays.

- 1) How has the element of sexuality been portrayed by Tennessee Williams in his plays to manipulate other characters to gain their own desires?
- 2) Why do the psychological complexes become the vital reason for black despondency of Williams' characters?

#### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study examines the complex relationship between sexuality, black despondency, and psychological motivations in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). It explores how characters use sexuality to express desire,

assert power, and manipulate others, while also analyzing the psychological forces driving them toward death and despair. Through a close analysis of selected characters and their interactions, the research applies Freudian psychoanalytic theory to reveal how desire, manipulation, and psychological conflict shape their behavior and outcomes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Tennessee Williams, one of the most influential 20th-century American writers, gained critical and popular acclaim through *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). As a Southern writer, he captured the rhythm of Southern speech, especially in his female characters a quality he acknowledged. Critic Stark Young noted a deep literary echo in the mother's dialogue in *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). Williams used language to enrich dialogue and highlight character individuality (Dugošija, 2023). Tennessee Williams was deeply concerned with society's treatment of outsiders, misfits, and foreigners a recurring theme in his work. His plays also explore love, desire, sexuality, parent-child dynamics, family struggles, aging, isolation, guilt, mendacity, and the conflict between illusion and reality. He boldly tackled taboo subjects like rape, incest, nymphomania, cannibalism, and violent deaths, especially in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), which some critics labeled "obscene." These controversial themes significantly contributed to both American and international theatre (Williams, 2015). According to Freud (1930), tension and pleasure are central to life pleasure results from the release of libido (sexual energy), and tension from its buildup. His early work focused on homosexuality, masturbation, and deviance rather than typical sexuality. Freud introduced the first psychological theory of sexuality, viewing sex as a mind-body intersection, and developed the libido theory to explain human desires and inner conflicts. He believed libido shapes personality and that unresolved sexual tensions cause neuroses and perversions. (Bibler, 2002).

Lubbe (2011). traces the evolution of Freudian psychoanalysis, highlighting how British object relations theory enriches the understanding and treatment of depression. His book *Object Relations in Depression* offers valuable insights into the complexity of depression and despair. After completing *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud revised his 1923 theory following personal losses, later emphasizing the superego's role in melancholia in *The Ego and the Id* (1930). Wright notes a long-standing connection between psychoanalysis and literature, with literary criticism historically bridging the two. While psychoanalysis has been used to interpret literature, it more often draws from literature to develop its own theories (Wright, 2016).

Nawaz and Awan (2018) critically analyze *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), noting that while Williams often centers female characters, his plays also explore themes like symbolism, reality, expressionism, abjection, identity, female victimization, rape, and the individual's conflict with society. Frequent motifs include black despondency, hopelessness, love and death, madness, sexuality, political

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dissent, homosexuality, and homophobia. (Nawaz and Awan, 2018)

Adler (2013) critiqued *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and examined individuals contributing to societal collapse. Drawing from personal experience, Ronald Hayman highlighted negative aspects of feminism in Williams' plays, such as fear and ignorance of it. Williams' works, including *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), are central to American literature for their focus on the human condition. These plays explore themes of marriage, art, grief, deception, death, and remembrance (Frankl, 2004).

In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), Tennessee Williams portrays black despondency through Laura Wingfield, who faces emotional distress, hopelessness, social anxiety, and physical disability. Her retreat into a world of glass figurines reflects her fragile state and desire to escape. Similarly, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), Brick embodies black despondency through emotional numbness, marital dissatisfaction, grief over a friend's death, and inner conflict about his sexuality (Dollimore, 2013).

*The Glass Menagerie* (1945) is renowned for its emotional depth, dramatic intensity, and poetic beauty, though *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1955) is often considered even more acclaimed. Both represent the height of American theatre and reflect Williams' lasting connection to the darkness in his early works. (Roberts, 1999). McNair explores the "sexualization" of modern life, linking it to broader post-war societal shifts. He explains that sex and death, though taboo in formal settings and common in education, carry multiple meanings. Ultimately, procreation and the avoidance of death are life's two primary motivations (McNair, 2002).

The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) was altered for its visual adaptation, focusing primarily on Big Daddy's reconciliation with Brick. However, the screenplay downplays the theme of homosexuality, which was more explicit in the original script. This omission likely reflects 1950s societal norms, where homosexuality was despised and considered a family disgrace (Williams, 2014).

Adler (1977) argues that Brick embodies "homosexual panic," a term by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Brick suppresses his sexuality when faced with the possibility that his deep bond with Skipper may be homosexual. Through flashbacks, the play shows how Brick used sports to affirm his masculinity. Though he is gay and shares a close relationship with Skipper, he hides it due to societal shame. To maintain a masculine image, he turns to sports, marries Maggie, and pretends to lead a normal life, but his lack of attraction to women prevents intimacy (Adler, 1977).

Gooper and his wife accept Big Daddy's inheritance plan, aware of Brick's hidden sexuality, while Maggie yearns for a traditional marriage and children. After the family conflict, Big Daddy's illness is revealed to him and Big Mama. A hopeful moment arises when Brick kisses Maggie, hinting at the renewal of their marital and sexual relationship. According to Bibler Maggie pretends to be pregnant to secure the

plantation, and the kiss suggests Brick's growing affection might eventually make her lie a reality (Bibler, 2002).

Brick and Gooper's father, Big Daddy, stands for two characteristics associated with men: procreation and the reality principle. He is dedicated to advancing his family's reputation in addition to living in the harsh realities of merciless money-making. While he is still a small boy and learns that Big Mama is expecting his child (Boothby, 2014).

He tells her, devoid of affection:

*"That is my kid, isn't it? I want that kid. I need him. He is not going to have nobody else's name but mine. Let's get the preacher. That's what marriage is for, Family."*

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study applies Freud's tripartite psychoanalytic model to analyze *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), focusing on sexuality and black despondency. It draws on primary texts and secondary sources, including Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1917), journal articles, books, and credible online materials. The research is interpretive, offering a psychoanalytic examination of Williams' main characters through literature review and comparative analysis.

This study employs a Freudian tripartite psychoanalytic framework to analyze *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), exploring how these plays depict black despondency and sexuality. Both primary and secondary sources are used. The concepts of id, ego, and superego guide the interpretation of hidden psychological meanings, focusing on how Williams' language reveals deeper themes. The analysis also considers broader discourse and examines character behavior and development (Frosh, 1999).

According to Freud, the psyche comprises the id (instinctual desires and aggression), the superego (moral conscience), and the ego (mediator). When the superego dominates, it directs aggression toward the ego, resulting in depression (Fuss, 2013). According to Freud (1930), depression stems from internalized anger and is linked to the superego, which is shaped by upbringing, innate aggression, and parental expectations. He believed past traumas cause guilt and sadness, with inward-directed aggression fueling depression. Freud explored how loss transforms into self-hatred and how societal and familial expectations lead individuals to suppress anger or aggression to maintain their social standing. (Freud, 1930).

## **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

This section examines *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) through the lens of Freud's psychoanalytic theory id, ego, and superego focusing on

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black despondency and sexuality. It also incorporates insights from various theorists and analyzes excerpts from the methodology section in relation to these Freudian concepts.

This section presents extracts supporting the research topics, addressing core themes that inform the research questions. By analyzing excerpts from the plays, it lays a strong foundation for drawing conclusions backed by original sources and relevant themes.

### **How has the element of sexuality been used by Tennessee Williams in his plays to manipulate other characters to gain their own desires?**

An analysis of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) uncovers psychoanalytic elements focusing on the id, ego, and superego of its characters. As a memory play narrated by Tom Wingfield, it highlights ironic and conflicting incidents related to sexuality and lost desire. The main characters Tom, his mother Amanda, sister Laura, and Laura's former classmate Jim reveal these dynamics, while imagery represents the absent father, Mr. Wingfield.

*"AMANDA: No, I'm not hiding anything. I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon..... I wish for that whenever there's a moon, and when there isn't a moon, I wish for it, too." (The Glass Menagerie, p. 17).*

This passage highlights the contrasting desires of Tom and Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). Their wishes upon seeing the new moon reflect deeper, often irrational desires. Amanda, appearing to be a devoted and morally upright mother, wishes for Laura to receive a gentleman caller suggesting her strong desire for her daughter's marriage and future security. This aligns with her superego, shaped by societal expectations of motherhood. However, Tom's sarcastic remark "I thought maybe you desired for a gentleman caller" hints that Amanda's seemingly selfless intentions may also conceal repressed desires linked to the id. Amanda's stories about her youth and many suitors indicate she once thrived on male attention. Her intense focus on Laura finding a suitor may be a projection of her own suppressed desires, possibly seeking to fulfill through Laura what she has lost. Thus, while Amanda's actions appear to be driven by duty and love, they also subtly reflect her inner conflicts between moral ideals and unacknowledged personal longing.

*"It's rare for a girl as sweet and pretty as Laura to be domestic! Thankfully, Laura is not only attractive but also highly domestic." (The Glass Menagerie, p. 24).*

Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), first performed in 1944, and brought him critical acclaim. While Amanda, Tom, and Laura can be interpreted in various ways, understanding their actions through the lens of sexuality provides deeper insight. Though the characters don't openly discuss their sexuality, Williams subtly weaves it into the narrative. Amanda's flirtatiousness hints at her sexuality, Tom's behavior suggests possible homosexuality, and Laura's sexual purity is emphasized

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through her domestic, passive role.

Laura's "prettiness" aligns with traditional femininity, shaped by her superego, which suppresses natural desires (id) in favor of societal ideals. Her intense shyness, especially around men like Jim, stems from this repression. The ego mediates this internal conflict, resulting in her passivity and inability

*"Your mother received seventeen one Sunday afternoon at Blue Mountain! Gentlemen callers! Why sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all ... I understood the skill of conversation ... Girls in those days knew how to talk, I can tell you"*  
(*The Glass Menagerie*, p. 24).

Amanda's ego mediates between her id's desires reliving her youth and ensuring Laura's desirability and the reality of her declining social and financial status. To cope, she clings to fantasies of past glory and projects her hopes onto Laura, encouraging her to pursue gentlemen callers as a way to satisfy both their desires within societal expectations. Amanda flirts even when Jim O'Connor shows up at her house as a possible gentleman caller for her daughter:

*"No one, Mr. O'Connor, no one has entertained me as much as you have in years!"* (Williams 77).

Amanda uses her understanding of sexuality and male communication to draw attention to Laura, with her onstage behavior vividly highlighting this. Her superego drives her to uphold the Southern belle ideal charming, submissive, and desirable believing a woman's worth lies in attracting men. She imposes these societal norms on Laura, manipulating her under the guise of moral duty. At the same time, Amanda compensates for Tom's failure to lead the household by adopting authoritative, masculine traits. Her diminished sexuality, new societal role, and resentment toward her husband fuel both hysterical and controlling behavior, as seen when she boldly takes Tom's Lawrence book:

*"Yes, I returned that awful book to the library! That dreadful book by that insane Mr. Lawrence ... I won't allow such filth brought into my home!"* (Williams 17).

Amanda's authority at home is shown when she confiscates Tom's book, suppressing his autonomy and freedom of choice. Her rejection of D.H. Lawrence reflects a dominant superego, fixated on moral codes and appearances. This act symbolizes her effort to suppress latent sexual desires hers or others' and impose her ideal of purity. By manipulating Tom and Laura to meet her standards of respectability, Amanda enforces the superego's rigid norms. Tom's lack of traditionally masculine behavior, disregard for convention, and eventual escape hint at his possible homosexuality, as reflected in the home's repressive atmosphere:

*"His eventual flight, his impatience, his swearing, his outbursts, his*



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*drinking, and ..... in the straight-laced atmosphere Amanda built.”*  
(*The Glass Menagerie*, p. 24).

Though the play doesn't directly address Tom's sexuality, scholars often interpret his behavior as indicative of repressed homosexuality. His desire to escape reflects the inner conflict between his id's desire for sexual freedom and the restrictive environment shaped by Amanda's superego-driven values and societal norms. Tom's frustration, seen in his drinking and emotional outbursts, stems from feeling trapped between family expectations and his own identity. Unable to confide in his family, he turns to films as his only escape, using performance to express his suppressed emotions.

*“I have so much in my heart that I can't describe to you!”* (Williams 30).

As a result, Tom's homosexuality is not explicitly indicated in the play, but there is still evidence of his suffering at home and his inability to be honest with his family.

Amanda uses societal norms around gender and sexuality to manipulate Tom and Laura, enforcing traditional roles to control their lives. Her overbearing behavior suppresses any nonconforming desires, especially in Tom, whom she binds with guilt and duty. This manipulation appeals to his superego, keeping him tied to the family. Tom's eventual departure reflects his id's victory over the superego's control and escape from Amanda's repressive environment and a symbolic release of his repressed sexuality and desires long restrained by ego and morality. In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and other works by Tennessee Williams, sexuality functions as a means of manipulation and control, shaped by the interplay of the id, ego, and superego. Her fixation on youth and efforts to relive it through Laura stem from her id, while her ego and superego justify these actions within societal norms that tie a woman's worth to male attention.

Examining *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) through the lens of id, ego, and superego reveals key issues of sexuality and black despondency. The main characters, Margaret and Brick, are trapped in a deteriorating marriage, where the plot uncovers hidden truths about their relationship. The tension between past and present plays a central role, as the characters confront lingering memories while being pressured by current realities. The play links past loss of desire with present struggles around sexuality and emotional despair.

Margaret is portrayed as deeply sensual, using her sexuality in an effort to win Brick's affection. Her actions reflect the patriarchal idea that a woman's success depends on controlling men through physical attraction. She tries to keep Brick interested by focusing on her looks and sensual appeal.

*“Margaret: Why does he always look down his eyes my body when I'm talkin' to him, licks his old chops an' dropping his eyes to my boobs! Ha ha!”* (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, p. 6).

Brick's indifference and implied latent homosexuality frustrate Margaret, driving her to use her sensuality to manipulate him and others. Her sexuality serves not only for

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personal satisfaction but also as a tool to secure her social and financial standing in the family. Brick's emotional detachment fuels her frustration, leading to intense sexual outbursts and manipulative behavior to fulfill her desires. Margaret embodies the id through her impulsive pursuit of satisfaction, though her occasional restraint reflects the influence of the superego.

Margaret expresses the pain of loving someone she cannot be intimate with, highlighting her intense sexuality, which pushes her toward emotional distress. She continually tries to attract Brick by exposing herself, but her efforts are fruitless, deepening her psychological despair. Her unfulfilled desires reflect the conflict between her id and her superego, as she suppresses her needs to conform to moral expectations:

*"Margaret: Living with someone you love can be lonelier--than living entirely alone!--if the one that y'love doesn't love you...." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 6).*

Margaret's intense desire to be intimate with Brick reflects her id-driven need for emotional and physical fulfillment, despite his rejection. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the id seeks immediate satisfaction of desires, and Margaret's behavior aligns with this impulse. Act 1 of the play clearly highlights this inner drive, showing her persistent attempts to connect with Brick despite his emotional distance.

*"Margaret: Since I won't offer you a reason to get a divorce from me for being unfaithful or anything else.... Brick: Maggie For anything else, I wouldn't divorce you for being unfaithful.....". (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 23).*

This passage explores Margaret's fading drive to win Brick's affection, which threatens her sense of sexuality. Despite her emotional pain, she defends her actions and fights for the marriage, reflecting a conflict between her ego and superego. Her statement, "I would rather stay on this hot tin roof," reveals her id-driven need for connection and emotional fulfillment through her relationship with Brick. Brick, on the other hand, shows a clash between his id and superego. His indifference toward Maggie's potential infidelity and emotional detachment hint at repressed desires and unresolved guilt over Skipper's death. His suggestion that Maggie find a lover reflects avoidance of intimacy and a deep internal conflict.

Margaret's accusation that Skipper was gay, made in a desperate attempt to regain Brick's love, led Skipper to pursue her. She describes his attempt as "pitiful and ineffective," further highlighting the emotional damage and confusion within their relationships. Margaret succeeds in escaping poverty by being married into one of the wealthiest families in the nation. She is said to have seen firsthand what happens when a father who earns a living and a mother who stays at home is not realized in the idealized picture of a rich family:

*"I've never known such poverty! Brick, I had to endure hateful, rich*

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*people because I was as poor as Job's turkey—owning nothing .....still trying to keep up appearances." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 25).*

Margaret's reference to poverty and unpleasant company reveals her id's desire to escape social and emotional limitations. Her statement about being "as destitute as Job's turkey" reflects both financial struggle and a wish for freedom. She channels her desperation through sexuality to gain power and influence over Brick, expressing the id's drive for dominance and satisfaction. Her struggle lies in reconciling these instinctual urges with her superego's constraints. By using sexual allure to reach Brick, she seeks emotional connection and validation.

Brick, on the other hand, embodies the inner conflict between id and superego, repressing his feelings especially those tied to Skipper out of guilt. His emotional numbness stems from societal repression, while Margaret's manipulation aims to disrupt it. Brick's failure to respond to someone "in the quick sands" who sought love and help likely Skipper underscores his guilt. His repeated mention of "mendacity," like a corrupt politician, reveals his disillusionment with the lies and emotional denial surrounding him.

*"cheap politicians, who throw [it] back and forth at each other" (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 79).*

This explains Brick's perspective on sexuality as well as his wish to pass away. Additionally, it demonstrates how Brick satisfies his superego by holding Margaret responsible for Skipper's murder and then punishing her by refusing to have a sexual relationship. Brick believes he is acting with a balanced perspective on life (ego) and is feeding his id by acting in this way.

*"Margaret: You fragile, graceful souls who give up so easily you need someone to hold you with love and give your life back to you like something precious. ...." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 166).*

Margaret urges Brick to acknowledge his id's desires, including their shared sexual needs, aiming to end the emotional punishment he imposes. Her yearning for intimacy is expressed through tender imagery like "hugging gently" and "handing life back," highlighting her instinctual drive for emotional and physical fulfillment. Her offer of "something gold" symbolizes a deep emotional connection she hopes to restore. Margaret's sexuality serves not just as physical allure but as a means to express emotional truth and elicit a response from Brick. Her gentle touch and appeal for love reflect both a primal desire and an awareness of societal expectations tied to care and affection. By presenting herself as nurturing, she uses emotional depth and sensuality to draw Brick out of his detachment. This blend of genuine affection and strategic manipulation reveals how she leverages sexuality to seek validation and influence.

Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) reveals how desire, sexuality, and manipulation shape Margaret and Brick's relationship. Margaret's plea reflects her id-driven need for connection and validation, while the tension between id, ego, and superego exposes the psychological complexity of their bond. Sexuality

emerges as both a tool of manipulation and a profound expression of longing.

**Why do the psychological complexes become the vital reason for Williams' characters' black despondency?**

In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), the Wingfield family Tom, Laura, and their single mother Amanda live in a run-down St. Louis tenement and suffer from deep emotional distress. Each character faces intense psychological conflict between their black despondency and the fading of their desires due to their harsh realities. This internal struggle is evident from Tom's opening declaration in the play.

*"Yes, I have a few tricks up my sleeve and pockets. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you impression that has the appearance of truth. I offer you truth in the charming delusion." (The Glass Menagerie, p. 4-5).*

The play is a memory play, based on Tom's recollections of his mother Amanda and sister Laura. Tom cautions that what the audience sees may not reflect actual events. He then addresses themes like a dysfunctional social life, economic hardship, fading desires, and the looming threat of World War II.

Tom's desire to escape his monotonous life and responsibilities reflects his id's craving for instant gratification. His frequent movie outings and dreams of adventure show this urge for freedom. However, the reality of supporting his family prevents him from acting, creating inner conflict and emotional despair what the play refers to as "black despondency." Laura's id-driven need for emotional comfort leads her to retreat into a fantasy world symbolized by her glass animal collection. This offers her temporary solace but deepens her isolation, reflecting her avoidance of harsh realities.

Tom longs for autonomy, but Amanda's controlling nature and their poor financial state limit him. His id pushes him toward freedom and life's pleasures, yet he remains unfulfilled, as shown in the play's key dialogues.

*"AMANDA [to her son]: Don't use your fingers, dear use a crust of bread if you must push. Chew properly and enjoy your food. Unlike animals, humans need to chew before swallowing." (The Glass Menagerie, p. 5).*

Amanda's advice to Tom about chewing food slowly and properly reflects more than just concern for table manners it reveals her deep obsession with social behavior, control, and maintaining appearances. While the dialogue focuses on etiquette, it symbolizes Amanda's need to impose order and suppress both her own and her children's deeper emotional needs. Her attention to such minor details indicates dissatisfaction with her life and a longing to regain the security, love, and validation she once knew. Amanda's ego tries to create a sense of normalcy through proper manners, believing it will shield the family from the harshness of their emotional and financial struggles. Her efforts to control reflect the id's unfulfilled desires and the superego's demand for morality and propriety. This inner conflict leaves Amanda clinging to the

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past and enforcing rigid norms in the present. Her attempts to control Tom's behavior reveal a deeper psychological need to ensure the family's stability after their father's departure, driven by the pressure of her superego to make Tom responsible for the family's wellbeing.

*"TOM: Your frequent instructions ..... you that makes me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening - spoils my hunger" (The Glass Menagerie, p. 5).*

Tom, a young man, longs to escape familial burdens and pursue his dreams of adventure and writing. His resentment toward Amanda's constant control such as criticizing how he eats ("your hawk-like attention to every bite") reflects his id's rebellion against authority. His impulsive behaviours like drinking and movie-going express a desire for immediate gratification and relief from a claustrophobic home. These outbursts are responses to the repression of his desires, intensified by Amanda's overbearing nature. Amanda represents reality, constantly reminding Tom of his duties and societal expectations. Her micromanagement creates conflict between Tom's desires and responsibilities, overloading his ego. Tom's guilt rooted in his superego over wanting to leave, especially due to Laura's vulnerability, represses his desires and fuels frustration. Tom's superego embodies societal values of duty, responsibility, and family loyalty. His guilt about leaving his mother and sister arises from internalized moral standards, creating deep conflict between his personal desires (id) and societal obligations (superego).

*"TOM: No. You say there's so much in your heart that you can't define to me. That's true of me, too..... So let's respect each other's" (The Glass Menagerie, p.14).*

In this scene, Tom reveals his emotional suppression and desire to escape the burdens of family responsibility, especially from Amanda. His line, "How lucky are the dead," shows his id's longing for freedom, stifled by his oppressive home life. His nightly outings reflect unmet emotional and sexual desires, heightening his frustration and despair.

Tom's ego tries to balance this yearning with his duty to care for Laura. Though he wants to leave, responsibility holds him back, creating inner conflict and emotional paralysis. He struggles to express his dreams to Amanda, fearing rejection, and notes Laura's hidden desires due to fear and fragility. This passage reflects black despondency, as Tom longs for adventure but remains trapped by obligations. His turn to movies becomes a way to satisfy his id and escape reality, highlighting his deep emotional turmoil.

*"Laura: ... Oh, be careful - if you inhale, it breaks!" (The Glass Menagerie, p. 31).*

In her conversation with Jim, Laura uses the glass unicorn to symbolize her own fragile and delicate nature, revealing her black despondency and deep need for gentle treatment. Her physical disability and shyness reflect her low self-confidence and strong sense of inferiority. Meanwhile, Amanda subtly expresses her own past sexuality while trying to

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make Laura seem appealing to Jim, revealing her desire for Laura to marry and have a better life.

*"Well, in the South we had numerous servants. Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Totally vanished! I wasn't ready for what the future brought me". (The Glass Menagerie, p.29).*

Amanda's id clings to her idealized past, yearning for the comfort and luxury of her former Southern life, ignoring present realities. This desire for instant gratification keeps her trapped in denial and fantasy, showing the id's strong influence. Her ego, though aware of current struggles economic hardship, Tom's rebellion, and Laura's fragility fails to balance these pressures, leading to frustration. Amanda's longing for her pre-marriage life reflects her black despondency and an unfulfilled desire to recapture a joyful past that no longer exists (Grosz, 2013).

*"All of my gentlemen callers were sons of planters and so of course I naturally believed that I would be married to one and raise my family on a large piece of land with plenty of, servants" (The Glass Menagerie, p. 30).*

Amanda no longer dreams of marrying a wealthy landowner but still fantasizes about a different life one where she wasn't abandoned by Mr. Wingfield. Her romanticized memories of potential marriage to a wealthy planter reflect her id's desire for material comfort and emotional security. Her belief that beauty and charm could secure status and stability reveals a link between sexuality, self-worth, and societal ideals. However, Amanda's ego fails to reconcile these desires with reality, leading to inner conflict and despair. The superego adds guilt and inadequacy, deepening her emotional turmoil. Meanwhile, when Jim compliments Laura, subtle erotic undertones suggest she is seen as sexually desirable, helping boost her self-confidence.

*"Don't consider us, a mother abandoned, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no Job.... Go, then! Then go to the moon - you selfish dreamer!" (The Glass Menagerie, p. 36).*

In this dialogue, Amanda confronts Tom's desire to escape his family responsibilities, calling him a "selfish dreamer" and reminding him of their hardships a deserted mother and a crippled, unmarried sister. After Jim leaves, Amanda bombards Tom with questions, triggering his frustration and threat to leave. Her words act as emotional blackmail, revealing her fear of abandonment and hinting that her hope will die if Tom departs.

Tom's id seeks escape from his oppressive home, symbolized by his dream of going to the moon. His ego, caught between this desire and his duty to his family, creates deep internal conflict. This struggle reflects his emotional distress and inability to fulfil his desires without harming those he loves.

*"Oh Laura, I attempted to move on from you, but I ended up being more*

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*devoted than I had planned to be.!" (The Glass Menagerie, p.38).*

At the play's end, Tom reflects on his emotions after leaving his family. Though portrayed as eager for freedom, his final words reveal he cannot let go of his past, especially Laura. His lingering thoughts show his black despondency and difficulty moving on. Tom's emotional bond with Laura suggests an internal conflict his id desires freedom, yet he instinctively feels the need to care for her. His ego struggles to balance this, causing guilt and emotional turmoil. His remark about being "more devoted than I had planned to be" reflects this unresolved obligation. The characters' psychological battles trap them in isolation, intensifying their despair.

In *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), events unfold on Big Daddy's birthday, celebrated under the false belief that he has a minor colon issue rather than terminal cancer. The family plans to reveal the truth later. Margaret pressures Brick into intimacy to secure their share of the estate. The play highlights Margaret's struggle with childlessness, desire for inheritance, sexual tension, and the pervasive black despondency affecting all characters. Early on, Margaret reveals the family's plan to cheat Brick out of his rightful inheritance.

*"Margaret: Boy of mine, I'll tell you what they're up to! —They are up to cutting you out of your father's fortune, and----....." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 4).*

This passage reflects Margaret's desire to inherit from her father-in-law, rooted in her impoverished past and fear of a future without security due to childlessness. Her intense emotions reveal the id's drive for emotional and financial stability. Aware of the family's threats, Margaret uses her ego to navigate power dynamics and protect her and Brick's position. She strategically confronts Brick, hoping to stir him from his emotional detachment. The characters' inner conflicts especially Brick's guilt over Skipper shows the superego's influence, leading to shame, identity struggles, and emotional despondency.

*"Margaret: I exclaimed, 'SKIPPER! STOP LOVIN' MY HUSBAND OR TELL HIM HE HAS TO LET YOU ADMIT IT TO HIM!' —in one kind or another!... he made that disgraceful, ....." (Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, p. 28).*

Margaret's accusation against Skipper reveals deep psychological conflict rooted in desire, repression, and despondency. Her id-driven need for truth pushes Brick to confront his feelings for Skipper, exposing sexual rivalry and emotional tension. Her jealousy reflects raw instinct, and her push for Skipper to stop loving Brick or for Brick to face his emotions shows desperation. Her admission of their joint attempt to "make love to Brick" hints at shared despair and repressed sexuality. Margaret's ego tries to manage these desires within reality. Her frustration with Brick and Skipper reflects the ego's struggle to balance emotional needs with truth. Her manipulation reveals a

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longing for control. Haunted by past poverty, she sees having a child as a means to secure Brick's inheritance. However, Brick's coldness and Big Daddy's suggestion to replace her expose her perceived worthlessness. While she sees motherhood as survival, not love, she resists traditional roles to protect her ego. Margaret hints at other men's attraction to provoke Brick and reclaim her value. Her trauma stems from unfulfilled desires, intensified by Brick's indifference, making her anxiety and unmet id-driven cravings evident especially in her Act 1 quote.

*"[y]ou can be young without money, but you can't be old without it"*  
(*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, p. 25).

This passage clearly illustrates Margaret's desire for wealth and stability. Her id, ego, and superego operate in sync her conscious ambitions align with her inner needs and black despondency. Her ego helps her balance these forces, guiding her behavior as she seeks the truth about Brick's feelings for both Skipper and herself. It also shows her attempt to reconcile her infidelity by both hiding and confronting it.

The desire for financial stability, especially in old age, is a recurring theme. For Big Daddy and Brick, the id craves wealth as a symbol of worth, heightening feelings of inadequacy as they face aging. Margaret's drive to secure her future with Brick reflects the ego's effort to balance her ambitions with financial and social constraints. This tension fuels her despair when confronted with the limits of their wealth.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The first research question explores how Williams' characters use sexuality to fulfill their desires. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the id seeks pleasure, the superego upholds moral values, and the ego mediates between the two, shaping behavior through interaction with the external world. Hart (2018) explains that the ego seeks to satisfy desires within moral boundaries.

In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), themes of sexuality and black despondency emerge through the characters' struggles. Laura's neurotic anxiety stems from long-term sexual repression due to conflict between her id, which craves love and care, and her ego, which compels her to hide these desires. Amanda faces objective anxiety over her family's future, while Tom suffers moral guilt for abandoning Laura. Laura's emotional isolation leads her to retreat into a world of glass figures and music, symbolizing her frustration and despair.

Amanda's obsession with finding a "gentleman caller" for Laura reflects not just concern for her daughter's future but also her own repressed id her longing for past validation and sexual attention. By pushing Laura into this role, Amanda projects her unfulfilled desires onto her. This fixation carries sexual undertones, reinforcing traditional gender roles where women seek male approval. Tom's ambiguous sexuality



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and desire for escape reveal his id-driven impulses, which are suppressed by Amanda's moral expectations (superego). Amanda's control stifles Tom's desires, fuelling his resentment.

Sexuality in *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) operates as a form of control and power. Jim's flirtation exposes Laura's vulnerability due to her repressed sexuality. Her attraction to Jim, though suppressed, shows her id's presence, though her dominant superego and weak ego prevent expression. Amanda manipulates her past to cope with her unfulfilled present, using sexuality as a psychological tool.

Fuss (2013) highlights Freud's focus on repression and sexual desire in understanding the unconscious mind. Laura embodies these Freudian elements: her strong superego governs her behavior, evident in her moral stance toward Tom and Amanda's fights. She rejects Amanda's attempts to alter her appearance with the 'Gay Deceivers,' upholding her integrity. Laura, though shy, is more morally genuine than the other characters, and her reactions especially to Jim's betrayal reflect a deep commitment to conscience and Freudian ideals.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), these elements are evident in the characters' internal struggles and desires. Margaret's obsession with marrying Brick to gain wealth and escape her troubled past reflects a strong ego that often overrides her id-driven desires for romance. Her personality shifts between the id, ego, and superego sometimes driven by intense desire, at other times acting rationally to save her marriage and future.

Research question two focused on how Williams' characters' psychological complexes lead to black despondency. The study shows that Lacan reinterpreted Freud's theories, especially the death instinct, to explore despair and desire. In *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), Amanda's crushed ego caused by her husband's abandonment, poverty, Laura's disability, and Tom's urge to leave leads to objective anxiety and black despondency. Clinging to memories of her youth, Amanda uses fantasy to escape harsh reality.

Tom battles between his ego and superego, resulting in moral anguish. His guilt over abandoning Laura deepens his despair. To escape reality, each character finds a coping mechanism: Laura retreats into her glass animals and records, Amanda into nostalgia, Tom into poetry and movies. Tom admires his absent father and longs to escape like him, but his id's desire for freedom clashes with ego-based responsibilities and his superego's moral burdens, leading to emotional turmoil.

Tom's emotional despondency stems from the psychological conflict between his id, ego, and superego. His desire for freedom (id) clashes with his sense of duty (superego), and his ego struggles to mediate this tension. As a result, Tom represses his longing for adventure, leading to frustration, isolation, and emotional numbness. The burden of being his family's provider deepens his resentment and guilt, fuelling a complex that drains him emotionally.

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Amanda intensifies Tom's guilt through constant reminders of societal expectations, which his superego internalizes, making him feel inadequate. Her own despondency arises from her fixation on the past (id), her failed attempts to secure her family's future (ego), and her inability to meet social ideals (superego), trapping her in denial and dissatisfaction. Her harsh superego and fragile ego prevent her from facing social realities, forcing her to retreat into her imaginary world of glass animals, symbolizing her deepening isolation and psychological fragility.

Analysis of the plays reveals that characters operate within Freud's psychoanalytic framework of id, ego, and superego. The id seeks immediate gratification, the ego mediates between desires and reality, and the superego upholds moral and social norms. The characters fluctuate between these states as they navigate sexuality, black despondency, desire, and the lingering effects of the past.

Nawaz and Awan (2018) critically examine *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), highlighting recurring themes like victimization of women, rape, hopelessness, madness, and homosexuality. Similarly, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), Brick's alcoholism and grief over Skipper's death suggest black despondency and repressed homosexuality. Brick's refusal to confront his identity results in isolation and emotional paralysis, reflecting internal conflict between id and superego.

Margaret's need for control stems from psychological insecurity. Her manipulation of others is both a desperate assertion of agency and a reaction to the despair that surrounds her. The family's internal betrayals and power struggles especially over Brick's inheritance intensify their psychological turmoil. The characters are entangled in deceit, showcasing the dark complexities of familial relationships.

The characters' inability to face their true desires results in deep emotional pain. Brick's repressed feelings for Skipper cause emotional numbness and despair, while Margaret's outbursts aim to expose these hidden emotions, showing how repressed desires foster a toxic emotional environment. The emotional triangle between Margaret, Skipper, and Brick heightens jealousy and desire, worsening feelings of isolation and creating black despondency.

Societal norms worsen the characters' inner conflicts, as the clash between personal desires and moral expectations causes guilt, inadequacy, and emotional distress. The absence of open communication deepens their isolation. She embodies black despondency, especially due to the absence of an heir, which questions her worth as a wife and woman. Big Daddy's suggestion that Brick find a new partner and Big Mama's scrutiny of their private life reflect a patriarchal view where a woman's value is tied to fertility, placing the burden of social expectations on women.

Societal pressures isolate the characters, preventing meaningful connections. Margaret's attempts to reach Brick fail due to his emotional detachment, emphasizing how their unresolved complexes foster alienation. Characters like Brick use coping mechanisms alcoholism and emotional repression to escape feelings of inadequacy and despair. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), Williams

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explores these psychological struggles through Freud's theory. Aging, societal norms, and financial insecurity deepen the characters' helplessness and emotional turmoil. Their internal battles reveal how desire, identity, and social expectations shape their despair.

Tennessee Williams' plays address the challenges Americans faced, highlighting the conflict between individual psychological states and societal norms. Both male and female characters question the nation's economic crisis, traditional gender roles, and accepted behaviors. The plays also portray psychological issues that, while less recognized at the time, are more familiar today.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research presents a psychoanalytic analysis of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), focusing on themes of black despondency and sexuality. It examines how sexuality shapes character development, psychological manipulation, and empowerment through Freudian theory. The characters' actions, driven by id, ego, and superego, reflect internal struggles with gender roles, escapism, and repressed desires. Williams exposes the harsh realities of traditional gender norms, showing how women, whether dependent or independent, often endure cruelty, humiliation, and abandonment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Future researchers are encouraged to explore defense mechanisms when conducting psychoanalytic studies of these plays, as this can deepen the understanding of both character psychology and human behavior. While this research focuses on two plays by the same playwright, future studies might examine different works or authors. Researchers may also consider the author's communal, financial, and religious background or apply a socio-cultural historical approach. Additionally, instead of analyzing all characters, future studies could focus on the actions of a single character for a more detailed analysis.

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