



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## MENDACITY - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ANGUISH OF SUBTERFUGE AND SELF-DECEPTION IN THREE PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

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### Abstract

Tennessee Williams is often referred to as one of 20th century America's greatest playwrights, alongside the likes of Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill. A staunch proponent of the realism movement, Williams is known for his enduring characters and their tragic stories. His contribution to the tumultuous literary climate of the 1940s with his distinctive, brutally honest, and emotionally complex voice, makes his work a riveting basis for research and analysis. This thesis explores the moral vision of Williams through the deceptive practices of his dramatic characters. Though illusion may be effective in disguising the bare ugliness of man, Williams emphasises the importance of mustering the courage to confront the truth, no matter what the situation. The struggle to accept truth as a necessary path to salvation is explored through the characters of three of his most iconic plays. The paper will attempt a cross-referential study amongst three of Tennessee Williams' most acclaimed works; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944); and will analyse and compare the presentation of mendacity, self-deception, and subterfuge through the contextual and historical factors that influenced the playwright, the nature of the characters, as well as his interpretation of the literary movements of social realism and existentialism.

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### Introduction:-

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#### Socio-Political Context

The 2017 UN World Economic and Social Survey states that "The term "Golden Age" refers to a period in history remembered for its prosperity and happiness. A closer examination of such a period, however, often reveals hidden challenges." [1]. Such "hidden challenges" were rampant during the times termed as "The Golden Age of American Capitalism". This term alludes to the post-world war economic boom that saw the growth of the middle class and the introduction of new, thriving American industries [2]. The war had given women and minorities more career opportunities than ever before as they filled in for their male counterparts. This taste of independence was not

forgotten by the working women of the Second World War, so that even after the end of the war and the return to the “status quo”, widespread dissatisfaction followed. This dissatisfaction percolated into man-woman relationships and generated an internal conflict between a patriarchal society’s expectations and women’s individual ability and ambition – often a result of the discovery of deceit, leading to subterfuge.

The nuclear family was often the center for such deceit – being the most personal sphere of one’s life, it would follow that one could leave their anguish at their doorstep. However, Williams and his contemporaries often explored the family as the epicentre of such matters, a microcosm of American society.

Marxist sociologists argue that the rise of the nuclear family was a product of the new industrial world. With the rise of individual autonomy and the swift migration from rural to urban areas, workers were forced to create their own small, mobile units. This framework benefitted a capitalist society. From 1950 to 1965, a disturbingly uniform trend arose in America; a widespread conformity to the nuclear family structure. The need for a “picture-perfect” nuclear family was a residual effect of the insecurity and instability of the Second World War. Consisting of a heterosexual couple and their progeny, in this image men were expected to be the household breadwinners and disciplinarians [3], while women were to assume the natural role of housewife and caring mother. Girls were discouraged from pursuing higher education, often marrying shortly after their high school graduation. Male children were indulged more, encouraged to be assertive and career-driven but ultimately expected to settle down into their own stable family life. Claiming to be the foundation of a healthy democracy, the concept of “family values” soon became essential to one’s identity as an American. The devotion of the average American to this cause is highlighted by a 1957 survey, in which over 50% of respondents said that unmarried people were “sick”, “immoral”, or “neurotic” [4]. Williams’ view on gender roles in the family can be seen in this exchange between Cat’s Big Mama and Margaret:

BIG MAMA: [...] Some single men stop drinkin' when they git married and others start! Brick never touched liquor before he--!

MARGARET [crying out]: THAT'S NOT FAIR!

BIG MAMA: Fair or not fair I want to ask you a question, one question – D'you make Brick happy in bed?

MARGARET: Why don't you ask if he makes me happy in bed?

BIG MAMA: Because I know that--

MARGARET: It works both ways!

Margaret’s continuous assertion that she is not responsible for her husband’s well-being, and that this accusation is “not fair” shows Williams’ subversive approach to many of his female characters. Margaret is a feminist in much of her behaviour, and her proposition that sexual pleasure “works both ways” subverts the general opinion on gender roles to be had at the time.

The overly restrictive nature of society’s facades is what leads to the torment of almost every character in Williams’ plays. At the core of their struggle is a lack of freedom to escape the harsh realities they have been irreversibly assigned to.

To add to the nation’s already pervasive sense of insecurity, this era also witnessed a by-product of the Cold War known as the “Red Scare” – a Communist witch-hunt that spread an irrational and intense fear of the potential rise of communism amongst Americans. This led to what has more recently been termed the “Lavender Scare”; a similarly brutal but much longer witch-hunt for those of “transgressive” sexualities. This was widespread and institutional. A published government report assembled by the Hoey committee boasting a title of “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government” concluded that homosexuals were unsuitable for employment and constituted genuine security risks [6]. 1948 saw Congress pass an act for “the treatment of sexual psychopaths”.

The suicides of Blanche’s husband Allan in *Streetcar* and Skipper in *Cat* are both indicative of the horrors faced by men who felt homoerotic tendencies that would never be accepted by the heteronormative society of the time. Williams sought to destroy the myth of the perfect nuclear family through such transgressive characters. Once again, in *Cat*, Margaret is his mouthpiece for such issues when she talks about Brick’s relationship with Skipper:

**Margaret:**

It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, and that's what made it so sad, that's what made it so awful, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly. Brick, I tell you, you got to believe me, Brick, I do understand all about it! I--I think it was--noble! Can't you tell I'm sincere when I say I respect it? My only point, the only point that I'm making, is that life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is--all--over...

She likens Brick and Skipper's relationship to a "Greek legend" – a type of perfection that could not be seen in the reactionary society of the 50s. Williams uses tragedy to tell stories of the suppressed and condemned by society. This extract emphasises how harmful such discrimination could really be, ruining lives that had the potential to be fulfilling and happy. He comments on how because it could not be "talked about plainly", homosexual love was suppressed and destroyed, leaving those who felt it in acute anguish. This is what leads to the various forms of subterfuge used throughout his plays. The deception is justified and tragic because it is necessary; there is no other option for these characters.

A New Yorker article proudly referring to Williams in its title as "The Man Who Queered Broadway" describes how "[...] his work spoke to those who could not fit within the parameters of all those neat lawns and white picket fences and solid heterosexual values." [7] In these characters, Williams makes no attempt to romanticise their experiences, depicting the torment that comes with hiding one's identity in a brutal and honest light.

**Characters**

The characters are integral vehicles through which Williams presents the various forms of mendacity. In his Times review of the 1995 London production of *The Glass Menagerie*, Benedict Nightingale wrote, "If anyone ever wrote more shrewdly and feelingly about family politics than Williams does here, I don't know him." [8] Williams continuously displays, in *Cat*, *Streetcar*, and *Menagerie*, that his agenda is not to peddle a message to the masses, but simply to capture the realism of family life.

Family politics were touched upon frequently in 20th century American theatre; notable examples being Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey*. Williams' depiction differs considerably from these simply because they were shaped by his own familial experiences. Born to Cornelius, an alcoholic, womanising father, and Edwina Williams, an old-fashioned and often hysterical mother, his childhood was not at all a peaceful one. His youth, chequered by intense familial tension, serves as inspiration for characters like Big Daddy from *Cat* and *Menagerie*'s Amanda.

A significant comparison, likewise, can be made between Williams' two iconic maternal figures, *Menagerie*'s Amanda Wingfield and *Cat*'s Big Mama, both of whom are inextricably trapped in a web of mendacity.

Despite her hazy depiction, Amanda is quite blatantly similar to Williams' own mother, Edwina Williams. They both represent the last generation to have experienced the antebellum South. Edwina was the "archetypal Southern belle...she virtually erased from her speech and manner anything that was not appropriate to the Southern Victorian maiden" [9]. Entertaining dozens of gentlemen callers, she maintained this prim and refined demeanour well into her later years. This reminiscence for such a time can be seen in Amanda's character, as she indulges in nostalgic monologues about the pre-civil war Southern society and refuses to reconcile with her compromised reality. As Tom and Laura reflect:

TOM: I know what's coming!

LAURA: Yes. But let her tell it.

TOM: Again?

LAURA: She loves to tell it. (*Menagerie* 7)

According to Trivers' (2011) theory of self-deception, individuals temporarily store truthful information in the unconscious while consciously presenting false information to others – such deception can thus go undetected as the deceiver themselves is incognizant of their own duplicity [10].

Amanda practises a benign form of self-deception, in which she builds a fantastical past to bring a sense of optimism to a dull, frustrated household. She uses the past to shield herself from the present, burying it in her subconscious

while displaying a dramatised version of the truth in order to comfort herself. Another example of Amanda's benign deception can be seen after her argument with Tom in Scene 4, a futile affair with neither side able to communicate their point of view effectively. After an intense display of vulnerability, the scene ends with Amanda returning to her fundraising telesales campaign, back to the "brittle facade of the performer". This once again shows her shielding herself from the truth with a version of reality that is more palatable.

By comparison, in *Cat*, Big Mama displays a similar, but more extreme pattern of self-deception. "Defence mechanisms", a term coined by Freud, are "unconscious resources used by the ego to decrease internal stress" [11], and Big Mama utilises these plentifully. This can be seen specifically in Act 3, after the revelation of Big Daddy's cancer –

BIG MAMA: It's all just a mistake. I know it's just a bad dream.

DOCTOR BAUGH: We're gonna keep Big Daddy as comfortable as we can.

BIG MAMA: Yes, it's just a bad dream, that's all it is, it's just an awful dream.

GOOPER: In my opinion Big Daddy is having some pain but won't admit that he has it.

BIG MAMA: Just a dream, a bad dream. (*Cat* 79)

One type of primitive defence mechanism identified by Freud is denial, defined as "the refusal to acknowledge disturbing aspects of external reality, as well as the existence of disturbing psychological (internal) events, such as thoughts, memories, or feelings." [12] Big Mama's repeatedly referring to the situation as a "bad dream" showcases her repeated denial of her husband's imminent death and, by extension, her harsh reality.

In this manner, both Williams' mothers are shown to be selfless in an unconventional manner, putting up psychological guards to help "protect the peace" in their volatile households. They both exhibit brash, often melodramatic personalities that make them seem almost comical at times; a vehicle through which Williams displays their internal goodness. However, it is notable that Big Mama has her cathartic moment in Act 3 of *Cat*, in which she seizes control of her fate and comes to her senses in an exhilarating display of power and authority. The exaggerated pretense is shed because of the desperate circumstance; the revelation of Big Daddy's cancer and the threat of Gooper and Mae's clinical takeover.

### **Big Mama:**

Now you listen to me, all of you, you listen here! They's not goin' to be any more catty talk in my house! And Gooper, you put that away before I grab it out of your hand and tear it right up! I don't know what the hell's in it, and I don't want to know what the hell's in it. I'm talkin' in Big Daddy's language now; I'm his wife, not his widow, I'm still his wife! (*Cat* 86)

She can be seen here using authoritative language and assuming her role as the "man" of the house in Big Daddy's absence. The truth she has buried in her subconscious is brought out through her use of harsh language and her bold demands. This matches Freud's psychoanalysis theory, in which the "unconscious is made conscious" [13] – Big Mama is able to shed the illusion she has accepted for so long and take her place as an existentialist hero, fully in control of her own fate. Amanda does not have such purgation in *Menagerie*, with the play instead ending with the divide between her and Tom wider than ever. Tom is the storyteller, therefore he has the last word, and everything is viewed from his perspective. While the closing scene of *Cat* is in no means a happy ending for Big Mama – her gruelling circumstances persist – Amanda's unfinished ending seems more tragic by comparison, a question of a character left unanswered.

Likewise, Streetcar's Blanche and *Cat*'s Margaret are both vital, iconic female protagonists who engage in significant degrees of subterfuge throughout the play, but in very different ways – displaying that despite their individual temperaments, their anguish continues beyond the end of the play.

In *Streetcar*, Blanche hides behind her pretences of snobbery and propriety throughout the play for her own material gain. Emerging from a ruinous past of indiscretion and tragedy, she is undoubtedly the most deceptive character in this play and among others. She hints at this deception using the symbolic "paper moon" from the Ella Fitzgerald classic –

BLANCHE [singing blithely]: Say, it's only a paper moon,

Sailing over a cardboard sea  
 – But it wouldn't be make-believe  
 If you believed in me! (Streetcar 59)

This summarises Blanche's approach to self-deception – she believes it is benign and harmless as it is only a means to an end. Her denial of the past mirrors Amanda's, except instead of romanticising innocuous details, she resolutely denies her past behaviour. Even so, her sexual promiscuity and alcoholism are both likely coping mechanisms for the series of tragedies she experienced. Her continuous, desperate deception also stems from a deep and extreme insecurity; Blanche's beauty is fading, and she often masks this physically with her showy clothes and costume jewellery – she uses her beauty as a weapon, and latches onto Mitch to escape the dire wheel of time.

BLANCHE: I don't want realism.

MITCH: Naw, I guess not.

BLANCHE: I'll tell you what I want. Magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what ought to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it! (Streetcar 73)

Unlike Trivers' proposed theory of "unconscious ignorance", here Blanche displays that she does not see deception as an inherently bad thing. To her, any version of truth is forgivable as long as it is beneficial to her. This sets her apart from Amanda and Big Mama, making her actions seem more intentionally malicious by comparison.

As identified by Northrop Frye in his "The Secular Scripture", there are two primary modes of sin in the ethical scheme of Dante's "Inferno" – *forza* and *froda*; violence and fraud [14]. In Streetcar, Stanley is a blatant symbol of *forza*, while Blanche clearly represents *froda*. This begs the question – is Blanche merely a victim of her circumstances, or is she truly an antagonist? It is argued that she breaches both Stella and Stanley's trust with her constant lies, but as she says – "Deliberate cruelty is not forgivable" (Streetcar 78). Stanley is deliberately cruel in his violation of Blanche; most significantly in the penultimate scene when he physically violates her, a horrific act that surpasses any malevolence Blanche may have possessed. By the end of Streetcar, Blanche is in shambles, with her reassuring illusion having been stripped away and with no mental or physical esteem left to speak of.

Cat's Margaret seems far more heroic by comparison. She is implacable in her resolution to face the truth no matter what. Her similarity to Blanche lies in her knowledge of her own deception. Throughout the course of Cat, she is the voice of reason, the obvious heroine victimised by circumstance yet determined to seize the day. Her honesty is her most notable and vibrant trait.

MAGGIE: [...] I'm not tryin' to whitewash my behaviour, Christ, no! Brick, I'm not good. I don't know why people have to pretend to be good, nobody's good. The rich or the well-to-do can afford to respect moral patterns, conventional moral patterns, but I could never afford to, yeah, but – I'm honest! Give me credit for just that, will you please? – (Cat 28)

In this extract, she clearly expresses her view that truth – no matter how harsh and unsettling – should be prioritised above all else. However, with an alcoholic, homosexual husband and relentlessly ambitious in-laws, her true circumstances are not in her favour. The audience views this in Act One and Two, through her interactions with Big Mama, her quips against Mae, and her arguments with Brick. Margaret is a character that was blatantly and indisputably pushed to her limit, and the audience understands when she is forced to resort to deception in Act Three.

MARGARET: I have an announcement to make.

GOOPER: A sports announcement, Maggie?

MARGARET: Brick and I are going to--have a child!

[Big Mama catches her breath in a loud gasp. Pause. Big Mama rises.]

BIG MAMA: Maggie! Brick! This is too good to believe!

MAE: That's right, too good to believe. (Cat 71)

The audience understands the justification for this deception, as it was clear that Margaret had no other way out of the situation she had been assigned to. In a succession of tragic events, an event that was "too good to believe" was necessary. She represents vitality, a quality Williams has claimed to be "the hero of the play", but her struggle will

continue past the end of Act 3. She differs from Blanche in this respect. Blanche's version of this redeeming arc happens before the opening of *Streetcar*, and the audience doesn't view the struggle that made her turn to the deceptive methods she uses – therefore she is less easily forgiven. Maggie seizes her destiny, while Blanche dooms hers. Neither is a happy ending, and nothing is certain except for their continued agony.

According to director Albert Delvin, Williams “distilled into Cat the tensions of his apparently faltering career”. In this way, the character of Brick is a reflection of his struggle at the time; the tensions being “alcoholism, concern for material comfort, and an indistinct sexual shame” [15] Similarly, a widely accepted critical interpretation of *Menagerie* is that it is somewhat autobiographical – with Amanda representing Edwina Williams, Laura representing Williams' sister Rose, and Tom, the protagonist, being representative of Tennessee Williams himself.

The events of Williams' plays are undeniably inspired by his own experiences, but they are in no means confined by them, as emphasised by Tom in his opening monologue –

TOM: Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.

With this, Williams emphasises that though the events are realistic, they are not completely real; the play is not a recount, but a retelling. One major disparity between the Williams' family history and that of the Wingfields' is the time period – *Menagerie* is very specifically set around 1937, as can be inferred by Tom's allusions to *Guernica*, the Spanish Civil War, and the Great Depression. He also refers to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement in which political concessions were made to the aggressive Nazi Germany in an attempt to prevent a Second World War. According to Christopher Bigsby, writer of *Entering the Glass Menagerie*, this is “an invitation to read the events of the play ironically” – as every character in *Menagerie* is guilty of “indulging the desire to live with comforting fictions rather than confront brutal truths, a doomed and ultimately deadly strategy” – much like Chamberlain's attitude towards appeasing Hitler.

This is true for Tom more than any other character, as we see him engaging in deception throughout the play while constantly expressing his unease to his unreceptive mother.

TOM: I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy, but inside – well, I'm boiling! (*Menagerie* 62)

This summarises Tom's inherent struggle throughout the course of *Menagerie*; the struggle to break free of the role he has been confined to. He is expected to satisfy himself with a wearying career without complaint. His recurring sarcastic quip, “You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers?”, shows how profoundly dissatisfied he is in his employment, creating palpable tension throughout the play. This also forces him to resort to deception so as to not spark further conflict with his melodramatic mother, as he claims to be going to the movies every night when even the audience realises there is something deeper transpiring. Tom's approach to deception is selfish and self-aware, much like Blanche. He consciously hurts people around him with his lies, worrying both Laura and Amanda.

AMANDA: You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions!

[He crosses to the door]

Where are you going?

TOM: I'm going to the movies.

AMANDA: [...] Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go — to the movies! (*Menagerie* 96)

Tom's insistence on “going to the movies” every night is symbolic of the escapism that 20th century American media represented. During Williams' time, these sensational stories served as temporary, superficial distractions. Movies such as *Casablanca* (1942) and *Citizen Kane* (1941) depicted strong and archetypically masculine protagonists, and one could imagine Tom – or Tennessee – using these stories as a means of escapism.

Despite his morally ambiguous portrayal, Tom is almost certainly not an antagonist. It is well-documented that this character is an attempt by Williams to exorcise his memory, to deal with the fragmented family he left behind, which would explain why he is not painted in an objectively malevolent light. No one understands Tom's plight

better than Williams himself, which is perhaps why he is portrayed in a more sympathetic manner than a character like Blanche. Being the narrator, Tom expresses his guilt time and time again, presenting a tragic paradox that the playwright himself may have had to come to terms with; even after escaping the life he was confined to, the shackles of guilt still prevent him from being truly free.

The character of Brick Pollitt is somewhat of a blank slate by comparison. He embodies ontological despair and a vivid internal identity crisis, engaging in more intense versions of escapism compared to Tom. His alcoholism, material instincts, as well as the “shrine” of his television all contribute to a persistent denial of reality. Williams refers to him as “the living sacrifice, the victim of the play” – the tragic, ruined hero who is now a husk of what he once was. He displays a masculine indifference to the world around him, even draining his family’s finances with his drinking and unemployment.

BRICK: Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an’ death’s the other...

This despair reflects the ideas of the existentialist movement in literature, or, more specifically, Albert Camus’ idea of “absurdism”. The latter describes the innate paradox between the desire to live and the fact that one has no natural purpose to do so. According to Camus, there were three ways to resolve absurdism – through either death, religion, or acceptance. Brick is not brave enough for the first, has abandoned the second, and has thus resorted to the third, masked with alcohol as a form of escapism. When he accidentally reveals Big Daddy’s illness, he attempts to explain this mentality –

BRICK: [...] My head don’t work any more 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... (Cat 61)

Unlike Tom, Brick, consumed by his tragic past, has rejected living itself, and holds no hope for his future. He engages in extreme self-deception but simultaneously does not deceive others. He hides his despair behind a facade of indifference but he is too far gone to integrate himself into regular society, so he simply exists in the background of it all. It is a unique situation in which everyone around him deceives themselves about his condition – everyone except Brick himself. Big Mama’s insistence on doting on him, Big Daddy’s confidence in him as an heir, even Maggie’s hope that he may help her in her quest for inheritance – this trust his family has in him is unfounded and blatantly misguided. Yet, the Pollitt household finds itself making accommodations for Brick, carrying hope through their individual forms of self-deception.

#### **Associated Literary Movements – Existentialism And Social Realism**

As a philosophical movement, existentialism attempts to tackle a difficult concept – existence. Existentialist philosophers believe in the inherent absurdity of the universe, and its lack of governing rules or logic. As famously said by Albert Camus, “I don’t believe in reason enough to believe in a system. What interests me is knowing how we must behave, and more precisely, how to behave when one does not believe in God or reason.” [16]

Though the movement’s philosophical relevance dates back to Kierkegaard in the early 19th century, the most significant works of existentialist literature came after the horrors of World War 2 and the Holocaust. Such novels involved protagonists in absurd circumstances being forced to address their purpose in life. Simone de Beauvoir noted that existentialism became “the first media craze of the postwar era”. [17]

Though Williams’ works are rarely connected to the movement, they do occasionally display strong existentialist influences. In *Menagerie*, this is shown through Tom and his circumstances. His chasing after freedom in order to escape his dreary employment, dooms him to an equally painful life of loneliness and guilt. This is a perfect example of the existentialist idea of the absurdity of existence, and the indifference of the universe to the troubles of man. Similarly, in *Cat*, Maggie is the existentialist hero of the play, as she claws her way out of desperate circumstances despite all the odds being against her. In fact, Williams himself noted that “Maggie, the cat, has to give Brick some instruction on how to hold your place on a hot tin roof, which is human existence which you’ve got to accept on any terms whatsoever”. Blanche is a more tragic version of this heroine archetype, as the urge to seek refuge from unhappiness is what leads to her downfall – a potent commentary on the unfairness of life. In Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, which bears many similarities to *Streetcar* in terms of plot and characters, he comments that “It is still tragic to see one on whom fortune has smiled go under [...] The fact that the heroine arouses our sympathy

is merely due to our weakness in not being able to resist a feeling of fear lest the same fate should befall us..." [18]. In this context, mendacity becomes a vital tool that helps the character navigate through several existential crises.

Social realism is a subgenre of realism that focuses on truthful social commentary. It flourished in the 1920s, and was originally a means of political and artistic expression for those suffering under economic depression, fascist regimes, and racial conflict [19]. Such literature tends to feature complex, morally ambiguous characters from lower-middle class backgrounds, tragic storylines, as well as attempting to expose social inequalities as authentically as possible. The most iconic social realists include Dostoevsky and Dickens, who wrote as early as the 19th century and chronicled the lives of the working poor.

In his 1947 essay, "The Catastrophe of Success", Williams wrote, "The Cinderella story is our favourite national myth". This encapsulates his passion for social realism, and for a deviation from the romanticised storylines of the new American media. His attitude towards social inequality is detailed later in the same, as he describes how "Maids, waters, bellhops, porters and so forth are the most embarrassing people in the world for they continually remind you of inequities which we accept as the proper thing". In this same vein, all three of these plays depict social inequalities in their own way. *Menagerie* follows a lower-middle class family struggling to make ends meet, and this struggle is what sparks the culture of deception amongst the Wingfields. Tom's primary woe is his dreary employment, which he can't leave because of his obligations towards his family. In *Cat*, the wealthy Pollitts are a deceptive backdrop for the true economic competition between Maggie and Mae, who both come from lower status and as a result have more of a competitive spirit than their male counterparts. *Streetcar* shows an economic downfall as Blanche's main source of despair, and the origin of her deception. All three acknowledge the struggle of the lower classes, shying away from an ambivalent standpoint as much as possible.

### Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the presentation of mendacity, self-deception, and subterfuge in each play is influenced by their social contexts, as well as Williams' interpretation of the literary movements of social realism and existentialism. The prevalence of such mendacity is reflected in Williams' complex characters. Each play, *Cat*, *Streetcar*, and *Menagerie*, has a distinctive approach and contributes to a wider understanding of the human tendency to deceive others and oneself – each in a different but meaningful way. In the 21st century Western world, arguably a hyperbolised version of Williams' own, deceit in practice is becoming easier to disguise through the internet and social networking. Works such as Williams' allow for a comprehensive study of human nature – not just how people lie, but why. This empathetic view, in my opinion, is essential to how we must approach our rapidly changing world. Mendacity is eventually unavoidable, but the more one tries to understand it, the less one feels compelled to engage.

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