Chapter – 5

Sexual Repression and Human Compassion
The plays of Tennessee Williams are always haunted by the pressure of sexual repression substantiating the problems of the creator’s life. The deep chasm created by the sexual repression which in turn caused alienation, can only be cured by human compassion. This is the inherent message in Williams’ plays. The pressure of repression that Williams experiences himself throughout his life due to his unfavourable family environment and his being a homosexual one is transmitted to his characters. It is this intensity of the pressure of repression that inevitably led Williams to explore the possible avenues which can illuminate the dark world of his otherwise repressed characters. Tennessee Williams has exploited the theme of sexual repression to its extreme in his plays with the basic intention to show its inherent ambiguity and confusion. For him it is the ‘deeper necessities’ in order to communicate his own confused sexual identity. He himself stated, according to legend, “my type doesn’t know who I am.” (Williams, Memoirs x) So only getting a suitable sex partners for his sexually repressed characters is not enough even though some of his plays move in that direction. The proposed homosexuality of Brick is not resolved till the end of the play; Blanche’s sex life is highly confusing; Mrs. Vanable and Catherine are in confrontation to put a labelling to the dead poet Sebastian’s sexual identity. What Williams demands for his characters is better comprehension of their problems with compassion. Himself experiencing a long period of depression after the death of his friend and lover Fankie,
Williams feels the pain of the inability to communicate with people. In his *Memoirs* he puts his realization of that period: “As long as you can communicate with someone who is inclined to sympathy you retain a chance to be rescued.” (Williams, *Memoirs* 204) The ‘rescue’ is very significant in the sense that the repression that consequently gives rise to later depression cannot be resolved completely by an outsider. But a brief communication of love, sympathy, can make the pressure endurable.

An in-depth study of the plays of Tennessee Williams displays the creator’s experimentation with the theme and technique with the sole intention to give his otherwise repressed world a more meaningful communication. The obsession is to minimize the pressure of repression by ensuring the process of sublimation, to give the personal feeling a more meaningful universal outfit, to provide the singular with comprehensive plural response. In the preface to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Williams reflects upon his intent motive:

> “The fact that I want you to observe what I do for your possible pleasure and to give you knowledge of things that I feel I may know better than you, because my world is different from yours, as different as every man’s world is from the world of others, is not enough excuse for a personal lyricism that has not yet mastered its necessary trick of rising above the singular to the plural concern, from personal to general import.” (Williams, *Plays 1937–1955* 876)

The dramatic world of Tennessee Williams is filled up with the characters unwillingly find themselves trapped in their own predicament. But
the responses of his characters to their subsequent situations vary with the writer's experimentation with the theme. Though sex and death perform dominating roles, his plays seem always in search for something which can give meaning to the 'broken world' of his psychologically disturbed characters. In this search Williams is found attracted to the Oriental philosophy which has left its profound voice in some of his plays viz. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Night of the Iguana* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*. The last is an allegory as the playwright himself called it, and even pressed for an explanation of his new religious bent, he brought out a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and said that a trip to the Orient had left him deeply impressed with eastern philosophy. (Marowski et al. 450) The value of human compassion and endurance are highly praised in the Orient and Williams happens to find his answer here to shower ray of hope in repressed world of his characters where each one is in solitary confinement psychologically.

Williams' search for finality or a balanced emotional set up has made him conscious even in selecting the technical devices for his plays. In the page 'notes for the designer' of the play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he speaks of the quality of tender light on weathered wood, once seen in a reproduction of a faded photograph of the veranda of Robert Louis Stevenson's home on Samoan Island. For the setting of a play that deals with human extremities of emotions, Williams thinks to provide the grace and comfort of light that can bring an
essential softness behind the play. What Williams intends to do is confessed in

Act Two of the play where he states in a parenthesis:

"The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent—fiercely charged! —interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis. Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself. This does not absolve the playwright of his duty to observe and probe as clearly and deeply as he legitimately can: but it should steer him away from "pat" conclusions, facile definitions which make a play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*)

Williams has been accused of obsession with sex but this is not the only truth with him. It is a fact that the attempt to communicate often takes the form of sex in his plays but willingness to show compassion as a means of communication is also strongly present in some of his plays. As for instance in *The Night of the Iguana*, Hannah Jelkes accepts the neuroses of her fellow creatures and understands the problem with Shannon. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy and Maggie are able to communicate with the detached Brick mainly by showing compassion for him. In his preface to *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Williams might have been describing his characters' condition when he spoke of "the outcry of prisoner to prisoner from the cell in solitary where each is confined for the duration of his life." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*)
In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* all the three major characters are struggling to overcome their crisis in their own way. But whereas Big Daddy and Maggie are confronting their predicament with the spirit of life, Brick has preferred to take recourse to alcohol to continue his unbearable life. Just at the beginning of the play Brick’s speech for his wife is marked for ‘a tone of politely feigned interest, masking indifference, or worse’ (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 883). His proposed homosexuality is not resolved till the end of the play and it is confused sexual identity that has turned him away from himself, from his family members, his wife, his society, and even from life. It is as if he has just given up. But *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* does not simply deals with extremities of human emotions but also with compassions. Both Maggie and Big Daddy are involved to make Brick Pollit aware of his actual self, accept life and responsibility. Turning towards Maggie it is felt that she is the actual victim of the situation due to her husband’s indifferent attitude. But her repression does not leave her lifeless. She rather with her wit and hypocrisy and genuine compassion for her husband has turned the table and ultimately moved towards her proposed victory as the curtain falls.

The play is focussed on the occasion of Big Daddy’s birthday, a wealthy Pollitt who has developed advanced terminal cancer. In the beginning of the play the fact of his approaching death is not revealed to the patient or to his wife Big Mamma whereas others are aware of it from the beginning. Their elder
son Gooper and his wife Mae are seen in their desperation to win the favour of Big Daddy which is the only essential thing for them to inherit the entire plantation. Margaret or Maggie, wife of an ex-athletic star Brick, is the heroine of the play as she is the ‘cat’ on a hot tin roof. She is smart, witty, self assertive and the most determined character in the play. She finds herself in a situation where she has to endure as long as possible and her victory lies in enduring as she herself thinks. Her genuine love and affection for her husband lies in sharp contrast to his (husband) indifference and detachment that intensifies alienation in their relationship. Margaret’s heart touching expression of her loneliness to Brick “Living with someone you love can be lonelier-than living entirely alone!- if the one that y’ love doesn’t love you. . . .” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 891) executes the pang of alienation Maggie has to endure in her married life. In the play it is revealed that Brick had turned into an alcoholic with the death of his friend Skipper whose relationship to Brick was an issue of suspect as it was something more than a simple friendship. The ambiguity of the play rests in determining the sexual identity of Brick which remain unresolved executing Williams’ confession that some mystery always remains hidden and not revealed even to the character himself.

Brick, the younger son of Big Daddy, is the favourite of his parents and still is liable to be disinherited mainly because of his inability to produce an offspring. This intensifies the pressure of repression for Maggie because it is
she who has to prove herself by conceiving with the support of Brick who is indifferent to everything. She does not have a very rich and genteel background; her economic and social status has been elevated by her marriage to the son of a Mississippi planter and now it is on the verge of fading away from her due to her husband’s detachment. Roger Boxill comments:

“The anxiety of the titular heroine, the result of sexual frustration, already begins toalley her with the faded belle. Her relation to her detached and self-destructive husband is like those in which the belle or anyhow a character resembling her, tries in vain to save the foredoomed wanderer.” (Boxill 115)

Maggie is the most vocal character in the play, pressure of repression does not leave her dumb. She dares to confront the alcoholic Brick relating both of their problems openly and not less with honesty. Lack of communication intensifies repression and here Maggie is seen determined to engage Brick listen to her and respond. Her pragmatic attitude is reassured in her comments to Brick, “When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don’t work, it’s just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hope of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn’t put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and fester in silence, becomes malignant. . . .” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 893) It happens exactly in case of Brick who develops disgust within himself in/silence and it continues to magnify encompassing everything in his surroundings. Though later on Big
Daddy’s consistent queries he terms it ‘mendacity’ he is disgusted with but it is 
“no one single person and no one lie. . . .The whole, the whole- thing. . . .”
(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 941) So for him everything has become a suspect 
and like Shannon in The Night of the Iguana, he has lost hope in life itself. His 
outward appearance is still attractive because his liquor has not started 
destroying his physic. But the internal turmoil he is suffering from flashes out 
sometimes or other. Williams describes the phenomenon thus: “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 a fair sky, which shows that at some deeper level he is far from 
peaceful.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 885) Brick is badly in need of emotional 
support or compassion to come out of his world that is increasing the amount of 
repression only for him. In the play Maggie and Big Daddy are extending that 
support to Brick to realize the nature of his problem and to face it.

In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Maggie’s role is multidimensional in the sense 
that she incorporates both masculine and feminine attributes in her personality, 
and the dominance of each one determines her role in the game of getting her 
husband back to life and to a genuine heir to the plantation. Her very existence 
depends upon her winning the game. Maggie quite often addresses Brick as 
‘baby” that metaphorically substantiates the changing of the assigned role of 
husband and wife. At the beginning of the play when she speaks about getting
the medical report of Big Daddy to Brick, Williams describes her thus “Her voice has range, and music; sometimes it drops low as a boy’s and you have a sudden image of her playing boy’s games as a child. (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 885). Judith Butler’s queer theory is applicable in Brick, Maggie, and Skipper relationship. There is nothing like essentially masculine or essentially feminine, there is not even any fixed demarcations between the so-called heterosexual and homosexual because desires cannot be demarcated. If it is done then it is possible only with a split creating Lacan’s unconscious. Sometimes Maggie is very soft and caring like a beloved in her words to Brick, sometimes her words are infused with gloom while at others she is full of protests against her husband, scolding him for his indifference and unmanly attire. In order to hurt the man in Brick, she appreciates Big Daddy’s manly desires for her. She even goes further to call Brick “an ass-aching Puritan” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 887). But in the process of playing the role of a loving and caring wife, a sufferer, and a dashing and dominant partner, she succeeds in breaking his cool detachment. Brick rejects Maggie’s offer to lean on her shoulder as he has dropped his crutch. This rejection sounds like “sudden lightning” which Maggie notices and admires thus: “-but that’s the first time I’ve heard you raise your voice in a long time, Brick. A crack in the wall? – Of composure? – I think that’s a good sign. . . . A sign of nerves in a player on the defensive!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 894) This can be considered a step
towards positive transformation from a world of repression to that of rebellion. Later on as the play progresses Brick is found not only responding to Maggie but also showing a tone of concern for her when he says: “Maggie, I wouldn’t divorce you for being unfaithful or anything else. Don’t you know that? Hell. I’d be relieved to know that you’d found yourself a lover.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 905)

In comparison to Brick, Maggie finds herself in a more delicate situation where everybody like Big Mamma, Big Daddy, and Brick himself make her a suspect. The intensity of repression is speculated high in Maggie than in Brick. Even with the painful experience of constant rejection from her husband she is destined to prove herself to everybody. Big mamma accuses her for Brick’s turning into an alcoholic and she even suspects her for not making her son (Brick) happy in bed. But in reality, it is Maggie burning from unfulfilled desire at every moment only because of Brick whom she loves almost blindly. Maggie’s heart touching appeal to Brick “Feel embarrassed! But don’t continue my torture. I can’t live on and on under these circumstances” substantiates her suffering. (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 898) Maggie is childless and Brick drinks and so there must be something wrong in their relationship for which none but Maggie is made responsible. Unlike Brick she demands compassion not from anybody else but from her husband and she is consistent upon her demand. She asks Brick, “How long does it have t’ go on? This punishment?
Haven’t I done time enough, haven’t I served my term, can’t I apply for a – pardon?” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 897)

Maggie is well aware of her problem or her ‘blocks’ whereas Brick doesn’t, and so she is in upper hand than her husband. She is not simply confronting her adverse situation with a life force but also guiding her husband to face the truth. She knows when she has made the mistake and she intends to clear out everything to Brick. She reveals herself with firm determination against her husband’s objection as she continues:

“I’ve thought a whole lot about it and now I know when I made my mistake. Yes, I made my mistake when I told you the truth about that thing with Skipper. Never should have confessed it, a fatal error, tellin’ you about that thing with Skipper...Skipper and I made love, if love you could call it, because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you...And so we made love to each other to dream it was you, both of us! Yes, yes, yes! Truth, truth! What’s so awful about it? ...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 life has got to be allowed to continue even after the dream of life is-all-over. . .” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 908-910)

The complication that is inherent in the relationship between Brick and Skipper is worked out by Maggie for Brick who sticks to a world of illusion regarding the same. She calls it something clean that deserves to be kept on ice
to remain incorruptible. She also clarifies that it is not Brick but Skipper who "harbored even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure between you two!" (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*) She has also confessed that it was her declaration to Skipper about the differences between the world of his and Brick that destroyed Skipper because "from then on Skipper was nothing at all but a receptacle for liquor and drugs. . . ."(Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*)

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* throws light upon the confession procedure practiced in the catholic countries the purpose of which is to make the person concerned free of the burden of repression. Maggie's confession or rather clarifications is operated not simply in minimizing the pressure of repression she is experiencing herself but also in making Brick realize the truth and come out of his shell. Following Williams' characters, Maggie goes beyond conventional moral pattern who can call a supposed homosexual relationship something clean. It probably illustrates Williams' hidden desires to demand a positive or at least a look with respect for those who find themselves cherishing homosexual tendency.

In the play Maggie comes out with a genuine insight into human nature that accounts for her wisdom. In this respect she is the true predecessor to Hannah Jelks of *The Night of the Iguana*. On Brick's queries of why Big Daddy is not informed of his cancer, Maggie's remark is noteworthy when she says "Because human beings dream of life everlasting, that's the reason! But most of
them want it on earth and not in heaven” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 906) In another occasion she is found trying to make Brick understand how life will become unbearable if one is old and without money though it is possible for one who is young and without it.

There is a very close resemblance between Maggie and Big Daddy in the sense that they put their lives open to Brick whom both of them love very much. Both Maggie and Big Daddy need Brick for their own purposes and so both are engaged to motivate Brick towards life. From the conversation that has been taken place between the father and son, it is revealed that Big Daddy’s life was also one of repression. Just like Maggie, he has been suffering from the unfulfilled desires throughout his life. He was never satisfied with his wife and he even goes further to say to Brick, “All I ask of that woman (Big Mamma) is that she leave alone. But she can’t admit to herself that she makes me sick. That comes of having slept with her too many years.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 934) So now at the stage of sixty-fifth he is contemplating pleasure, confessing his still having desire for woman. Now he is realizing he had never him enough and allowed many chances slip by only because of his conventional pattern. Like Maggie, Big Daddy’s words are time and again infused with the philosophy of life that is intended to enhance Brick’s transformation from despair to desire. He is declaring of his leading life with mendacity and so why can’t Brick! In relation to this he makes a valuable statement that throws light
upon human nature when he says, "we've always- talked around things, we've -
just talked around things for some rutten reason, I don't know what, it's always
like something was left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us
was honest enough with the -other. . . ." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 943) The
gap in the communication is somehow filled up with the mask of mendacity
because when Big Daddy says "why is it so damn hard for people to talk?"
(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 928), he is talking about honest communication
that can propose sublimation.

Big Daddy's spontaneous overflow strikes Brick with extremity of
emotion when it touches the issue of Skipper. He is outraged on the thought that
at last his father also bears a suspect about his relationship with Skipper and his
agonising expression to Big Daddy "Oh, you think so, too, you call me your son
and a queer." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 945) Brick was not so vocal when the
issue was touched upon by Maggie as that time his effort was mainly to prevent
Maggie from discussion. But now it is Brick's turn to give an out let to his
suppressed thought relating to his relationship to Skipper in front of his father
because Big Daddy has shaken him by "talkin' so—casually!-about a —thing
like that. . . ." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 948) Then he continues telling the
different factual details relating to his days with Skipper only to confirm that his
friendship with Skipper was something real and deep that should be respected as
something clean and decent. But in his description Brick has deliberately missed
a vital information that Big Daddy has made him aware of. Here Carl Jung needs a reference as he finds people tend to repress those psychic contents which are morally incompatible with his conscious values. So Brick is bound to confess the thing that probably he wanted to suppress and it was a long-distance call that he had from Skipper where his friend made a drunken confession to him and on which he had disconnected the phone. It was the last time they spoke to each other in their lives. On this Big Daddy has tracked down the actual disgust that Brick wanted to kill by turning to alcohol as Big Daddy points out, "- we have tracked down the lie with which you’re disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with, Brick. You been passing the buck. This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself. You!- dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it!- before you’d face truth with him!" (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 951) This fact of not facing truth with Skipper that probably enhances his destruction gradually develops into what Jung considers as shadow part of Brick’s psyche defined as the repressed, suppressed, quality of the conscious self. Brick is dealing with this reality of the shadow by denial whereas Maggie is by projection.

Maggie’s reading of the issue and that of Big Daddy’s are not same; whereas Maggie is taking the responsibility upon herself for the destruction of Skipper, Big Daddy is putting the blame upon his son. However both are intended to make Brick aware of the truth which is tentative by nature
advocating Lacanian ‘real’ which is always out of reach leaving an amount of frustration or dissatisfaction to be experienced. But both Maggie and Big Daddy’s efforts are successful in bringing out a positive transformation in Brick who at least happens to remove his cool detachment and get involved in interaction. Following Williams’ inclination this play is also time and again threatened with the eternal force of time and death that are operated as the agents of repressive mechanisms in Williams’ plays. So Brick’s anguish can be discerned when he says that time has outran his spirit, the spirit of a sports man. The relief Big Daddy has experienced after a long years in his life is again shattered by Brick’s slip of the tongue that discloses the hidden truth about his life. This has shaken the stabled Big Daddy who becomes crazy now. Ironically the father now finds himself in a place that was occupied by his son when the issue of Skipper had been touched upon. Big Daddy is not willing to face the truth substantiating Brick’s significant remark “Who can face truth? Can you?” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 #1) Brick asked this to his father when he was accused for not facing the truth with his friend. But however Brick’s development is proved when he is found consoling the withered Big Daddy with the philosophy of life “Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an’ death ‘s the other. . . .” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955/953) Here Brick’s words can be accounted for his experiencing sublimation, for the repressed Brick is now found assisting someone to face the truth. So in the play it is not
only Maggie and Big Daddy’s compassion for Brick that helps him to overcome the intensity of the pressure of repression but it is later Brick also who returns them the support in the time of their extreme need. When Maggie made a false announcement of her pregnancy, Brick was silent and through keeping quite he saved her face. At the end of the play Maggie’s words are significantly related to human compassion as she says to Brick, “Oh, you weak people, you weak, beautiful people! - who give up. – What you want is someone to – take hold of you. – Gently, gently, with love! And – I do love you, Brick, I do!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 976) After this the play ends with Brick’s response to Maggie that bears a question “Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true?” That time Brick’s facial expression Williams defines was ‘smiling with charming sadness’ which indicates Brick, after all, is going to settle by compromising with mendacity. It is important because life is precious and it must go on with a little bit of adjustment.

*The Night of the Iguana*, written in 1959, strongly displays the influence of Japanese Noh play where Hannah is referred to as a ‘female standing-up Buddha’.”But Hannah, which suggests Hannya, is not the female ghost-mask of a Noh play, she is rather the Holy Ghost engaged to drive out the evil from Shannon. Noh play intends to present some universalized human passion especially at a moment of crises, advocating transcendence to a balanced existence at the same time. *The Night of the Iguana* displays the same issue
where Shannon's, a defrocked Minister, emotional crises has left him almost at the point of extinction but who is ultimately able to experience transcendence to a relatively balanced existence with the help of an outsider Hannah Jelks.

In this context, *The Night of the Iguana* very aptly invites a re-reading of the play in the light of the *Bhagavad-Gita* where Sri Bhagavan was engaged to wipe out the darkness from the mind of Arjuna, the warrior, who was at his extreme emotional crises and fully confused about what was right for him. Many of the dialogues between Hannah and Shannon surprisingly echo those of Sri Krishna, the Bhagavan and Arjuna.

In his "Civilizations and its Discontents", Freud has discussed the source of man’s unhappiness. To get happiness is the aim of life, and whenever it is obstructed we seek substitutive gratification. "The Pleasure Principle" has to be accommodated with the reality principle under the external pressure of civilization. This substitutive gratification has given rise to counter illusions like religion, art etc. which compensate our sufferings though cannot protect us against it. But in a different way Carl Jung, a Swiss psychoanalyst, stresses the importance of exploring the world of religion and spirituality for psychological growth and maturation, which he calls the process of individuation, of the individual. This process starts with the encounter between consciousness and the symbols arising from the unconscious. Analytical psychology finds out a collective unconscious which is different from the personal unconscious in the
sense that it possesses archetypes common to all human beings. The individual, going through the individuation process, may get the gleams of symbols which are related to the experience of not a single person but humanity in general. These are the symbols which throw light upon the fundamental questions like life, death, happiness, etc. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Arjuna cannot be considered simply a warrior who finds himself in depression, he is rather representing everybody whoever is in his crises just as Shannon in The Night of the Iguana who states his own situation—"...well, like everyone else, at some point or other in life, my life has cracked up on me." (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 343) In the play the tied up iguana, 'trying to go on past the end of its goddam rope', is representing the characters struggling to get rid of their crisis.

Dealing with the theme of repression and a simultaneous search for sublimation lead Williams to write The Night of the Iguana that marks the turning point in his dramatic career. The spiritual inclination which has been discerned momentarily in his early plays almost outbursts in this play. His obsession with God and sex that are functioning as part of repressive mechanism in his plays is illuminated with the progress of the play The Night of the Iguana. In his Memoirs Williams states, "...what I think we most need is a New Morality. And I think we’ve arrived at a point where that is a necessity of continued and bearable existence...." (Williams, Memoirs 230) Hannah Jelks’ advice to Shannon to “throw away the violent, furious sermon” and to “lead
them (people) beside still waters....” (Williams, *Memoirs* 305) is what Williams realizes as the only way to avoid religious repression. Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon, defrocked Episcopalian minister, is over burdened with guilt conscience injected in his very childhood by his mother when she caught him in amusing himself. The antagonism that Shannon develops against God is also due to the influence of his puritan mother. In this respect he shares Williams’ own life where the dominance of a puritan mother enhances her son’s intensity of repression. Williams’ mother did not approve of his attachment to Hazel, the ‘great’ extra familial love of his life. According to Williams, it seemed that his mother did not want him to have any friend. So in both the cases, sons are obstructed to follow their desires which result in infantile regression. According to Freud, when a specific infantile influence is traced to parental restrain of sexual pleasure, such represents of the child’s ‘auto-eroticism’ by “education and mental forces like shame, disgust and mortality is internalized by the individual psyche as the super ego or coincidence.” (Thompson 18) According to J. Thompson, *The Night of the Iguana* moves from a “Freudian case study of sexual neurosis and spiritual malaise” through a psychological “dark night of the soul” (Thompson 17) Freud believes that when the individual revolts against the internalized “censorial institution” and desires to liberate himself from its influence, “his conscience
then encounters him in a regressive forms as a hostile influence from without” (Thompson 25)

The Night of the Iguana strongly depicts a progression from repression to that of sublimation. The heroine, Hannah Jelks, a painter and a quick sketch artist, along with her grandfather, Nonno, a poet, travel around the world. So far they somehow met their expenses but now in a financially broken condition they arrive at the Costa Verda, a hotel run by Maxine Faulk who has recently lost her husband but not the desires for man. Incidentally Shannon, a defrocked priest and a tourist guide, has also arrived there in an emotionally broken condition and the host finds in him a better substitute to replace her dead husband with. Though a highly sexed one, Shannon desperately resists her advances because of the torments he is suffering from sexual repression and guilt conscience. The play deals with Shannon’s progression towards self understanding that sparks the spirit to lead life for other’s sake. Nonno’s progression towards the completion of his life’s works can also be accounted for his achieving a state of sublimation just before his death. In both the cases Hannah’s assistance is noteworthy who has dedicated her life for other’s sake experiencing sublimation in the true sense. She has experienced internal conflicts before the action of the play begins and in the play she emerges as an absolutely stabled personality that has overcome the cheap instinctual demands of the ‘id’. Embrey states:
“Hannah creates in the audience the impression that withdrawing from sex is positive or healthy, since we tend to see all the behaviour of an admirable character as admirable, unless something indicates we should feel otherwise. And nothing in the play indicates that her sexual reluctance is a problem.” (Tharpe 338)

In the play Shannon’s depression is enhanced due to the lack of insight into the basic goodness of a human being and especially of himself. He has lost faith and has lost hope to lead a meaningful life as well. Though absence of God is one of the recurrent issues that have attracted attention in Williams’ plays, search for God’s vision is also inherent in his characters. A desperate need to restore faith in companionship and to develop a feeling of compassion for others prompts Williams to create characters like Hannah Jelks who is a human being with a vision of life and no less of God. In The Night of the Iguana Hannah Jelks is vested with the supreme task of a savior and so her appearance itself symbolizes her difference from Williams’ other characters. Hannah is “remarkable-looking - ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine and yet androgynous-looking - almost timeless.” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 338) This is what Shannon feels when he first looks at her. When Hannah reappears for the second time with her grandfather Nonno, Shannon looks at them steadily “with a relief of tension almost like that of someone going under hypnosis.” (Williams, Plays 1957-
So from both the initiation it is clear that Hannah is special for Shannon who is badly in need of someone who can rescue him from his internal conflict. What Williams demands for his characters is better comprehension of their problems with compassion. Himself experiencing a long period of depression after the death of his friend and lover Frankie, Williams feels the pain of the inability to communicate with people. In his *Memoirs* he puts his realization of that period: “As long as you can communicate with someone who is inclined to sympathy you retain a chance to be rescued.” (Williams, *Memoirs* 204) The ‘rescue’ is very significant in the sense that the repression that consequently gives rise to later depression cannot be resolved completely by an outsider. But a brief communication of love and sympathy can make the pressure endurable. In the play we see Shannon is able to share his problems with Hannah and she not only responds with compassion but also illuminates his mind with her wisdom.

Hannah is a human being who has experienced a lot and who in return learns a lot from her experience. The adverse situation of life has taught her to develop a genuine vision of life which is quite often reflected in her words. Her words to Maxine Faulk: “We’ve been through several typhoons in the Orient. Sometimes outside disturbances like that are almost welcome distractions from inside disturbances...” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 358) is worth quoted in this respect. Hannah is also very tactfully projected as a painter who naturally bears
a strong sense of perception to look beyond the physical or the superficial. We find that Art, Poetry, and Religion are always Williams' strong concerns as he finds in them better substitutes to realize sublimation of his repressed desires and so these are recurrent elements in his plays. Hannah bears a deep insight into human psyche. When Shannon raises the issue of a human being’s living on the two levels, Hannah’s immediate response is that both the levels are true. Later in the play she substantiates her point when she says to Shannon: “Everything in the whole solar system has a shadowy side to it except the sun itself.” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 410) Jung’s discovery of the primary and secondary personalities may be what Shannon terms as realistic and fantastic level of living respectively. The first one is related to social norms and the second is unconcerned with it. But when it becomes out of control for an individual to make balance between the two then ‘that’s when you’re spooked’ (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 380) and it is what Hannah calls ‘blue devils’ (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 409). Shannon’s ‘spook’ or Hannah’s ‘blue devils’ represents the repressed desires of their psyche that can be controlled or tamed by endurance. On this issue of how to control the repressed desires, Hannah has become the mouthpiece of Williams, she says, “...we had quite a battle, quite a contest between us... I showed him that I could endure him and I made him respect my endurance...Just by, just by... enduring. Endurance is something that spooks and blue devils respect. And they respect all the tricks that panicky
people use to outlast and outwit their panic.” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 409) The contest is in between the conscience and the desires that are not in accordance to the social norms and hence repression occurs. Hannah’s endurance does not allow her repressed desires to take over herself whereas Shannon’s restlessness does the opposite. In suggesting the ways to outlast the panic caused by ‘blue devil’ or ‘spook’ Hannah significantly points out about ‘subterranean travels’ which means “the journeys that the spooked and bedeviled people are forced to take through the . . . the unlighted sides of their natures.” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 409) So it is not by allowing it grow in silence but by confronting it with endurance. Here Hannah echoes Maggie’s suggestion to Brick.

Hannah and Shannon’s conversation starts in Act two of the play which is initially based upon the latter’s past career as a Minister and his subsequent downfall. Shannon, like Sebastian Venable of *Suddenly Last Summer*, has a negative conception of God who is described in Western Theologies. Shannon’s open declaration of God as a “senile delinquent” has shaken the normal pulse of established customs and he has to pay for it as a consequence. Following Williams’ tradition, Shannon is in search for the presence of God not in the furious sermons but in somewhere else just as Hannah finds it in the suffering faces. But Shannon has to find out his God himself as he doesn’t find comfort with the image of God that comes up in the violent and furious sermons of
Western Theologies. Hannah only helps him in his search with her compassion and beliefs. It is in the storm, in the white lightning, in the rainfall, that Shannon feels that divine touch: “Shannon extends his hands under the rainfall, turning them in it as if to cool them. Then he cups them to catch the water in his palms and bathes his forehead with it. The rainfall increases...Shannon lowers his hands from his burning forehead and stretches them out through the rain’s silver sheet as if he were reaching for something outside and beyond himself.” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 387)

Hannah inspires Shannon by speculating that one day he will surely go back to the church at least for those very few old faces who will look up at him and he will make them aware of ‘something to still believe in’. Here she very significantly remarks, “Lead them beside still waters because you know how badly they need the still waters ...” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 370) The meaning inherent in the phrase ‘still waters’ is tentative. Shannon has shaken their faith and it is his moral duty to restore it upon something which can still believe in with firmness.

Shannon confesses dark chapters of his past life to Hannah and feels better. Confession is a step towards sublimation which Foucault points out in his discussion on ‘sexuality’. In this play the confession is made not before the confession box of a church but to a human being who responds instantly. In Act three of the play, Hannah has turned against Shannon especially for his act of
self-inflicted crucifixion in the name of atonement in the hammock as she rebukes him by calling it a ‘passion-play performance’. Here Hannah’s role is exactly that of Maggie’s in Cat where the latter was engaged to raise the pride in Brick by rebuking his unmanly attire. Here Shannon’s case is related to that of abnormal repression that gives rise to complex neurotic behaviour. He experiences repression that is initiated in the secondary phase due to the internalized feelings of guilt caused by his mother. Throughout his life he has been haunted by that guilt conscience and the repression continues to develop inviting behaviour that is incoherent, against the social norms and even self-destructive.

Shannon wants Hannah to untie him but she rejects and prefers to wait till he has passed through his present disturbance. She wants to remove the sadistic pleasure he is taking in self-indulgence. She has found in him something precious which shouldn’t be allowed to get wasted meaninglessly. So she has insisted him to stop, “Stop being childishly cruel!” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 404) Hannah helps Shannon to realize the good in man, to know how to live beyond despair, to taste the bliss of endurance in an adverse situation. She has evoked the pride in Shannon, the strength to survive with honour. When he wanted to know what she had found to respect in him she said, “I respect a person that has had to fight and howl for his decency and his bit of goodness…..” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 404)
In *The Night of the Iguana* though Hannah is depicted as a saintly figure she is not without human traits. She is able to make Shannon overcome his psychological turmoil because she had been through what he is experiencing now. Hannah’s oriental message ‘accept whatever situation you cannot improve’ is as if not simply for Shannon but for all those repressed characters of Williams. Blanche’s quest for ‘tenderer feelings’ is also echoed in Hannah when she says, “Nothing human disgusts me unless it’s unkind, violent.” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 418) It is this ‘tenderer feelings’ that binds Hannah and his grandfather Nonno for such a long period of time. Without ‘home’ they taste the warmth of being at home wherever they go which Maxine fails to provide for her husband Fred. Hannah’s compassionate nature not only illuminates Shannon’s dark continent of the soul but also transforms the vulgar and beastly Maxine into a human being to a great extent. Though Williams’ plays are crowded with highly sexed individuals, in this play he wants us to discard the demand of the flesh and appreciate the spirit in Hannah. It is the spirit of love, kindness, and human compassion which can enlighten the repressed world of Williams’ characters and make life endurable. Shannon is the true successor to Brick in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* with his guilt conscience and lack of interest in all human relations and even in God. Lastly both surrender themselves in a compromising relationship to their counterparts with
the exception of Brick without resolving or knowing his 'spook' and Shannon with better understanding.

Sexuality in O'Neill's plays is never presented as a cause or solution to the problem of life: "Man's disorientation and Man's bedevilment is from within and from without" (Cargill, Fagin and Fisher 325). Williams' plays strongly displays "sex satiety as a solution to life's problems." (Mathur 147) But it is true only partially. In The Glass Menagerie, it is not sex but proper understanding in the relationship, lack of the warmth of love that causes psychological alienation of the characters. Williams' search is in no way stopped back with the solution to life's problems in sexual satiety. Had it happened then we would have never got character like Hannah Jelks in the Night of the Iguana. It is not sex, not even the death, but the sudden revelation of the infidelity of her husband which breaks the dream world of Serafina in The Rose Tattoo. Blanche in The Streetcar Named Desire experiences series of sexual confrontation. But what she seeks to find in Mick is not simply a sex partner but the emotional response which she fails to give to her young husband and as a consequence destroys him. Mrs. Venable in Suddenly Last Summer could not understand her son's problem. In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof Maggie's frustration is enhanced mainly because of the indifferent attitude of her husband Brick.
The Night of the Iguana shows a profound statement of how the trauma of sexual repression and the problem of alienation can be handled with human compassion. Williams experimenting with the role of sex in human life from various perspectives created the character Hannah Jelk, who has overcome the cheap instinctual demand and experienced transcendental reality. She has dedicated her life for other’s sake displaying sublimation in the true sense. But her asexual nature makes her more an ideal character than a real one with the spirit of life. She helps Shannon with her wisdom to overcome his “Blue-Devils”. But his surrender to the Lady only echoes a compromise with life at the cost of something vital. In this respect Maxine’s words to Shannon is worth quoting that reveals her practical views on life and bears her resemblances to Maggie. She says to Shannon, “I know the differences between loving someone and just sleeping with someone- even I know about that. We’ve both reached a point where we’ve got to settle for something that works for us in our lives- even if it isn’t on the highest kind of level.” (Williams, Plays 1957-1980 389-390) In the play though Maxine’s vulgarity or voluptuous nature creates a feeling of disgust for her in the mind of the reader, she is also a victim of repressed desires and that should not be overlooked. Her pathetic but open expression about her relationship to her late husband, Fred, bears the testimony of her experiencing the pang of alienation in her married life. She asks Shannon for not misunderstanding her about Fred and says, “I miss him, but we’d not
only stopped sleeping together, we’d stopped talking together except in grunts—no quarrels, no misunderstandings, but if we exchanged two grunts in the course of a day, it was a long conversation we’d had that day between us.” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 389) Here also one’s indifference to the other enhances alienation in the relationship. If sexual satisfaction was the only necessary thing for Maxine then she would not be in a position to miss Fred who never satisfied her physically. It is a sense of respect that she used to enjoy from her husband but what she is not getting from her employees who otherwise sleep with her. Like other Williams’ characters, the vulgar Maxine is also in need of emotional support or compassion and not simply sexual satisfaction. This need makes her crazy to somehow get engaged in a relationship with Shannon though it may not be ‘on a highest kind of level’. Of course, monetary support is also a motivating force that should not be missed here. Just like Shannon and Maxine, in *Cat*, Maggie and Brick’s relationship also lastly come to a settlement with a compromise and it is Williams’ message for his characters who are mostly fugitive by nature that life demands an amount of compromise if it is deserved to go on. Compromise inevitably carries repression but life is important and here compromise involves the welfare of both the individuals concerned, leading a path towards sublimation. The play surprisingly ends with the lifelong wanderer Hannah’s appeal “Oh, God, can’t we stop now? Finally? Please let us. It’s so quiet here, now.” (Williams, *Plays*
When Hannah finds Nonno dead, she becomes panicky and in that moment 'she looks right and left for someone to call to. There's no one. Then she bends to press her head to the crown of Nonno's.' (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 427) Her desperately looking for someone signifies her need of emotional support/ compassion that she has been so long getting from Nonno. But with his death her 'blue devil' returns and makes her panicky and so she bends down upon the dead Nonno in search for the support.

Williams' characters are exposed in their crucial moment of depression necessitated by their repressed world. They are torn in between the physical and the spiritual as they fail to make a proper amalgamation and as a consequence deprived of enjoying the blessing of a normal life. According to Bigsby, the women in Williams' plays are: "Desperately sexual beings, the consummation which they seek is nonetheless spiritual. The body they embrace is physical enough but what they seek is seldom simply sexual satisfaction. They long for completion." (Bigsby 130) Williams seeks to find his answer in art, religion and most importantly in the extending hands of kindness and compassion to rescue his otherwise repressed characters from complete oblivion. Blanche's expression to Stella is exactly what Williams believes in. Commenting upon Stanley's nature Blanche says:

"... May be we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been some progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have
come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some
tendered feelings have had some little beginnings! That we have got
to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march
to whatever it is we’re approaching....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*
510)

Williams’ protagonists are badly in need of that ‘tendered feelings’;
nothing disturbs them so violently other than unkindness. In *Memoirs*, he
writes, “…if you knew me outside of this book, you would find me a man who
values kindness and patience with others.” (Williams, *Memoirs* 242) His
characters are also quite often found to express their desperate need of kindness
and compassion, the absence of which breaks the delicate world of Laura in *The
Glass Menagerie*, destroys Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Lady in
*Orpheus Descending*, shatters Charles Wayne’s dream world of love in *Sweet
Bird of Youth*.

Shannon’s guilt complex can achieve a satisfactory trance which
Williams fails to provide for his guilt ridden characters in his early plays. It is
not by any miracle or divine grace that Shannon experiences a positive
transformation within him. It is Hannah Jelks’ compassionate nature and deep
understanding that results in Shannon’s existential “resurrection from the
hammock ...out! free! unassisted” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 408) It is that
brief but honest communication between Hannah and Shannon that helps the
latter to revive his internal strength to fight back his ‘spook’. The play shows
what is the most needed for Williams’ repressed characters to realize their
nature of repression or to overcome the intensity of the same is the “Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it’s just for one night only…. A little understanding exchanged …. A wanting to help each other ….” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 408-409) E. M. Jackson is of the view that not many of Williams’ plays resolve the conflict of the protagonists, in the way *The Night of the Iguana* does by advocating the significance of “human contact” (Jackson 16) and the need to come out of one’s “separate cubicle” (Williams, *Plays 1957-1980* 408) and accept people as they are.
Works cited


