Chapter – 2

Repression and Delusional Projection
Delusional projection is considered as an attempt to get substitutive gratification of the repressed desire. Both repression and delusional projection are designated as the devices of defense mechanisms where delusional projection, denial, distortion are thought to be the symptomatic behaviour of the psychotics and repression is that of the neurotics. But the psychical health of an individual is very difficult to get demarcated by assigning fixed terms. The characters inclined to delusional projection in search for satisfying repressed desires are sometimes found developing neurotic behaviour. So the symptomatic variations of the psychical health of the character depend upon the nature and intensity of repression.

In the plays The Glass Menagerie and A Street Car Named Desire, the protagonists namely Amanda and Blanche Dubois respectively, are found to take recourse in the delusional projection of their own image to forget about their pitiable present condition. But in both the plays they fail to accommodate their pleasure principle to the reality principle and as a result they inevitably experience alienation. The pressure of repression is so high that the momentary illusion cannot protect them from experiencing despair that is ultimately reflected in their incoherent, self-destructive, and neurotic behaviour. The appearance of Jim O’Connor has made Laura taste the warmth of life only momentarily, because ultimately this interaction leads her to almost eternal confinement in the world of her glass animals. Her fragility fails to sustain the
vitality of Jim, agent of the real world. Blanches' numerous sexual encounters are not only unable to fill the emotional gap created by the death of her young husband and the loss of her estate, but necessitate her disastrous predicament. Amanda finds it difficult to adapt herself to her present economic and social situation in St. Louis. She frequently takes refuge in her maiden past. In both the cases of Amanda and Blanche, the memory of their glorious past in the South is the only source which gives them momentary relief. Robert E. Jones aptly describes the early female protagonists of Williams like Amanda of The Glass Menagerie and Blanche of A Streetcar Named Desire:

the relics of the moribund tradition of gentility in which Williams himself was reared, women who are unable to accept the twentieth century and who prefer living in the illusive and legendary world of something that never really was –the mythical cavalier Old South (Jones 211)

Women and South contribute a significant part in the formative years of Tennessee Williams. The antagonism that he used to harbour within himself against his father led him towards becoming a close associate to his mother. His grandmother and his delicate sister, Rose, also leave a deep influence in his psyche. He gradually inherits feminine attributes in his personality from his close female associates that is later on proved disastrous in his leading a normal emotional life. Tischler’s comment is noteworthy in this regard as she says that Williams’ “world became increasingly feminine and he became negatively sensitized to masculine crudities” (Tischler 19)
So far as the south is concerned, Williams' parents are southerners as for example, his mother inherits Southern Ohio tradition whereas his father is from Tennessee. So quite naturally Williams has turned into a southern writer and in a significant phase of his literary career South is almost ever present as a determining factor to understand his characters. Amanda, Blanche, and Alma, in Glass Menagerie, Streetcar, and Summer and Smoke respectively are Southern women carrying faded aristocracy of their past. In an interview with Mel Gussow Williams says: "All my relationships with women are very important to me...I understand women and I can write about them" (qtd. in Stanton 5)

Williams' first Broadway success The Glass Menagerie in 1945 and the second success A Streetcar Named Desire in 1947 received variety of responses and earned for him the status that he enjoyed along with the other greatest dramatists of America. With The Glass Menagerie, Williams proposed a conception of a new, plastic theatre which was intended to replace 'the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions' and his subsequent plays share the same umbrella of plastic theatre. Enjoying freedom of convention is not preferred to escape the responsibility of a playwright; experimentation with technique is rather sought for getting a closer approach to truth, to reality, which is the first essential attribute of a play. But as Lacan is of the view that even when our demand is fulfilled, dissatisfaction still remains with us,
Williams in his *Memoirs* has exactly pointed out about his similar experience on the most desired success of *The Glass Menagerie*. He says:

> ‘After the success of *Menagerie* ... I felt a great depression, probably because I never believed that anything would continue, would hold. I never thought my advance would maintain its ground. I always thought there would be a collapse immediately after the advance. Also, I had spent so much of my energy on the climb to success, that when I had ‘made it’ and my play was ‘the hottest ticket in town,’ I felt almost no satisfaction.’ *(Williams, Memoirs 92)*

*The Glass Menagerie* is a memory play where ‘the emotional value’ than the factual details is more important ‘for memory is seated predominantly in the heart’ *(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 399)*. Here Tom, the male protagonist, is going to present ‘truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion’ *(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 400)* and ironically with the progress of the play the characters are revealed to get stuck to illusion to avoid the truth. It is the civil war of the thirties and the follow up depression that creates the social background of the play. Out of the four major characters, the three of the Wingfield apartment, Amanda, Tom, and Laura, are living almost in a make-believe world and the fourth, a gentleman caller, is from the outside world of reality. It is considered as one of the most autobiographical of Williams’ plays where Amanda and Laura are representing his own mother, Edwina Williams and his sister, Rose, respectively. Tom, the narrator, is Williams himself, looking back to the past through his memory lane. Hence the journey undertaken in the play is both within and without creating a suitable ground for the playwright and narrator
protagonist to taste the bliss of sublimation. The play revolves around Amanda’s exercising strong influence upon her children and her passionate longing for the days of her maiden past, with a constant focus at the physically crippled Laura for whom a gentleman caller is badly expected. At the beginning of scene three of the play Tom confides: “It became an obsession. Like some archetype of the universal unconscious, the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment...” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 411) Symbolically all the three members of the family are living for that expectation. The arrival of the long expected Jim O’ Connor in the final scene is an initiation of the Wingfield family to the reality. The confrontation with the reality has been disastrous for the family because the fragility of their delusion cannot sustain its pressure. The family has lost its aspiration in the form of Laura’s symbolic confinement in her world of glass animals. The gloomy and repressive mood of the play ends up with intensifying the pressure of repression mainly for the mother. Laura, identified more with her delicate glass animals, exhibits an indifference to emotions, and Tom, being a possessor of the art of poetry, has lastly discovered himself lying bare his guilt ridden self to get rescued. Like his father, Tom bears an inclination for the distance that has after all turned him away from his home. A born vagabond, escaping the responsibility, Tom has confirmed the tradition of fugitive characters of Williams’ plays. “I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that
were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stooped, but I was pursued by something.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 465)

Amanda is strong, dominating but pathetic as she fails to adapt herself to her present economic and social condition in St. Louis. Williams himself has through the similar experience of disgrace when his family is transferred to St. Louis from Mississippi. Amanda’s married life was not a happy one corresponding to that of Williams’ mother. Her husband was never so concerned for his family who ‘fell in love with long distances’ and abandoned the family. Deserted by her husband, Amanda has become desperate to hold her family together and for this concern she has been turned up into an over protective mother. As a mother she is sincere enough about her grown-up children but the means she has adopted for their better lives is proved to be only her futile effort. By trying to make Laura feel accustomed to normal life, she has only exaggerated her seclusion. Her practical insight is well marked but she herself fails to get accommodated to the practical situation her family is thrown into. In the action of the play the mother in Amanda is found almost crazy for the present and future of her children, but the woman in Amanda is often flashed up taking solace in the past memories of her maiden days. She is found recalling how in one afternoon in Mississippi, seventeen gentlemen callers came to visit her and each one was with the expectation to marry her. These memories of the bygone days operate as the source of internal strength for
Amanda to keep hold of herself and her family. Life imposes responsibility upon Amanda before the time that has led her to a domineering mother, always obsessed for the future of her son and daughter. In this regard Tischler thinks:

"In discarding the real father's part, Tennessee Williams found it necessary to endow the mother with some masculine practicality ... the feature of this woman which makes her a more admirable character than the later Blanche of Streetcar is the anomalous element of practicality encased in her romantic girlishness. Although she has approached much of her life unrealistically, her plans for her children and her understanding of their shortcomings are grimly realistic." (Bloom 34-35).

This 'masculine practicality' can also be noticed in the maiden Amanda from her nature of conversation with those seventeen gentlemen callers that she shares with her children "Things of importance going on in the world! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 403)

Mixing up of masculine and feminine attributes in the personae is found Williams' recurrent phenomenon reminding of his experiencing the strong presence of both the attributes within himself. Amanda's heart rendering nostalgic cry is: "Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! ...I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 442) This nostalgic cry is happened to be the destiny of Williams' Southern heroines and the playwright presents it so simply but honestly. In comparison to Amanda, Blanche is hypocritical and more
complicated who always prefers to put on the mask that makes it sometimes difficult to recognize which one is the real of Blanche.

Not to face the reality does not necessarily mean to be unaware of it. Reality bears a threat for Amanda and she knows it well that one day her children will have to face it. This is the most disturbing thought of Amanda that has desperately driven her to make her children adaptable for practical life. But her practicality quite often takes refuge in the delusional projection of herself and of her daughter that in contrary makes the sensitive Laura more conscious of her weaknesses and consequently leads her into her gradual introversion. Amanda’s too much interference into each and every bit of their lives is proved to be a great mistake on her part because this has provoked especially her son Tom to develop a sense of detachment from or may be a hidden disgust for, his mother. In the very first scene Tom is seen getting furious at his mother on the dinner table “I haven’t enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It’s you that make me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening –spoils my appetite—all this discussion of –animals’ secretion—salivary glands—mastication!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 402) Physically crippled and introvert Laura does not deserve to be compared with the powerful Amanda. But Laura beats her mother at least in understanding the predicament they are forced into. The brief conversation between Amanda and Laura will clearly bring out the point.
Amanda: ....Stay fresh and pretty!—It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving. How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?

Laura: I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.

Amanda: what? No one—not one? You must be joking! Not one gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado!

Laura: It isn't a flood, it's not a tornado, Mother. I'm just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain....I'm going to be an old maid”

(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 404-405)

Here the daughter appears to be the more matured one than the mother.

As Amanda finds herself in her maiden past with an imaginary satisfaction, Laura also has her own world with the glass animals. In scene two, Laura is discovered in ‘washing and polishing her collection of glass instead of practicing type writing as directed by her mother. But the sound of Amanda's approaching steps toward Laura's room has at once made her nervous. “Laura catches her breath, thrusts the bowl of ornaments away and seats herself stiffly before the diagram of the typewriter keyboard as though it held her spellbound.”(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 405) Here Laura has to experience repression at two different levels; one is Freudian and the other is Foucauldian. Following Freud, Laura prefers to take refuge in the world of her glass menagerie to repress the pitiable present whereas following Foucault, Amanda is representing Power that imposes repression upon its subject. To satisfy herself she is repressing her present and to satisfy the Power she is repressing her satisfaction. Though the kind of satisfaction or relief Laura seeks to find in
her collections is momentary but it helps her to endure her destiny. Satisfaction itself is an illusion because it is never achieved completely and so repression of some kind is always inevitable. It is to get this satisfaction that Freudian pleasure principle operates that motivates life to go on. Williams’ characters, mostly product of a repressed world, are badly in need of this principle to work in their lives. Delusional projection is driven by the working of this pleasure principle and many of Williams’ heroines like Amanda, Laura, Blanche, Alma, Serrafina, are in a way victims of this projection.

The nature of repression Amanda is assigned to experience in the play is more complicated than Laura and even Blanche in Streetcar whose is mostly sexual. The change in socio-economic life in the bigger world has thrust the Wingfield family in a closed apartment of St. Louis which is an experience of disgrace in itself. Amanda carrying a rich, genteel, background finds it difficult to adjust in their present condition. Her nostalgic inclination for the past is stimulated by her effort to forget about the present. But the responsibility of two grown-up children time and again forces her to speculate over their future which is to depend on the present. Her repression leads her to experience greater depression whenever she is confronted with truth. The sudden revelation of Laura’s deception has shaken her existence. If repression is supposed to repress the undesirables then Amanda is not entertained to sustain it for long as her sense of responsibility often breaks through her consciousness forcing her at
least to speculate over the reality if not to face it. Her despairing query to Laura is: “So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by? Amuse ourselves with the glass menagerie, darling? Eternally play those worn-out phonograph records your father left as a painful reminder of him?” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* /408-409)

Here ‘glass menagerie’ is symbolically representing the fragile nature of delusion that can break at any moment whereas ‘phonograph records’ is related to repression as it bears painful memories. Amanda, struggling a solitary battle all these years, is now at the end of her patience where she demands compassion and support from her children. Her practical insight once again points out what is the most needed in their crucial situation where life brings crises to survive with dignity. She says to Tom, “we have to do all that we can to build ourselves up. In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is—each other ....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* /419)

Williams values compassion for each other as the only means to break the shackles of alienation that often prevails in the relationship causing to experience repression in silence. But the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* are destined to feel alienated in their world of repression because communication is a major problem in Williams’ world. So Tom’s clear confession to her mother, “You say there’s so much in your heart that you can’t describe to me. That’s
true of me, too. There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to you! So let's respect each other's—" (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 420)

Scene three of the play reveals Tom’s predicament where he has to confront a dominating mother who always prevents him from satisfying his personal desires and a crippled sister whose fragility demands constant caring. Amanda’s Puritan conscience does not allow Tom to read Lawrence as she “cannot control the output of diseased minds or people who cater to them....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 412) The brief quarrel that has been taken place in between the mother and the son brings into focus the desperation of both Amanda and Tom. Both are at the end of their patience. In absence of her husband, Amanda desperately needs Tom’s emotional and financial support to run the family. Tom’s dissatisfaction with his job in warehouse has driven him into a frequent movie goer which is, for Amanda, not an expectant behaviour of a person with a right mind. Tom is torn in between what he is doing and what he wants to do experiencing the cramp of repression at every moment. The pressure of repression becomes intolerable when Tom finds that his mother is indifferent to his experiencing crises. The pitiable condition of Tom’s life is given an expression in his own words: “For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say self—self’s all I ever think of. Why, listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I’d be where he is – GONE! As far as the system of transportation reaches! ... I’m leading a double
- life, a simple, honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic czar of the underworld, Mother." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955/414)

Here the intensity of repression can be discerned in each and every word of Tom. He has given up his dream, has suppressed his self's desire and is destined to lead a double-life. The term 'underworld' is symbolic of the world of his desires that is to be suppressed by day, the time to confront reality, but the night is for channelizing those hidden desires in his own way. Tom's leading a double-life is re-echoed much later in The Night of the Iguana when Shannon speaks of living a life at two different levels: realistic and fantastic. During day time Tom lives at realistic level and during night at fantastic one. Tom has taken it for granted that though he will 'rise' but he will not 'shine'. So Tom is found searching out his compensation there in the movies, in the activities of the Paradise Dance Hall to satisfy his repressed desires for adventures.

The news of supposed arrival of Jim O'Connor, a gentleman caller, has charged the otherwise repressed world of the Wingfield family, centred upon the magnetic Amanda, with the vibration of life. It is Amanda who has become over enthusiastic on the prospect of having a gentleman caller for the first time for her daughter. Her excitement in the name of preparation is working for getting relaxation from the burden of depression. But in this regard Tom, like Laura in previous occasion, is found assisting Amanda to face the truth and not
to have too much expectations from Laura. Tom clarifies to Amanda, “Laura seems all those things to you and me because she’s ours and we love her. We don’t even notice she’s crippled any more...face facts, Mother.”(Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 430)

But Amanda’s delusion about her daughter does not receive a single wound from Tom’s factual analysis of her defects. She rather sticks to her delusion to such an extent that Laura’s peculiarities are turned up to her as something extraordinary that will work to Laura’s advantage. Amanda’s desperation is not simply for preparing Laura but also for herself. After long years of undertaking a solitary battle, she finds an occasion to relive her maiden past when she was supposed to attend her gentlemen callers. The very dress she gets out to wear is related to the legend of her youth (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 434). It is the dress that she wore in attending her gentlemen callers on Sundays and also on her first meeting with her husband whom she loved. So the news of gentleman caller’s expected arrival is operated for Amanda as a source to give an outlet to her repressed desires. From a different perspective, Amanda’s action can be reviewed in the light of Mariam M. Johnson who believes that although mothers have a sense of oneness and continuity with both genders...this sense of relatedness is stronger and lasts longer with daughters than with sons because of the mother’s own female gender identity. The mother projects her own sense of self into her female
infant and tends to experience them as less separate from herself.¹ (Johnson 101-102).

So when Jim’s reality has shattered their illusion, both mother and daughter ‘don’t dare to face each other’ (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 463)

*The Glass Menagerie* is an enactment of how substitutive gratification of the repressed desires is badly needed when it is not possible to fulfill the original one. All the three characters are desperately searching out for their compensation--Amanda in reliving her gracious past and also in magnifying her children, Laura in her glass menagerie, and Tom mostly in the movies. But substitutive gratification cannot sustain the pleasure for long and so it is destined to break. The reality is always strong enough to break the delusion. Laura has failed to perform up to her mother’s expectation and Amanda is forced to realize the short comings inherent in her children as she says to Laura: “I’m sick, too—of your nonsense! Why can’t you and your brother be normal people? Fantastic whims and behaviour!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 437) Tom is tired of movies and has decided to embrace his long desired life of adventure. But it is possible for Tom to accept his dream world only by ignoring his responsibility that has consequently developed a guilty conscience. His selfish drive cannot get him absolute satisfaction as he is being constantly haunted by the guilty conscience. The positive transformation that Laura starts to experience in Jim’s contact is short lasting. Jim with his warmth and charm
‘lights her inwardly with altar candles’ (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 452) only to push her back in ‘infinite desolation’ (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 460). Jim’s compassionate conversation has stimulated confidence in Laura, though momentarily, to give expressions to her secrets. But Laura, like her unicorn, is a misfit for the real world. Laura’s difference has decided her predicament and it is one of eternal repressions, whereas unicorn by getting rid of its difference in the form of a horn becomes fit for the real world. *The Glass Menagerie* is an enactment of cyclical progress of the characters from a world of repression often through momentary relief of delusion toward dissolving into a world of repression with greater intensity than the beginning.

Tennessee Williams has incorporated the inherent qualities of Amanda and Laura in creating his enigmatic Blanche Dubois, the heroine in his next play. Williams’ second Broadway success *A Streetcar Named Desire* received variety of responses mainly for the creation of dynamic Blanche Dubois. The actions of the play move round Blanche either to present her in the height of an angel or a condemned one. But Williams has created her to reveal the predicament of an otherwise exceptional but helpless woman in a patriarchal society. The detail account of the setting of *Streetcar* at once makes us conscious of the contradictions to be experienced in the play. Blanche Dubois, representing Williams to a greater extent, is a bundle of contradictory impulses. The different character traits infused in Blanche has made her an easy prey to
psychoanalysis. Philip C. Kolin in his article “Reflections on/of A Streetcar Named Desire” very emphatically writes:

"Streetcar tells tale about us and is one of the most haunting tales we tell about ourselves, often revealing what we want concealed and concealing what we want revealed." (Kolin 1)

This reading of Streetcar shares some vital points of both sexuality and masquerade. Like Amanda in The Glass Menagerie, Blanche is from a Southern aristocratic origin and possesses divided personality that became a dominant trait of those belonging to the plantation tradition. Though the South was a least affected region of the humdrum of the twenties, the forces of industrialization disintegrate its rich plantation tradition. But the Southerners always prefer to maintain their attitudes and behaviour, carrying a nostalgic attachment to their glorious past. In his book The Southern Tradition and Regional Progress (1960) Nicholls points out that the South always presents a certain element of moonstruck unreality in its outlook. The reality demands a compromise with the old modes of life that necessitates experiencing conflicts between the present conditions without and nurturing identification to their past world within. Amanda and Blanche are caught up in this fragmented world of their psychological landscapes where imaginary wish fulfilments become their destiny to avoid the intensity of repression.
Blanche resembles the type of ‘intellectual woman’ of Reviere. Stanley, quite often described as an “ape”, a “pig”, a “goat”, is also “the gaudy seed-bearer”, father of Stella’s “son”. Blanche always intends to present her superiority over this father figure by displaying her superior taste and culture. An inherent hatred for Stanley is always there in Blanche, but apparently she prefers to present herself as a very delicate and vulnerable woman. She demands appreciation for her beauty from the man, and for this purpose she lies about her age. In her responses towards the matured ones like Stanley or Mitch, she always puts on the masque of womanliness if we can call it following Reviere. She wants to project herself as an object of desire for the Other (men) and so turning herself into being the phallus (Lacan). Blanche’s words to Mitch: “I can’t stand a naked light bulb any more…” clearly defines what Blanche is. She doesn’t want to face the truth, her true identity, any more. Reviere considers both the appearance and essence of womanliness as the same, but Blanche does not fit here completely. She is rather more suited to Lacan’s notion of masquerade that reveals only the constructed nature of the essential identity of women. “I’ve got to keep hold of myself!” (Williams, Plays: 1937-1955 473). This ‘myself’ is different from what she appears to be. The ‘colored paper lantern’ symbolizes Blanche in the true sense. She says to Stella, “Have got to be seductive – put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and glow –” (Williams, Plays: 1937-1955 515). Here Blanche echoes Amanda’s advice
to Laura on the latter's physical defects: "When people have some slight disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it—develop charm—and vivacity—and —charm! That's all you have to do!" (Williams, *Plays: 1937-1955*)

Having lost her plantation Belle Reve, her job, her young husband, Blanche is in extreme need of financial support and security, and this prompts her to come to Stella's house. Even after that in her first meeting with Stella she rebukes her sister for her pitiable condition, hiding the reality of her own life. She always prefers to project an illusory atmosphere around herself so that the reality gets never exposed. Blanche's obsession to delusional projection of herself is so intense that she starts believing it as something real.

Blanche sings a song: "Say, it's only a paper moon, Sailing over a cardboard sea—But it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me!" (Williams, *Plays: 1937-1955*) When Stanley starts disclosing the reality of Blanche, she is shocked not because her lies are caught but because of her make-believe world where she has been living is shaken.

Blanche has lost her first love in the form of her young husband, the homosexual, at an early stage when her vision of love and sex just started flowering. This frustrating experience at the initiation of her sexual life has left in her what we can identify as Lacanian 'lack'. Her subsequent sexual interactions are partly motivated by her search for that original one which was
not simply on physical level but was infused with a spiritual flavour. All her sexual encounters can be arranged in the chain of signification where the central signifier is always missing, and so the end result of each experience is despair. One can trace back to Blanche's first love experience with her husband as her 'mirror stage'. The breaking up of this relationship at the shocking exposure of his being homosexual dropped her at the symbolic stage as a split personality. Here Erich Fromm's understanding of promiscuous behaviour can throw light upon Blanche's sexual encounters:

> The consequence is one seeks love with a new person with a new stranger. Again the stranger is transformed into an 'intimate' person, again the experience of falling in love is exhilarating and intense, and again it slowly becomes less and less intense and ends in the wish for a new conquest, a new love—always with the illusion that the new love will be different from the earlier ones. These illusions are greatly helped by the deceptive character of sexual desire. (Fromm 49)

Following Lacan, sexuality is not the result of a need because even when the need is fulfilled, feeling of dissatisfaction still remains. Blanche's life is an enactment of catching hold of 'desire' or Lacan's central signifier 'phallus' which is beyond reach. This search to fulfil her 'desire', evoked by the loss of her husband, the Other, has led her towards her catastrophe. Ultimately she could not find out her place in the patriarchal society symbolizing the phallocentric 'structure of sexuation' of Lacan. The drama which is enacted between Blanche and Stanley in his home can be aptly applicable to Lacan's
symbolic 'structures of sexuation'. Masculinity in Stanley searches his desiring Other in his wife’s body, dreams, poker game, which can be considered as phallic jouissance. Stanley’s experience with each one fails to give him complete satisfaction. Blanche’s, on the other hand, lies in getting financial support and home which Stella partially fulfils. Her flirtation with Mitch, Stanley, and the boy who came for collecting subscription for The Evening Star, only intensify her despair. Lacan elaborates in his discussion on Courtly Love that no one can seduce one’s despair and real love can never be found through any form of sexual activity. It is always out of reach like Blanche’s young husband. In her case there is something more the glimpse of which she imagines and which is quite often reflected in her inclination to poetry and in her aspiration as well: “How pretty the sky is! I ought to go there on a rocket that never comes down.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955/492) Blanche’s poetic inclination is actually her desperate need to channelize her repressed desire. Her fragility searches security in the soothing touch of poetry.

The conflict between Blanche and Stanley is in a sense representing the tussle within Blanche between her Southern conservatisms and her highly sexual instincts that she fails to channelize in an acceptable way. In Williams’ dramatic world, sex is presented as something redeeming and dangerous as well. Stanley and Stella’s relationship is based upon sex which is the only important thing between a man and a woman in Stanley’s world. Stella has
incorporated the values of her husband’s brute ways of life in her mind and is settled down in life. Sex is operated as the only unifying factor in their relationship. But Blanche’s presence along with her values in Stanley and Stella’s world has disrupted its balance. It has also destabilized Stella’s constructed identity that she so long put on to sustain her married life with Stanley whose life style was totally different from that of Southern Stella. In this regard Benjamin Nelson’s remark is worth quoting:

“Stella knows she has paid this price and she attempts to dull the pain of realization by closing her eyes to it . . . loving Blanche, Stella also hates her, and pitying her, she simultaneously fears her . . . Stella has rejected but not forgotten these traditions and now she sees Blanche as the symbol of these traditions. (Nelson 147-148)

If following Freud, repression is forgetting the undesirable incidents or the desires itself that cannot be fulfilled in reality or within the social norms, then Stella is not alien to this experience of repression. She has been so long deliberately forgetting about her Southern past to live in reality and now the arrival of Blanche is functioning as stimulus to revive her so far abandoned past. Moreover Stanley’s efforts to establish Blanche’s hypocrisy by revealing the high priced items from her briefcase is instrumental to make Stella confront with her so long repressed memory of Belle Reve. She desperately tries to save the innocent image of her sister on which the prestige of her family tradition is involved. She says to Stanley, “I don’t understand what happened to Belle Reve but you don’t know how ridiculous you are being when you suggest that my
sister or I or anyone of our family could have perpetrated a swindle on anyone else." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 485) Stella's arguments with her husband indicate that at some deeper level of her psyche Stella also cherishes dream of her genteel past. But for Stella the present is more important because it promises security for her. So repression can not affect her mental stability, rather it operate positively to make her lead a normal married life with Stanley. Repression allows Stella to become more considerate and adaptable. On the other hand, highly sensitive and passionate Blanche has to experience repression to its extreme. She has witnessed the decline of her family members with their plantation Belle Reve, symbol of their aristocracy and the present is still without a promise of security for her. Blanche's married life was short-lasting that came to an end with the suicide of her young husband creating a guilty conscience in her. Her teaching life also did not last long and ended up with her dismissal from the school. Her last but desperate drive to find security in Stella's house also ended with her departure to mental asylum, the only secured place for Blanche who has lost her family, her plantation, her husband, her job, her imagination, and lastly her mental balance.

Blanche always finds herself in situations where both the insensitive/unkind world and her dominant sexual appetite are responsible. The incident in the school for which she has been thrown away from there is instigated by her repressed sexual desires. In Stella's house it was very difficult
for the highly sexed Blanche to overcome the physical appeal of the highly
sexed Stanley. There is always a hidden desire in Blanche for the Man in
Stanley. She bears disgust against Stanley’s rough and brute ways of life but
cannot negate the Man. Her repressed desire is time and again flashed out in her
sensuous approaches to Stanley. Being herself a full of ambiguities Blanche
admires Stanley in the words: “you’re simple, straightforward and honest, a
little bit on the primitive side I should think...I like an artist who paints in
strong, bold colors, primary colors. I don’t like pinks and creams and I never
cared for wishy-washy people. That was why, when you walked in here last
night, I said to myself—‘My sister has married a man!’- Of course that was all
that I could tell about you.” (Williams, *Plays 137-1955 488*) Here Blanche’s
uses of words are symbolically significant to discern her inner longing. Strong,
bold, and primary colours are in a sense related to the primitive instincts of
human being, and Blanche by making her preference to those colours is actually
indicating her desires for the primitive in Stanley. It is the domination of this
primitive in Blanche that enhances her catastrophe. Stanley is only an external
agent to this unbridled sexual drive that is already there in Blanche. Her
dependency upon her delusion so long saves her from the trauma of too much
repression, and in the last moment of the play when Blanche is going to be
rescued to the mental asylum, she still sustains her delusion about herself that
she will be gallantly rescued by her millionaire beau, Shep Huntleigh.
Blanche displays a life full of contradictions and ambiguities that actually gives her character a larger than life stature. On one hand she is found telling Stanley of her preference to bold, primary colours and on the other, her words to Mitch: “I can’t stand a naked light bulb...” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 499) bears quite opposite aspect of her personality. Freudian notion of constant clash between Eros and Thanatos, the pleasure and death instincts, is aptly applicable in Blanche. Her very first introduction in the play is associated with the symbols representing life and death. She was supposed to take “a street-car named Desire and then was transferred to one called Cemeteries.” Desire and Cemeteries are representing life and death respectively. In search for a secured life she had come to Elysian Fields but there the subsequent situations gradually led her towards her catastrophe. In the play she imagines achieving salvation through death and at the same time demands desperately someone to come to rescue her from her predicament. She is in the midst of earthly desires and ethereal longings inheriting the dichotomy of flash and spirit of Williams’ world.

The presence of Blanche in his family has become a threat for Stanley. He enjoys absolute power over his wife Stella who has surrendered herself to the Man in her husband. In the play the first address of Stanley to Stella is “Hey, there! Stella, Baby!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 470) and he throws the package that carries meat at her. The term baby indicates Stella’s inferiority to
Stanley and 'meat' indicates his beastly nature and their relationship that is settled upon sex or flash. In this family structure, Blanche with her spirit is a misfit. The man in Stanley cannot bear Blanche's superiority over him as 'a cultivated woman', 'a woman of intelligence and breeding' possessing 'beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart'(Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*551). Again inherent hatred for Stanley, the father figure, is always there in Blanche, but apparently she prefers to present herself as a very delicate and vulnerable woman. Blanche's compulsion is also for securing protection for her. She confesses a helpless woman's predicament to Stella: "I've run for protection, Stella, from under one leaky roof to another...because it was storm...and I was-caught in the centre....People don't see you-men don’t-don’t even admit your existence unless they are making love to you." (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*515)

She demands appreciation for her beauty from the men, and for this purpose she lies about her age. Stella is her younger sister but even after that she tells Mitch, a friend of Stanley: “Stella is my precious little sister. I call her little in spite of the fact she’s somewhat older than I. Just slightly. Less than a year.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 499) And then, in order to hide her actual age, which may reflect in her face, she immediately requests Mitch to put over the light bulb the little colour paper lantern which she bought at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. In the play, we see, for the time being, Blanche is successful in
convincing Mitch to fall in love with her constructed identity. She confesses to Stella “I want to deceive him (Mitch) enough to make him – want me. . .” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*) and for this she is so much sensitive about her age and looks.

Freud in his psychoanalytic explanation of mourning and melancholia reveals that loss prompts the ego to incorporate attributes of the lost loved one. Blanche is defined from this perspective as homosexual inheriting the attributes of her young husband. So the young boys always remain her centre of attractions. The incident with the student of her school and later with the news paper boy in Stella’s house substantiates the masculinity in Blanche.

In comparison to Blanche, Stella has come up as a more matured one who knows her sister’s weaknesses. Her requests to Stanley “…admire her dress and tell her she’s looking wonderful. That’s important with Blanche. Her little weakness!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955*) is motivated by her sincere concerns for her delicate sister. Stella lives in reality, not inheriting the romantic conservation of Williams’ Southern women. She has embraced the rough ways of her husband’s life resigning her genteel world. Stella is fortunate enough who need not have to watch the tubercular deaths of her family members that have been a traumatic experience for Blanche. Moreover she has not witnessed the decline of their plantation caused by the ‘epic fornications of her father and grandfather’. Whereas Blanche following Williams, possesses
the contradictory impulses of Puritan heritage and Dionysian spirit; Stella being less sensitive than her sister can easily discard the Puritan trappings. In accepting Stanley’s world she has given a free play to her Dionysian spirit without cultivating any conflict within herself. She is the least repressed of Williams’ women characters. Like her sister, Stella is also a highly sexed woman who has channelized her desires in a socially acceptable way. Her life exhibits simplicity as the best way of looking at life. Stella leads her life in accordance to what Hannah suggests Shannon in *The Night of the Iguana*: “accept whatever situation you cannot improve” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 417) She is satisfied in her world and her demand is limited as she thinks “there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark - that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 509)

But for Blanche it is “Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light... some tenderer feelings ....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 510) those matter much. Blanche here carries the footsteps of her predecessor Amanda who rebukes Tom just for his using the term ‘instinct’ in front of her because it is something that belongs to animals, and that people have got away from. Amanda thinks that a Christian adult like Tom must want “superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 421) Stella is fitted in preordained social roles of woman, which are daughter, wife, mother, where woman comes to be positioned within the restrictions of an inherited
patriarchal circuit. She is a wife to Stanley and is going to be a mother of his child. She has surrendered herself to her male counterpart and is secured. But unfortunately Blanche doesn’t belong to any one of the roles and, may be for this, her life has become a suspect for the society which has ultimately removed her to a place where a complete – normal - human being is not expected. So Stanley, by exercising his physical power over the delicate Blanche, has created wound in her body and spirit and has left her incomplete - abnormal, not deserving to be in his social structure defined by patriarchal hegemony.

In Lacanian perspective of sexuality, the different character traits of Blanche, generally deserve condemnation only, at least demands some more positive readings. She possesses both masculine and feminine attributes in herself which intensifies her being more as an outsider in Stanley’s family environment which is mostly filled up by ‘heterogeneous types’. In the play Blanche herself has used the term ‘heterogeneous’ to get confirmation from Stella about the identity of the players of poker game. Here Blanche comes up as subject for Queer study that negates society’s fixed expectations about sexual desires on the basis of anatomical differences. However, Blanche is come out as a woman whose femininity may not ultimately secure a place for her in the patriarchal society resembling ‘phallocentric structure’, but she has left trace of character, larger than life. In his Memoirs Williams writes, “I have never blamed anyone for anything but deliberate cruelty, for there has always been in
me the conviction of Blanche, that ‘deliberate cruelty is the one unforgivable thing.’ (Williams, Memoirs 170) In the play, Stanley’s ‘deliberate cruelty’ upon Blanche is unforgivable that causes her to lose mental balance. But the dynamic Blanche is always at her exceptional stature who sustains her delusion about herself even at the moment of extreme crises. Ironically she receives the supporting hands of Doctor instead of her expected millionaire who has not come following her delusion to gallantly rescue her but she is rescued with kindness. There is at least a satisfactory trance that can be discerned in Blanche’s last words to Doctor, “Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 563) Blanche’s extending her hands toward the Doctor is symbolic of her accepting the reality which is also the reality of Williams. According to Williams’ own version, the exit line for Blanche later became somewhat historical. He points out, “In fact, I would guess that chance acquaintances, or strangers, have usually been kinder to me than friends- which does not speak too well for me.” (Williams, Memoirs 131)

The characters excepting Jim in The Glass Menagerie and Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire, belong to a world of repression but tend to live in a world of delusion because they are misfits for the real world. They are not common and the extraordinary in them create the difference for them like Laura’s unicorn. Their too much sensitive nature deserves special care
otherwise ‘if you breathe, it breaks!’ (Williams, Plays 1937-1955) Their frailty always fails them in their test of confronting reality and so sublimation is rarely possible to attain in this world. They can taste only the pleasure of delusion for the time being. Blanche’s ‘moth’ like appearance is related to Laura’s ‘fragile, unearthly prettiness’ that are not suited for the hostile world of reality and so both are destined to resign in a world of seclusion with their repressed soul.
Works cited


