Chapter - 4

Conflict of Flesh and Spirit
The tension of flesh and spirit is a recurrent phenomenon in Williams' plays. His protagonist move between the two poles: on one hand to sublimate the repressed desire they prefer to put themselves in spiritual attire and on the other hand, unable to eliminate the pushes of the unconscious. The play *Summer and Smoke* delineates the drama of puritan conscience in battle with the instinctual freedom proposed by Calvinism. John Buchanan and Alma Winemiller represent the physical and the spiritual sides of our lives and thus are both destined to feel incomplete. Alma's too much repression of instinctual desires has left her lifeless in the crowd, just like the "Soul", which John cannot locate in his anatomical chart. Alma, like Amanda and Blanche, fails to communicate herself to John, preventing reconciliation between flesh and spirit. Repressed desire, if not properly channelized, forces to come out in a much undesired way which may turn up destructive. Alma's life is a perfect enactment of this psychic phenomenon which Robert Lifton better points out in his essay "Women as Knower": a "sudden emergence in often exaggerated form of psychological tendencies previously suppressed by social customs." (qtd. in Mathur 99) Alma's final deviation is not at all a surprising one but predetermined. The world of the play *The Rose Tattoo* also elaborates the same tension of flesh and spirit. Serafina considers her home a paradise of love, and continues to protect her illusion of her husband's loyalty till his infidelity is revealed. Even after possessing a strongly sensuous nature, she leads a life of
supposed spirituality clinging to the memory of her husband, worshipping his ashes. Her inhibited passion seeks to find outlet in exhibiting personal sorrow but she imposed constraints like Alma that gives her character an eccentric touch. When she comes to know of the infidelity of her husband, she breaks the castle of her make-believe world and seeks to find satisfaction by releasing her suppressed desire. Both Serafina and Alma ultimately embrace life at the cost of degrading their social position. Tennessee Williams, in his plays, always intends to bring out a balance between the contradictory demand of body and spirit as without these it is impossible to attain rounded personality which Jung has talked about.

With the unresolved dichotomy of flesh and spirit the play *Summer and Smoke* invites attention to Williams' inherent inclination to the theme of repression and sublimation. The play presents its heroine Alma Winemiller trapped both psychologically and socially in a world of repression. Being a Minister's daughter along with the responsibility of looking after a mother who is clinked to childish activity, Alma already finds herself older than her actual age. Because of her father she inherits from the very childhood itself the puritanical norms to be followed in life that ironically prevents her from life itself. In depicting Alma it is said that “Her true nature is still hidden even from herself” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 577). Surprisingly she carries with her an artificial affectation even without knowing of it. It is John, the male counterpart
of Alma, who for the first time makes her know of her peculiarity. Alma is the Spanish name for the soul and metaphorically in search for that soul she has denied her body and failed herself both in life and love. At first Alma was composed in her life with the task of scattering artificial fragrance of spirituality. Her sexual repression was so much deep-rooted that she failed to recognize her bodily demand and mistakenly considered her nervous breakdown as symptomatic of her heart-failure. From her childhood she possessed genuine love for John but that was more motherly than of a girl. Now in her mid twenties, John’s gorgeous presence with wonderful physic has shaken her inner life that is so long repressed. The very introduction of young John reveals his characteristic features betraying his being different in the society of Glorious Hill: “He is now a Promethean figure, brilliantly and restlessly alive in a stagnant society. The excess of his power has not yet found a channel. If it remains without one, it will burn him up.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 575) Alma gets aware of her physical desires that should be repressed for her puritan conscience by coming in contact with John. The tussle between the demands of body and soul caused the individual feel alienated and Alma’s sense of alienation starts to mystify her existence. John’s restlessness and physical enjoyment is enhanced to exert his excess of energy. In contrast to Alma’s spiritual inclination, he bears a scientific bent of mind that could not understand Alma’s concept of love. But at the end of the play it is John who has
happened to attain sublimation in the true sense of the term by finding out a
genuine vocation for his life. Too much repression of sexual desires is harmful
as Freud points out, and Alma finds herself a victim to that, the sudden
explosion of which has out rightly deteriorated her existence. From the pulpit of
an angel she is thrown to that of a prostitute.

The plot of the play is about the unconsummated love of Alma and John
Buchanan, son of a doctor. Both are neighbours residing next door to each other
with having a gulf of difference in their life style and more significantly in their
way of thinking. While pursuing his medical studies John leads an absolute
carefree life endowed with full of physical enjoyment. Both John and Alma
stand in sharp contradiction to one another as the woman is withdrawn and the
man is uninhibited. Through them Williams puts forward arguments for two
different ways of looking at life but both fall short because life is much bigger
than to be demarcated simply between flash and spirit. Bennett points out in
this context: “The result is a codified and regimented spiritual and physical
culture, and never the twain shall meet” (Tharpe 455). Both the characters
experience transformation in their respective views on life but whereas the
sensuous John gets an esteemed identity for him, the spiritual Alma gets her a
degradng status in the society. Ironically each one contributes in other’s
transformation where they symbolically exchange their chairs rejecting finally
the least possibility for them to get united.
Williams has created Alma with excess of so-called femininity in her nature that strongly contributed in her developing a repressed personality as femininity is traditionally attached to repressed humanity. She is hurt very easily and is in the habit of taking things over seriously. Her soft and compassionate nature is time and again revealed in the play. Her life is trapped within the religious circuit of her minister father where she is supposed to perform her assigned role that allows her little space to act according to her own will. With the mental breakdown of her mother, when she was just a school-going girl, she was endowed with the responsibility of managing the Rectory. She has to take care of both the social and household duties. Like Amanda in Glass Menagerie, this untimed responsibility has deprived her of her youth which is repressed in performing her duties. She tries to find sublimation in her works and so she takes Nellie even going against her father’s wishes. In this respect, regarding Nellie her words to John is noteworthy: “Father didn’t want me to take her as a pupil because of her mother’s reputation, but I feel that one has a duty to perform toward children in such—circumstances . . . And I always say that life is such a mysteriously complicated thing that no one should really presume to judge and condemn the behaviour of anyone else!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 584) Unfortunately Alma cannot continue this trend of her life for long as she fails to endure the pressure of too much repression of her youth that comes out in sudden explosion with a disastrous consequence.
John is a man of action whereas Alma is one of contemplation who’s sensitive and repressed nature does not allow her to get over the shocks easily. Her spirituality is lacking the liveliness of John; but in the course of the play both of John’s physical enjoyment and Alma’s practice of spirituality turn up to dry intercourses. Both are destined to feel dissatisfaction or Lacanian ‘lack’ in their respective way of life. Alma’s repression of sexual desires is caused by the religious repression that associates a sense of guilt with the very word desire. Excepting the last encounter with John, in all the other previous occasions Alma’s words to John are vibrated only with the abstract concepts where John fails to get the warmth of life. Even after getting realized the torment of the fire inside, Alma’s regimented religious upbringing prevents her from communicating herself to John in a way that is quite comprehensible for him. Unfortunately she always tries to make him understand the thing from her standpoint and he from his and so each time their approaches to each other is followed by withdrawn from each other. There is a similarity between Alma for soul and the stone angel for eternity as both have the icy coolness to offer that can offer momentary relief but cannot satisfy the life for long. Like John, Alma has the potentiality of a promising young lady with an insight into the world of knowledge and a beautiful vocal tune. But the identity of her being a minister’s daughter makes her to limit her circle to a group of frustrated ‘intellectuals’. John has deserted Alma’s pseudo intellectual gatherings with an unconcealed
disgust in his first initiation with them. But ironically Alma's repressed sexual desire is gradually stimulated to come up with its demands each time at John's withdrawal or rejection. Like Williams' tradition of southern women, Alma is also destined to find herself a looser. She has won the argument with John but lost the battle in life. Her shameless desperation could not get her John for whom there was always a subconscious responsibility felt by Alma. When she discovers him slipping away from her hands she puts off her artificial religious restrictions and lays bare herself before him but the attempt is proved futile. She has ultimately lost John, her love, her pride, her dignity, in responding to the call of her repressed self.

Williams' projection of John, the man, with his vitality and scientific endeavour in sharp contrast to Alma's, the woman, vulnerability and spiritual inclination invites feministic reading of the play. Figes is of the view that:

“Most of the feminine traits that psychometrics have revealed can be easily explained in sociological terms. So woman is less dominant because that is what society requires of her, more emotional because her thoughts and education have been directed to the heart rather than the head, more conservative because hearth and home do not change much and do not (like the competitive world of business and public affairs) require the capacity for change as a condition of survival.” (Figes 10).

Alma's regretting for being a woman in a society that offers little opportunities for them is discerned in her words to John where she is comparing her predicament to his: “You've heard unfavorable talk about me in your circle
of acquaintances and I've heard equally unpleasant things about you in mine. And the pity of it is that you are preparing to be a doctor. . . . Most of us have no choice but to lead useless lives! But you have a gift for scientific research! You have a chance to serve humanity. Not just to go on enduring for the sake of endurance....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 587) John’s extrovert nature, essentially associated with masculinity, makes the thing less complicated for him in compare to Alma for her introvert personality. He leads more a carefree life indulging his senses without any moral scruple. Freud in his discussion of sexuality has given secondary status to women betraying his patriarchal biasness. He thinks women experiences repressed desire and envy as well for man because of his anatomical differences. Freud and, after him, Lacan are accused of considering man as the norm through their phallocentric theories. Freud states:

“At no other point in one’s analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one’s repeated efforts have been in vain, and from a suspicion that one has been ‘preaching to the winds’, than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable. (Freud, *SE XXIII* 252).

From Freudian viewpoints it is quite apt to state that because of the anatomical differences woman has to experience surplus repression than man and so quite naturally woman happens to represent repressed humanity. Alma has lastly revolted against the predicament of women in society that follows
phallocentric norms. She exhibits a challenge to masculine attributes when she says to John, “...I don’t want to be talked to like some incurably sick patient you have to comfort. Oh, I suppose I am sick, one of those weak and divided people who slip like shadows among you solid strong ones. But sometimes, out of necessity, we shadowy people take on a strength of our own. I have that now. You needn’t try to deceive me.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 636) She does not want false sympathy from John only because she belongs to a sex that is considered weak, soft, and vulnerable. Co-incidentally Williams’ plays especially *Summer and Smoke* and *The Rose Tattoo* draw attention to Freud’s ideas of sexuality.

Alma’s love for John is without question but it is also true that she possesses an inherent envy for John. His vitality and sexual appeal always makes her feel incomplete. Her dry spiritual discourse could not confront his shiny existence. She inherently wants to be like him but her inability prefers to put on the mask of womanliness to at least draw his attention. She is found regretting for being a woman, blaming societal norms that allow less opportunity for a woman to enjoy her life. Following the tradition of delicate Blanche Dubois in *Streetcar* Alma also has to depend upon others’ kindness whenever she is deprived of the emotional support expected from John. On one occasion when John follows Rosa deserting Alma, her depressed self seeks emotional supports from Roger as she says to him, “I’ll have to hang on your
arm- I'm feeling so dizzy!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 589) Alma always finds herself weaker than John and this sense of inferiority complex has boiled up her anger that is burst out at her parents, at her group of pseudo-intellectuals. It is not simply the repressed sexual desires for John but also a repressed feeling of envy against him that has destabilized Alma’s life. A similar situation is discerned in *Streetcar* with Blanche in her relation to Stanley. Blanche always prefers to project her superiority over Stanley’s primitive attributes by exhibiting superior tastes of her class, but she also entertains an inherent love-hate feeling for the manly spirit in Stanley. She has ultimately lost the game because the man’s primitive power has outlived the artificial superior outfit of Blanche. But Alma has not lost the game empty handed as her repressed self has lastly accumulated strength to shake off the mask of womanliness and face John on nothing but equal terms. Her sudden jump into the life of a prostitute is in a sense the result of her hidden desire to take revenge upon John who prefers to settle in life with Nellie. Alma speculates that John will have to suffer guilt conscience when he will come to know about Alma and here lies her victory. Her final decision of her life is reactionary to that of John’s selection of Nellie as his life partner. For Alma, it cannot be said that she has achieved sublimation of her repressed desires but she has broken the shackle of repression thrust upon her by orthodox upbringing. For the first time she has made a decision of herself and her desperation does not think of its consequence. In a desperate
attempt to embrace life she has lost her social status provided by the patriarchal societal norms. Alma, through her desperate act, has thrown a challenge to the society itself that offers little space for a woman to flourish in her own way.

John’s scientific insights can easily get an access into Alma’s problems but he fails to understand Alma. Williams’ protagonists suffer from lack of communication executing their creator’s problem. Williams is quite often heard to get disgusted with the problem of communication. Alma becomes a victim to her problem of communication and her repressed nature complicates things not simply for herself but also for others. John could not respond to Alma’s love in the way she demanded. His surplus sensuality and her faulty spirituality created a gap between them from the beginning and it remains till the end even when she has turned up to think in his way. Alma agonizingly seeks answer from John for their failure in making up a relationship: “Now I wish you would tell me— why didn’t it happen between us? Why did I fail? Why did you come almost close enough—and no closer?” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 637) John responded to Alma with his findings which still bear some confusions: “…we seemed to be trying to find something in each other without knowing what it was that we wanted to find . . . it wasn’t the physical you that I really wanted!...You didn’t have that to give me . . . You had something else to give...You couldn’t name it and I couldn’t recognize it. I thought it was just a Puritanical ice that glittered like flame. But now I believe it was flame,
mistaken for ice. I still don’t understand it, but I know it was there....” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 637) Both John and Alma come to a settlement in life for themselves, but when John secures a place with dignity for him, Alma gets with degradation. This symbolic victory of John over Alma betrays the patriarchal hegemony entertained in the society. To satisfy herself Alma has to change her role in the society reminding of Blanche in Streetcar.

Alma’s repressed desires start to confer unconscious pushes from the time of her first encounter with John after his getting back to Glorious Hill with a heroic figure. They are focused in the form of anger against her parents, her pupil, the pseudo-intellectual members of her club, and of course against herself. The repressed, timid, considerate, Alma, has been gradually becoming a rebel within and that finally outbursts in desperately confronting John on equal terms. Her so long shadowy existence is determined to assert itself with vitality and thus releasing the pressure of repression. She is now ready to face the truth both of herself and that of John. Alma has laid down her secrets to John not simply for his kind consideration of her love but to defy her lifeless, shadowy existence. The artificial self of a spinster’s daughter “died last summer—suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her”. (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 635) Now the real self of a woman, having uncontrolled desires for her male counterpart, revolts against John’s philosophical talks, the very thing that once she herself entertained most. She wants either solid affirmation from John
or not as there should not be anything in between. Her clear declaration to John is: "You needn't try to comfort me. I haven't come here on any but equal terms." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 636) The process is first explicitly executed in accusing her mother for her pitiable predicament: "Yes, I'm tired of your malice and your self-indulgence. People wonder why I'm tied down here! They pity me—think of me as an old maid already! In spite of I'm young. Still young! It's you—it's you, you've taken my youth away from me!" (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 596) Her overexcitement at John's appearance at the meeting of her group of the intellectuals is followed by her disgust at the worst performance of her members that drives him away from the meeting. Both the excitement and the subsequent anger is the outcome of her repressed desires for John. On the next occasion she exhibits her protest against her father by refusing his order to go upstairs and not to receive John herself if he would have approached to their house. She even goes farther to defend John's image by indirectly attacking her father's envious existence to his shining youth.

Through John and Alma, Williams puts forward enough explanations in favor of physical and philosophical / spiritual way of life respectively. His own life is torn in between the physical demand of satisfying his homosexual desires and the inherent restraints of his puritan conscience inherited from the domination of her puritan mother. His search for finality somehow leads him to deal consciously or unconsciously with the issue of the dilemma of flesh and
spirit in his plays, and so it becomes a recurrent motif of his dramatic world. For John, anatomy chart is the parameter by which he understands the physical world. But Alma, the soul, is not shown in the chart and so for Alma, the chart is incomplete and for John Alma’s soul is unrecognizable. John speaks for satisfaction of the senses that concerns much for a successful being but Alma for illuminating the soul as the more important thing. This regimented thinking makes both incomplete and confused as Alma aptly points out: “I think you’re confused, just awfully, awfully confused, as confused as I am—but in a different way....” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 611) Williams’ female protagonists are more tend to philosophizing life other than their male partners and Alma does not break the tradition. They are often made to put on the airy touch of philosophical inclinations to compensate their repressed self. To compete with the physical valor of their male agents, they are necessarily imbibed with the philosophical vibration. Amanda, Blanche, Alma, Catherine, Maggie, Hannah, all are found to be nurtured in the same tradition in this respect. Williams’ characters are highly sexual but women are found more in repressed situation than men that sometimes make them neurotic. Too much repression prevents them to make up a balanced existence, necessitating disastrous consequence for them. John leads his life freely without any restraint and so when time comes he is able to establish a proper balance between his public and private life. Endowed with masculinity, John searches out
reasonable settlement in life whereas Alma's femininity pins her with emotions. When John asks: “I've settled with life on fairly acceptable terms. Isn’t that all a reasonable person can ask for?” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 634), Alma’s answer is flowered with imagination or with philosophical overtones: “He can ask for much more than that. He can ask for the coming true of his most improbable dreams.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 634) Ironically Alma has broken her high vision of life for the cheapest existence of it.

By nature, reason associated with masculinity gives John the strength while feminine emotion makes her vulnerable. Alma no doubt contributes him in developing an insight into something else other than only physical pleasure that actually helps him give up extravagance in sense-indulgence and settle down in life with Nellie. John unmistakably recognizes Alma's contribution for his changed vision. He says, “…I've come around to your way of thinking, that something else is in there, an immaterial something- as thin as smoke-which all of those ugly machines combine to produce and that's their whole reason for being. It can't be seen so it can't be shown on the chart. But it's there, just the same, and knowing it's there-why, then the whole thing- this --this unfathomable experience of ours- takes on a new value, like some- some wildly romantic work in a laboratory!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 636) But Alma's too much repression of sexual desires frustrates her chance to create a proper balance between her public and private image of life. She has to surrender one
for the other but cannot go for a compromise of the two. John notices the inherent problem in Alma and so questions her: “Under the surface you have a lot of excitement, a great deal more than any other woman I have met. So much that you have to carry these sleeping pills with you. The question is why?” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 613) But John also has recognized the problem with Alma that she has realized herself much later when it is already too late. When John is possessed with the task of redeeming himself with good works, her repressed desires start operating for degrading her in the long run. She confesses to John of her problem: “No, I haven’t been well. I’ve thought many times of something you told me last summer, that I have a *doppelgänger*. I looked that up and I found that it means another person inside me, another self, and I don’t know whether to thank you or not for making me conscious of it!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 634) In the play John at least becomes successful in channelizing his sexual extravagances towards getting him a dignified social vocation, but Alma’s confused spirituality and excess of sexual repression fails her. She was somehow settled in her earlier life as she was unaware of her ‘another self’ within. Following Williams’ tradition of women characters, when Alma is confronted with her actual self; she fails to sustain the balance of her life. It is John who makes her face the truth just as what Jim O’ Connor did in *The Glass Menagerie* for Laura. The initiation with herself makes Laura
resigned herself to eternal confinement in the world of her glass animals and Alma to the most degrading existence in the society.

Alma doesn’t want to win the argument with John as she has confessed it to the travelling salesman. Human emotions are so complicated that it cannot be judged always by the fixed parameter. Sometimes the natural implications of the word change its position and so victory fails to satisfy Alma. It rather intensifies her pang of repression. She inherently wants John to respond to her intense passion for him but unfortunately he has already made up his mind for someone else. Deprived of her love, Alma again finds herself in a situation where she can depend only upon a stranger who is unknown to her past. Her sudden interaction with the travelling salesman who is supposed to travel alone has made her aware of her awaited lonely life. So she desperately wants to experience someone besides her because “All rooms are lonely where there is only one person.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 641) It will not be very wrong to say that the young man has come to rescue her, may be momentarily, from her alienation that she is destined to suffer. Alma’s repressed self at least gets a chance to release it by assisting an alien to overcome his nervousness in an unknown environment. It is the loneliness that, significantly noticeable in each one’s life, makes the two come closer to each other or rather motivates them to use each other. But whatever may be the ultimate result Alma feels happy at that moment of helping him with her tablets. Williams’ plays somehow or other
emphasizes kindness and compassion for others that makes life endurable. These are little mercies of which Alma says, “Life is full of little mercies like that, not big mercies but comfortable little mercies. And so we are able to keep on going....” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 642)

The conflict of flesh and spirit that has been discerned from the beginning of the play remains unresolved till the end of it. Alma’s repressed sexual desires prompts her to embrace a life that destroys her so long cherished spirituality. Both John and Alma have realized the importance of anatomy and soul but fail to reconcile the two. The inevitable result is to compromise with life and feel incomplete. What Williams says in initiating the reader with the world of The Rose Tattoo under the heading ‘The Timeless World of a Play’ reveals the world of Summer and Smoke that has been just visited. He states:

“So successfully have we disguised from ourselves the intensity of our own feelings, the sensibility of our own hearts, that plays in the tragic tradition have begun to seem untrue. For a couple of hours we may surrender ourselves to a world of fiercely illuminated values in conflict, but when the stage is covered and the auditorium lighted, almost immediately there is a recoil of disbelief.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 650)

The experience of Summer and Smoke is again reflected in Williams’ next play The Rose Tattoo. The conflict of emotions associated with the two different identities of a same person is the central focus of both the plays. The image of a Preacher’s daughter demands cultivating emotions that confronts the desires of a woman in love just as the dummies of a widow and a bride face
each other in violent attitudes to each other in Serafina's parlour. Serafina is a natural successor of Alma who has to suffer the tussle of emotions within between the two separate identities that the play has thrust upon her. Finally Serafina finds herself in a much better situation than her predecessor in *Summer and Smoke*. She has embraced life in the true sense by shading off her self-imposed restrictions that has been so long offering her only a life of repression. With Serafina, the dichotomy of flesh and spirit has been strongly enacted in this play where the protagonist has finally responded to her repressed physical desires with future dreams. But whereas in *Summer and Smoke* Alma finds out her life in disgrace, Serafina makes a graceful entry into her new life. She is the first of Williams' female protagonists who comes out as a conqueror and this trend is followed by Maggie who appears much later in the play *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof*. The play *The Rose Tattoo* has broken Williams' myth of the 'defeated lady'. The influence of patriarchal society has made Williams to seek male partners for his vulnerable female protagonists. Where they get, they are secured and where not, all the enjoyment of life is withdrawn from them. Excepting Stella in *Streetcar*, Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo*, and Maggie in *Cat*, all the other heroines are deprived of the grace of a settled life.

*The Rose Tattoo* is an enactment of the emotional crises that envelops the whole being of Serafina who has lost her husband Rosario in an accident and also experienced a miscarriage as it's after effect. These two sudden
mishaps have thrown her into an approaching madness. She loves her husband so badly that she prefers to keep his ashes at home as a token of his existence with her. This is done by going against the religious norms, but she is desperate. She has resigned herself into a life of seclusion and denial, and has confined herself to her works of sewing cloths. After long three years of a life of denial, she comes to know about the infidelity of her husband that has shaken her world. She is torn in between belief and disbelief experiencing Hamlet's dilemma of 'to be or not to be'. She tries to believe, but her strong bond of love for her husband revolts against it. From a different perspective if she believes, she is deprived of her make-belief world which is so desired for her to endure the rest of her lonely existence. And so is waiting to get a hint from her Lady as she thinks that the statue responds to her call. Her initiation with the story of infidelity of her husband is surprisingly coincided with her initiation with a stranger named Alvaro belonging to the same occupation of her dead husband. Their introduction is happened in such a crucial moment when both are at the intensity of emotional crises. The pang of alienation in their respective lives makes them sympathetic to each other and this is what happened in the case of Alma and the travelling salesman. Both are badly in need of someone to get beside, to share with, and to settle in life with. But even then Serafina keeps her desires repressed from herself. The long three years' cherished image of a widow comes in the way of her accepting the approaching image of a bride.
This is the period of Serafina’s suffering of repression to the maximum and it becomes violent when she finds out similarities of Alvaro with her dead husband. The similarity is that of the physic and not of the face that indicates Williams’ implications of sexual desires repressed in Serafina and should be stirred out for the sake of her leading a normal life.

Serafina experiences a happy married life with Rosario without the least possible complain against him. Her sexual devotion towards her husband is so strong that it becomes the only means of her existence. Each night brings new experience for her in his company and he is the hero of her life and vision. She is so much possessed by his personality that she cannot imagine about her separate identity from him. His death has completely broken her world both from within and without. Just from her first appearance in the play, Serafina exhibits symptoms of a grotesque character which is magnified in her grief. She has detached herself completely from the outside world and confined to worship her dead husband’s ashes. In the play her affectation is genuine even though it may arouse laughter. June Singer opines on the predicament of such a woman in the following:

“The woman who has defined herself and her personality in terms of her relationship to a man suffers most when she is faced with widowhood. The widow is faced with the disturbance of an equilibrium that for better or for worse, was working for her...” (Singer 311-312)
The sudden death of her husband turns her into an over protective mother that has reversely created a psychological gap with her daughter Rosa. In this context Serafina shares some basic qualities of Williams’ another middle aged woman protagonist Amanda of *The Glass Menagerie* whose interference into the life of her son and daughter restrain their development. Finally Tom has revolted and left the family whereas Laura’s delicacy necessitates her taking recourse into the world of her delicate glass animals. But in *The Rose Tattoo* the situation is different as Williams has shifted his stand in delineating his women characters from their image of faded belle to that of a conqueror with a spirit of life. Williams’ Amanda and the delicate Laura in the course of time learn to revolt in the form of Serafina and Rosa respectively against their predicament in a repressed world. Serafina has asserted her identity of a woman with individual desires for life by finally accepting Alvaro’s proposal. She has discarded her identity of widowhood that societal norms attach with a woman who has lost her husband. For the long three years Serafina has been bearing the pressure of identity that is suddenly thrust upon her. As long she has been under the belief of Rosario’s untarnished loyalty to her love, she remains committed to her newly assigned role of the society. Then she is even scared of women’s talking about men in her parlor. For her, it is as if to hurt the pious ashes of her dead husband who was and is the only hero of her life. When others accuse her of jealousy she boldly defends her stand by narrating her life,
her love, and her relation to her husband. Serafina’s statement is vibrated with
her genuine feelings for Rosario when she says: “When I think of men I think
about my husband...We had love together every night of the week, we never
skipped one, from the night we was married till the night he was killed in his
fruit truck on that road there! And maybe that is the reason I’m not man-crazy
and don’t like hearing the talk of women that are....At night I sit here and I’m
satisfied to remember, because I had the best. – Not the third best and not the
second best, but the first best, the only best!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 678-
679) But the news of his infidelity leads her to have a look within and she gets
the call from there and dares to break the shackle of her repressed predicament.
Alvaro comes up as an objective co-relative of the man she cherishes within.
The repressed desire for her dead husband gets confronted with another
signifier in the form of Alvaro. Unlike Laura, Rosa, on the other hand, goes
against her mother in search for her freedom in love and life as well. She bears
a hatred for her mother’s way of leading life as she regrets: “I’m so ashamed I
could die. This is the way she goes around all the time. She hasn’t put on
clothes since my father was killed. For three years she sits at the sewing
machine and never puts a dress on or goes out of the house, and now she has
locked my clothes up so I can’t go out. She wants me to be like her, a freak of
the neighborhood, the way she is! Next time, next time, I won’t cut my wrist
but my throat! I don’t want to live locked up with a bottle of ashes!” (Williams,
Plays 1937-1955 671). Rosa’s desperate stand for her love is also instrumental to make Serafina realize her vulnerable existence as a mother and her repressed desire for love. So the action of daughter’s moving out for her love is immediately followed by mother’s act in the same direction.

Unlike her earlier female character, Serafina is able to come out as a conqueror and it is mainly because of her social background. According to Vernon Rice, Williams believed that, “Italians are like our Southerners without their inhibitions. They’re poetic, but they don’t have any Protestant repressions. Or if they do have any, their vitality is so strong, it crashes through them” (qtd. in Starnes 365). When the play starts, Serafina is in her high expectation for future life with Rosario and is also in the state of expecting. That night Rosario is supposed to work for the Brothers Romano for the last time. From the next day he is going to work for himself with his own truck and she speculates their future life with dignity “in America, then! Own truck! Own house! And in the house will be everything electric!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 661) But unfortunately Serafina could never hear again the sound of “his key in the lock of the door!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 661) She has lost both the expectations of happy future and of child at the same time with the breaking news of her husband’s death. She is projected during the period of her widowhood as one of Williams’ most sensitive and vulnerable characters sharing the essential attributes of his Southerners. She is locked up in her self-
imposed restrictions avoiding any contact with the external world. She conceives a suspect for the outside world that probably bears a threat to break the delicate castle of her existence. Too much repression necessitates Williams’ heroines to create a separate shell of imagination for their existence. They are inclined to delusional projection of their life to fill up the vacuum created by any external mishaps. Serafina glorifies her life by giving heroic stature to Rosario who is proved to be the “first best” in the role of a husband lover. Now Serafina helplessly seeks satisfaction from her memory of past days with her husband just as Amanda seeks the same in her maiden past. Serafina’s grief is so much deep rooted that she is in the state of negating the present and forthcoming future. She wants to keep a strong hold upon her daughter forgetting about the fact of her being grown up with her personal desires. The clash between mother and daughter is mainly because of the one clinging to her past memories and the other to the reality of the present. Rosa feels ashamed of her mother’s activities whereas Serafina feels scared of her daughter’s having a boyfriend. Like the usual trend of Williams’ heroines, Serafina is not ready to face the truth as the time is stopped back with her in her past memories. Her attitude to time is already discerned just at the beginning of the play when she says to Assunta about her relation to Rosario: “Each time is the first time with him. Time doesn’t pass...the clock is a fool. I don’t listen to it. My clock is my heart and my heart don’t say tick-tick, it says love-love! And now I have two
hearts in me, both of them saying love-love!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 661)

In Williams’ dramatic world, Time is projected as an enemy because it is unbitten and it takes away the precious part of life leaving the individual to depend helplessly upon the memories. Like Amanda or Blanche, Serafina lives in a make-believe world and she continues to sustain that world even after the death of her husband. The sudden mishap of her life puts her in a world of repression where she has to repress her desires, especially that of sexual one. This repression necessarily leads her towards taking refuge in religion, but as it is Serafina, so she has transformed her love itself into the stature of religion. She confronts the outside world with the strength of her love, her dead husband, which has turned into a magnifying force of religion for her. She is found criticizing women for their cheap way of leading life without having the glory of love. To Father De Leo, she says about the women of the existing society: “They make the life without glory. Instead of the heart they got the deep-freeze in the house. The men, they don’t feel no glory, not in the house with them women; they go to the bars, fight in them, get drunk, get fat, put horns on the women because the women don’t give them the love which is glory,- I did, I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion. Now I lie on it with dreams, with memories only! But it is still beautiful to me and I don’t believe that the man in my heart gave me horns!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 696) Through this account of Serafina, Williams puts forward two opposite
states of life highlighting the two opposite sides of flesh and spirit. Serafina is representing the ideal life with spirit in sharp contrast to the cheap physical activities of the women around. But can ideal be always real? This is the inherent question that should be responded in comprehending Serafina’s world. It is quite explicit from the beginning that she is a highly sexed individual who never skipped a single night without the act of love-making. Now suddenly she has to lie on the very big bed with her dreams and memories and she assumes herself satisfied. The question is whether this satisfaction comes spontaneously or it is to be invented with a laboured effort. If it is something spontaneous then why she should lock herself within a self imposed restrictions? She does not dare to get mix up with the outside world because the threat is both within and without. Repression seeks substitutive gratification through counter illusions like art, religion, poetry, etc. Serafina through her self-imposed restrictions tries to sublimate her sexual desires for her husband’s body to that of a spiritual desire for his ashes. She wants to make an artificial spiritual atmosphere prevailed in her house with the ashes of her husband and the statue of the Lady.

Serafina gets furious at the two ladies who speak about Rosario’s affairs with Estelle. The story creates an explosion at her flat faith on her husband and their relationship. Williams writes in the parentheses that “it is necessary for her, vitally necessary for her, to believe that the woman’s story is a malicious invention.” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 682) But even after her strong rejection
to believe, the story has created a wound into the untainted memory of her husband that so long supports her to sustain her lonely existence. The words received in the conscious mind get confronted with the words in the suppressed memories and both are engaged to make out sense. She recalls the name Estelle Hohengarten who has made her prepare a shirt for a man she was in love with. It is also reported that the man was wild by nature like a gypsy. Now Serafina’s subconscious mind is engaged in speculating whether both Estelle is the same woman and that wild man is her husband Rosario or not. But her conscious self revolts against the obsession of her subconscious and she is found desperately confirms herself by repeating: “No, no, no, no! I don’t remember! It wasn’t that name, I don’t remember the name!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 682) Here repression is explicitly come up as Freudian defense mechanism. The protagonist is deliberately trying to avoid the possibility of a disastrous truth to save her ego or conscious self.

The sudden death of her husband has led Serafina towards a life of deprivation. She is forced to lead a life of abstinence surrendering one of fulfillment. Herself feel castrated, she develops an unconscious jealousy against her daughter who is asking for a life her mother is deprived of. Rosa inherits the same intensity of passion from her parents and her mother is well aware of it. She wants to impose restriction upon her daughter’s sexual drives with the help of the very boyfriend of Rosa. She instigates his Catholic conscience to make a
promise of saving her daughter's virginity and in this way she injects seed of guilt conscience that will hurt him if he does otherwise. This very act of Serafina can be interpreted both as one of mother's concern for her daughter and that of a widow's revenge upon a girl who is blossomed to embrace life. In this context, religion is used as a bat to prevent the loving birds from love making. The life of self imposed restrictions has dried up her inner self that develops hatred against everything. In her previous she was a woman who intensely loved her husband and enjoyed sensual pleasure to its extreme, but now she develops a totally negative attitude towards the things operated in the outside world. The name Jack Hunter, Rosa's boyfriend, hits out her hatred against the most probable relationship between a man and a woman. She speaks out her disgust when she says to Rosa: "What all of'em are hunting? To have a good time, and the Devil cares who pays for it? I'm sick of men, I'm almost as sick of men as I am of wimmen." (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 688) Why Serafina should sick of men when she thinks that she has the 'first best' of men in her husband. Again throughout the play, before the appearance of Alvaro, she never comes across any pleasant or unpleasant experience with any man. Here it will be quite apt to say that the story of her husband's extra-marital affair constantly pushes her within. So to hide her sufferings even from herself, she strongly tries to specify her position as a mother with the responsibility of a grown up daughter. Another interpretation of her exercising power over Rosa
is the threat of her impending loneliness. The death of Rosario confines her in alienation but with the sweet memories of her husband. Now the story of her husband’s infidelity takes away her peace disturbing her memories and so she desperately wants to keep her daughter in her possession to avoid the intensity of alienation at least to some extent. Serafina takes the help of religion with a conscious thought of protecting her daughter from being polluted and through this she tries to sublimate her repressed sexual desires into the longings of a caring mother.

Serafina has been tortured within by the pressure of repression of her sexual appetites for the man who is no more and of her doubts regarding the loyalty of that man. She is seen exerting her suppressed anger at those women, at her daughter, and then at the society’s practices. She attacks even Father De Leo for what she thinks happening at the high school in the name of educating students. She sets out her allegations against Father: “You give to my daughter a set of books call the Digest of Knowledge! What does she know? How to be cheap already?—Oh, yes, that is what to learn, how to be cheap and to cheat!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 697) She shifts her role among a loyal widow, a concerned mother, and a worried citizen. The story has made her to suspect every individual and the society as a whole. Serafina is enacting exactly what Alma has already enacted in *Summer and Smoke*. When repression starts boiling up within, it gets outburst at everything in the form of anger. Probably
her desire to take revenge upon her husband for his infidelity is shifted upon others. The three years of a life of abstinence dries up Serafina’s magnetic spirit and she develops mechanical one. The first positive push about her life comes from Father when he makes Serafina to meet the truth of her external existence. He makes her aware of her being: “still a young woman. Eligible for—loving and—bearing again!... –But now you crouch and shuffle about barefooted; you live like a convict, dressed in the rags of a convict. You have no companions; women you don’t mix with.” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 696)

Serafina’s love is unquestioned but her faith is shaken by the external intervention of the story. She is robbed off her faith and feels castrated. The external threat is internalized in her psyche and she finds herself in conflicting demands. On one hand, she wants to negate the story and on the other, restlessly searching out for the truth. Time and again she helplessly invokes the statue of Madonna to give her the correct sign. She even wants to discuss with Father about the fact of the story but when the time comes she restrains. Her big bed, her house, that were so pious to her like religion, now gives her a feeling of suffocation. Her words indicate her suffering that is intensified in the house filled up with Rosario’s memories as she says to Father: “I can’t go in the house...The house has a tin roof on it. I got to breathe...No, I can’t breathe in the house. The house has a tin roof on it and I ...” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 695) Serafina gradually comes to the point of losing her mental balance as
repression goes out of control. So finally she dares to ask Father about the authenticity of her husband’s affairs. As it was necessary for her to out rightly negate the story, now it also becomes necessary for her to know the truth because doubt is sometime much more disturbing than death itself. Her desperation is clearly reflected in her words: “Father, you tell me, please tell me! Or I will go mad! I will go back in the house and smash the urn with the ashes—if you don’t tell me! I will go mad with the doubt in my heart and I will smash the urn and scatter the ashes—of my husband’s body!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 698) The urn with the ashes so long represents symbol of her ‘first best’ husband and their ideal relationship but now it turns up into a representative of infidelity, falsehood, profane love. She finds it painful to endure its existence with the doubts in her mind. Serafina approaches father in such a way as if only he can remove her confusion. But when he delivers the truth she reacts with the rest of her strength to deny the fact. Once again she is seen in her former stand of accusing the world of making conspiracy to take away her glory and peace. She comes up with the same arguments in her self defense. She prefers to stick to her pleasure principle even after initiating with reality principle of her life. It is very much heart touching to see Serafina in her futile effort to save her castle of imagination. Her repressed negative emotions get outburst at Father the most because it is he who could have saved her by declaring the story as something false but he does the opposite. She shouts at
the Priest: “It’s been a long time I wanted to break out like this and now I ....
The widow Delle Rose is not respectable, she is not even a woman, she is an animal! She is attacking the priest! She will tear the black suit off him unless he tells her the whores in this town are lying to her!” (Williams, *Plays 1937-1955* 699) She knows it well that Father never goes with the false and so she already gets her answer. Now she should not have any doubt entertained in her mind but the problem with Williams’ heroines is that they do not want to accept the truth and they just keep up their futile efforts to save their ideal world. To start with Amanda, Blanche, Alma, and Mrs. Venable, all are voyagers of the same path. Serafina’s internal conflict is revealed when on one hand she is negating the truth and on the other, she threatens to smash the marble unless she is locked up. She confirms the fact from Father but still is waiting to get the sign from Lady. Her dependent self searches out for signifiers that can show her not the truth but the truth that her unconscious self desires to see.

In Williams’ dramatic world, sex is projected both as subject creating repression and also offering salvation. The death of Rosario throws her in a world of repression by putting a stop to her highly sexed life but Alvaro gets her back the rose that she has lost with her husband. From the verge of becoming a neurotic caused by sexual repression, Serafina is led to a life of normalcy with the revival of sexual gratification in her life. From a lost world of sufferings she is suddenly uplifted to a world of satiety. Regarding America
Eden David Madden remarks: “It appears there are two major American dream myths: the Old Testament idea of a Paradise hopelessly lost, followed by endless nightmare sufferings and the New Testament’s idea of a Paradise that New American Adam will eventually regain.” (Madden 96) Serafina has to experience endless sufferings by losing her dream of future life in America with the death of Rosario. But Alvaro appears as a New American Adam, eventually regains the dream for her. Sometimes sublimation is achieved by going against the norms and Serafina finally finds herself doing that. She is representing what Williams once called himself the rebellious puritan. Rosario’s betrayal and Alvaro’s association, both are jointly operated to make Sreafina experience a release from bondage. Her act of running out behind Alvaro gets similar implication to that of the red kite of the child. Both signify freedom, an essential ingredient for a person to lead a normal life. She shakes off her self-inflicted inhibitions finally to embrace life. Williams has made her to come out as conqueror defying the established norms.

Serafina’s relation to Rosario was not just based on sex or gratification of carnal instinct. Williams’ heroines tend to move in between physical and spiritual level of experience and Serafina is not an exception to that. Recognizing sex as the dominant aspect of their relationship, her heart, will, emotions, faith, and even her whole being is dedicated to her husband. Only physical gratification cannot sustain a relationship for a long period and
especially when there is one who is already transformed his physic into ashes. Williams' female protagonists are always in search for an everlasting love. Their sexual encounters are partially designed to enhance that search and so Blanche has to move through a series of sexual encounters not simply for carnal gratification but for getting the gleams of love she has lost with her young husband. Serafina finds herself satisfied with her memories experiencing a spiritual bond with her husband. Alvaro's appearance with Rosario's body and a clown's face rekindles her carnal desires but even then also she takes control of her desires. In this context, in spite of all her odd behaviour, she deserves appreciation. She has elevated her position in her effort to keep up the spiritual bond with her husband. When she is almost sure of her husband's affairs and when Alvaro is there with his approach, Serafina fails to take decision herself. She seeks answer from Lady as she always does in a state of confusion. If she only has to satisfy her carnal desires then she needs not have to wait for Lady's giving her sign. She tries to the extreme of her capacity to sustain the spiritual bond with her husband. It is not sex that only matters in Williams' world but love, affection, human compassions. Through a dialogue between Serafina and alvaro, Williams throws light upon what a human being demands most in his world:

Alvaro: I am hoping to meet some sensible older lady. Maybe a lady a little bit older than me.—I don't care .... The important thing in a lady is understanding. Good sense. And I want her
to have a well-furnished house and a profitable little business of some kind...

Serafina: And such a lady, with a well-furnished house and business, what does she want with a man with three dependents....

Alvaro: Love and affection!—in a world that is lonely—and cold!

(Williams, Plays 1937-1955 710-711)

So in a world of repression of some kind or the other, the cry is for love, affection, understanding and good sense to outwit the pang of alienation that locks up individual self. But here again Williams betrays his inclination to the traditional mind set of the society where a man is considered more rational than a woman having more emotional attributes. Alvaro seeks emotional support along with monetary benefit. He is more practical than his female counterpart just as John is than Alma. Serafina ultimately decides to go with Alvaro not simply to satisfy her repressed carnal desires or to elevate her status but for the sake of love and affection that has been taken away from her memories by the revelation of her husband’s infidelity. Williams has designed the play going against the tradition of his earlier plays as it is the play that ends up on a genuine optimistic note with the Sun shining. Like Summer and Smoke, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, or The Night of the Iguana, The Rose Tattoo does not come to an end with compromise or any agreement for the protagonists but with a real settlement.

It is Alvaro, after Father Del Leo, who tries to make Serafina face her existential reality. He speaks to Serafina with a genuine concern for her waning
spirit of life: “Naw, you make a mistake! It’s always for everybody the time of roses! The rose is the heart of the world like the heart is the heart of the body! But you, Baronessa—you know what I think you have done? . . . You have put your heart in the marble urn with the ashes. And if in a storm sometime, or sometime when a 10-ton truck goes down the highway—the marble urn was to break!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 714-715)

In both Summer and Smoke and The Rose Tattoo, women are found victims to the phallocentric structure that is prevailed both in the society and in their psyche as well. Men are regulating the life of women as the death of a husband shifts her into the role of a widow as his memory locks up her insight. Serafina’s jump from a life of fulfillment to one of abstinence is due to her husband’s death and again the proof of his infidelity is followed by her re jump into a fulfillment. So both her life of abstinence and fulfillment are reactionary to the status of her male counterpart. Even after getting enough evidences against Rosario, Serafina attempts to stick to her faith upon her husband. She apologizes for her having doubts on him as she says in soliloquy: “Rosario, forgive me! Forgive me for thinking the awful lie could be true!” (Williams, Plays 1937-1955 715) Her alienation, her repression, urges for someone to share her emotions with and Alvaro should have been that someone. But there also the mother in her comes in the way of inviting Alvaro freely because “Rosa’s fifteen—I got to be careful to set her a perfect example.” (Williams,
Plays 1937-1955 715) She knows it well that there is nothing wrong to have a peaceful conversation between two young people but still she hesitates and wants not to be exposed to her daughter. In this desperation for over protection of her image, a note of her repressed carnal desires can be discerned. She is afraid of her weakness that may be caught up by her daughter. So Serafina has to make serious equation to tell Alvaro when to stop for taking his jacket and when not. She seeks apology to Rosario just after planning with Alvaro about in what situation he is allowed to come. The timing is very crucial. It is not simply for her doubts that she feels sorry but more reasonably for her repressed wish for Alvaro to come. Through apology she tries to restore balance between her conscious aspiration and her hidden or suppressed desires. In that night Serafina and Alvaro’s conversation time and again is falling short of passionate touch even after Alvaro’s honest approaches. The story about her husband is not yet settled for Serafina and so she fails to fill up the gap between herself and Alvaro who comes as a savior in her life. Fortunately it is Alvaro who has finally settled her problem by making her to have a direct contact with Estelle Hohengarten who is accused of having affairs with Rosario. The heart breaking truth as a result releases her from her superstition and her self-inflicted life of repression. Finally Serafina’s running out behind Alvaro gets similar significance to that of the ‘red kite’ of the child. Kite is associated with freedom that Serafina has so long discarded in her life. Her final act with defiant calling
‘Ecco la Camicia!’ is symbolic of her restoring freedom by shaking off all restrictions. It is in The Rose Tattoo where Williams’ protagonist successfully transforms her life from one of repression to that of sublimation.

In both the plays Summer and Smoke and The Rose Tattoo, female protagonists are seen over-possessed by the personalities of their male partners. Both Alma and Serafina find themselves victims to the rejection and betrayal of their men respectively. They have selected their later lives as a reaction to the position of their male counterparts. But whereas Alma shifts her life from sexual repression to one of fulfilment with the disgrace of a prostitute, Serafina finds her with the grace of society’s so-called approved role. The dichotomy of flesh and spirit remains unresolved in these plays. The practice of spirituality fails to provide the warmth of life and subsequently the heroines decide to go for life rejecting their make-believe world of spirituality. Alma and Serafina cannot amalgamate the mutual demands of flesh and spirit in their lives mainly because of their wrong approaches to both. They intend to stick to one completely rejecting the other and so finally they have to surrender to the demand of the rejected one.
Works cited


