



Mirroring Reality: The Socioeconomic and Legal Landscape in Tennessee Williams' Plays and Mid-20th-Century America

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Research Question

To what extent do the social, economic, and legal contexts depicted in Tennessee Williams' plays - 'The Glass Menagerie,' 'A Streetcar Named Desire,' and 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' - reflect the realities of the playwright's life and mid-20th-century America?

Abstract

Tennessee Williams' plays *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* provide a powerful reflection of mid-20th-century America's social, economic, and legal realities. This research explores how Williams' own experiences and the challenges of his time are embedded in his characters and their conflicts. Socially, the plays tackle rigid gender roles, mental illness, and the repression of sexuality. Economically, they reveal the fragility of the American Dream and class pressures. Legally, Williams exposes how property laws, inheritance issues, and mental health regulations restricted personal freedoms. By looking at these aspects, the research shows how Williams' works critique and mirror the societal struggles of his era, offering timeless insights into human nature.

Key Words: *Tennessee Williams, Mid-20th-Century America, Socioeconomic Contexts, Legal Realities*

Introduction

From the sultry streets of New Orleans to the bustling stages of Broadway, Tennessee Williams' life reads like a riveting tale of triumph and tragedy, making him one of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century.

Born in March 1911, Thomas Lanier Williams had a tumultuous childhood as he moved from his birthplace of Columbus to St. Louis, living alongside his rowdy and boisterous father and reclusive sister, Rose (Britannica). He studied journalism at the University of Missouri; however, his father pulled him out of school in his first year and put him to work at the International Shoe factory, which Williams later recalls to be the most tedious and desolate years of his life (CliffNotes). He left his job on his 24th birthday and enrolled at Washington University in St Louis. Later, he studied at the Dramatic Workshop of The New School in New York City. In 1939, he adopted "Tennessee Williams" as his professional name, gaining widespread recognition and receiving numerous accolades for his notable works, such as winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1948 and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 1955. In 1959, he had already accumulated an impressive collection of awards, including the Pulitzer Prizes, three New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, three Donaldson Awards, and even a Tony Award (Washington University Libraries).

The characters in his plays are often a reflection of the people in his life, such as Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, whose character is a mirror image of his sister Rose, as she failed to synchronize with life's momentum and instead crafted an imaginary world for herself, filled with glass animals. Similarly, Tom - an abbreviated version of his own name, Thomas, is a character and the narrator of the play, desiring freedom from his fruitless job and envisioning a life outside his cramped apartment in St Louis. In addition, we see glaring similarities between Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Williams' father, both being dominating, rough, and brutish, possessing poker-playing qualities shared by men in the South. Williams' writing style is characterized by a familiarity with the Southern language, which is deliberate, less precise, and significantly more imaginative and figurative than the speech of the North (Subashi). His work was often classified under the genre of "Southern Gothic," which explores the experiences of characters grappling with mental illness and challenging societal norms. Works of Southern Gothic often delve into the realm of the grotesque, fixating on unsettling, abnormal, and occasionally monstrous objects, individuals, or scenarios (Wilson and Surber). Blanche Dubois and Laura Wingfield were examples of women struggling mentally, an issue considered to be abnormal at that time. Similarly, Williams' struggle with homosexuality is also reflected through Allan in "*A Streetcar Named Desire*", a topic extremely sensitive and controversial at that time. In light of the aforementioned, this research paper aims to answer the following question: ***"To what extent do the social, economic, and legal contexts depicted in Tennessee Williams' plays - 'The Glass Menagerie,' 'A Streetcar Named Desire,' and 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' - reflect the realities of the playwright's life and mid-20th-century America?"***

This paper argues that Williams skillfully captures the social, economic, and legal struggles of his era through his characters, settings, and conflicts. His vivid portrayal reveals the tensions and transformations of mid-century American life, highlighting the struggles faced by the people with the emergence of the new south, a rising working class and economic fluctuations faced by the characters in the play.

The Social Context of Tennessee Williams' Plays

This section examines the plays' social context through symbols, themes, and character analysis.

Tennessee Williams's "The Glass Menagerie" was set in the late 1930s, a dark period in American history that was affected by the Great Depression. The opening of the play sets the stage with the reveal of the setting, as Williams describes the buildings to be "symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism" (p.22). The designed appearance of the buildings reflects the lives of the individuals residing within, existing as a collective mass without distinct identities. He portrays them as detached and trapped within a beehive that strips away their individuality and reduces them to mere cattle. The author vividly portrays the harsh truth of the American working class, who endured immense financial and social hardships as a result of the crumbling economy during the great depression. The country's unemployment rate hit a record low at 24.9%, marked by widespread job cuts and stagnant wages (Reiff).

The Wingfield family in The Glass Menagerie was another victim of the stagnant economy as the family was hurting financially, highlighting one of the play's main conflicts. Tom was working for a large shoe company making minimum wage and was frustrated with his life. The family dynamics were unbalanced, with Amanda imposing ideas of the great "American dream" onto her two children, fueled by her past lifestyle as a southern belle from Mississippi. She woke Tom up every morning with the words "Rise and shine!" thoroughly annoying Tom, who was unsatisfied with his tedious and unfulfilling life. According to Debusscher, Tom's "restlessness, impatience, swear words, outbursts, drinking may all be symptoms of the bottled-up frustrations of the gay person in the straight-laced environment created and insisted on by Amanda," further elaborating on the difficult and unhappy life of Tom. This interpretation highlights that Tom felt out of place in his own family, constantly struggling to balance his mother's heavy expectations and, at the same time, wanting the urge to escape the rigid life imposed on him. In fact, the entire family yearned to escape their current circumstances, epitomizing the classic traits of a dysfunctional family. This also has close relevance to Williams's personal life, as he himself was homosexual. He lived in a time when being homosexual was considered to be a mental illness and was a very controversial topic. Research published in papers such as those by Berard shows that even doctors, including psychologists, labeled homosexuality to be a disease. In addition, even the American Psychiatric Association added to the notion by classifying homosexuality as an unnatural disease (Juneja). Men during this time were expected to work harder, and the "Roaring Twenties" fun culture was

brought to an unfortunate close. Williams never explicitly used the word “homosexuality” in his works, instead using subtler means to inform the audience of his intentions. This censorship further reflects the social background of that time.

The typewriter serves as a symbol of the contrasting worlds within the Wingfield family. For Laura, it is a constant reminder of her struggles to find her place and make a meaningful impact on society. For Tom, however, it represents an escape—a gateway into a realm where he can find solace and express his creativity. Meanwhile, the typewriter triggers Amanda's intense desire to secure a stable future for Laura, highlighting her frustration over her daughter's inability to achieve independence. The contrast is striking: Amanda, driven by concern, enrolls Laura in typing classes, yet Laura's aversion to the typewriter is evident. It evokes feelings of fear, unease, and inadequacy, causing her to retreat further into her world of fragile glass animals. On the other hand, Tom uses the typewriter as a creative outlet, channeling his frustration and despair into writing, a small act of defiance against the monotony of his existence. Williams masterfully uses the typewriter to highlight the differences between the characters as the Wingfield family unravels. Their individual pursuits of happiness are at odds, emphasizing the tragedy of their inability to experience joy collectively.

The drama "A Streetcar Named Desire" takes place in the tumultuous years following the Civil War. The American Civil War was fought primarily over the question of ending slavery between the states in the North and the South. Like Amanda, Blanche Dubois was a former "Southern Belle," leading an opulent existence that contrasted sharply with Stanley's upbringing in an immigrant Polish family. Blanche DuBois and Stella Kowalski serve as contrasting representations of womanhood shaped by their societal contexts, yet they share a familial bond that highlights their differences. Blanche, embodying the Old South's aristocratic ideals, clings to her past grandeur, as seen when she says in scene nine, "I don't want realism. I'll tell you what I want. Magic!" (p.145). Her reliance on appearance and charm reflects a societal context where a woman's worth is tied to her social status and beauty. In addition, Blanche's fixation on maintaining an illusion of propriety is also clear when she tells Mitch, "I want to deceive him enough to make him - want me" (p.55). This highlights her reliance on deception to preserve her status and femininity in a society that no longer values the aristocratic virtues she clings to. In contrast, Stella has adapted to her working-class life in New Orleans, embracing a more pragmatic and sensual approach to her role as a wife. She finds contentment in her domestic duties and marriage, taking on the role of a devoted and submissive wife, saying, "I'm not in anything I want to get out of" (p.74). This demonstrates her acceptance of her reality, influenced by post-war America's shift towards more modern, egalitarian relationships. Despite their differences, both sisters exhibit a dependency on men, illustrating the limited independence women had during this period.

Another significant relationship highlighted in the text is between Blanche and Stanley, two individuals whose contrasting personalities and circumstances are a constant source of conflict in the play. Blanche is seen ridiculing Stanley for his immigrant and working-class status, adding to the intensity of the conflict between them. Blanche, on

one hand, is desperate to escape her reality, choosing instead to live in a world of illusion. Her constant need to be in the dark and the motif of the paper lantern, which symbolizes her feeble attempts to hide, to appear more “soft” and “attractive,” are a part of her efforts to deceive herself and the people around her. Stanley's actions to uncover Blanche's past can be seen as a response to Blanche's intrusion into his life and her challenge to his authority. He systematically uncovers the truth about her history, including her failed marriage, her sexual indiscretions, and her fall from grace. By revealing these details, Stanley aims to dismantle Blanche's carefully constructed persona and assert his dominance. His revelations serve to strip Blanche of her dignity and sense of self-worth. An interpretation of Blanche's eventual fate is that the Old South was destroyed by the new, industrial America, symbolized by Stanley Kowalski, an immigrant who came to the country. The drama depicts the downfall of the aristocratic families that are typically connected to the South on a broader scale.

In Tennessee Williams' "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," the exploration of homosexuality is woven intricately into the narrative, primarily through the character of Brick and his relationship with his deceased friend Skipper. This relationship, though never explicitly labeled as homosexual within the text, is fraught with tension, denial, and repression, reflecting the societal attitudes of the 1950s when homosexuality was heavily stigmatized and often criminalized. Maggie's confrontation with Brick about his feelings for Skipper serves as the catalyst for exploring this theme. Her insinuations in Act 1 - "You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died" (p.88) coupled with Brick's vehement denial, "Don't you know that I could kill you with this crutch?" (p.48) - highlights his internalized homophobia and the societal pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations. Brick's profound affection for Skipper is further underscored in his poignant confession to Big Daddy, where he exclaims, "One man has one great good true thing in his life. One great good thing which is true! I had a friendship with Skipper. You are naming it dirty!"(p. 48). This moment reveals the depth of Brick's emotional turmoil and the purity of his feelings for Skipper, which starkly contrasts with society's labeling of such emotions as immoral or perverse.

Furthermore, Williams uses Brick's struggle with his sexual identity to critique the mendacity, or pervasive dishonesty, of the society they inhabit. Brick's repeated references to mendacity - "Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out, and death's the other" (p.96) - reflect his disillusionment with a world that forces individuals to conceal their true selves behind facades of respectability. He seems to be disgusted by the idea of anyone implying the idea of Skipper and him being more than friends, as he replies to Big Daddy by saying, "You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men?" (p. 91). This further reveals his disgust with society and himself as he struggles to come to terms with his feelings and relationship with Skipper. In addition, his turn to alcohol as a means of coping with his repressed desires and the accompanying guilt over Skipper's death further illustrates the destructive impact of societal norms on personal identity. The societal expectation for men to exhibit traditional masculine traits and suppress any indication of homosexuality is mirrored in Brick's defensive and often violent reactions to any suggestion of a deeper connection with Skipper.

The gender roles of the time are further explored in the play through the relationship between Brick and his wife, Maggie. She relies on Brick for validation and status, revealing the limited avenues available to women to assert power as she navigates a world where her worth is predominantly measured by her ability to produce an heir and maintain a facade of marital harmony. Her sister-in-law also constantly picks on her for having no children of her own, implying that there is a flaw in the couple's relationship and that somehow Maggie is not upholding her end of the arrangement. Maggie is also determined to inherit Big Daddy's estate, recognizing that it is essential to secure a livelihood for herself and her alcohol-dependent husband.

The Economic Context of Tennessee Williams' Plays

The "American Dream" is a widely held cultural ideal in the United States, rooted in the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve success and upward social mobility through hard work, determination, and perseverance. It is often associated with the pursuit of prosperity, freedom, and the ability to improve one's life and the lives of future generations. This is a theme that runs through *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, but it is explored in distinct ways in each play.

The Wingfield family in "*The Glass Menagerie*," consisting of Amanda, Tom, and Laura, is emblematic of the economic instability that characterized the era. Abandoned by Mr Wingfield, who represents the disillusionment with the American Dream, the family is left to survive on Tom's meager salary from his warehouse job. Amanda's desperation to secure a future for her children reflects the widespread anxiety of the time, as many families grappled with financial uncertainty and the loss of traditional roles and securities. The story takes place during the great depression, an era characterized by financial hardship and widespread uncertainty among the working-class population across America. The small family is extremely vulnerable as they struggle to make ends meet. There are some important moments from the play which reflect this struggle. In scene 7, Tom reveals to Jim that he used the money intended to pay for the electricity bill to join the Union of Merchant Seamen, leading to the electricity being shut off. This moment underscores the precariousness of the family's financial situation. The inability to pay essential bills like electricity highlights their economic hardship, and Tom's decision to prioritize his escape over the family's immediate needs reflects the desperation and hopelessness that pervades their lives. Amanda also takes on the job of selling magazine subscriptions to make ends meet, earning a small income to support her family, reflecting her attempts to adapt to their reduced circumstances. Her nostalgia for a more affluent past contrasts sharply with her current reality, where she is forced to engage in menial work to contribute to the household income. This endeavor is symbolic of the family's financial desperation and Amanda's fading connection to her former life of comfort.

In the drama "*A Streetcar Named Desire*," Stanley represents the rising working class in industrial America. He is a blue-collar worker, proud of his working-class roots, and sees himself as the embodiment of the American Dream - working hard and earning his place in society. His disdain for Blanche and what she represents (Southern wealth) is

partly rooted in his economic class consciousness. He is described as a factory worker working in a meat-packing plant. His job symbolizes his connection to the industrial economy, further emphasizing the rise of the “working class” as they emerged as an integral part of the American Economy. In contrast, Blanche’s economic desperation directly results from her failed pursuit of the American Dream. She clings to the idea that she can regain her lost status through marriage or charm. Still, the reality of her situation is that without financial independence, her dream is unattainable. In the drama, it is mentioned that she was an English teacher but was fired from her job after she had an affair with a young student. She completely neglected her privilege of having a good education and a secure job at a time when women struggled to support themselves, and this reinforces her inability to work hard and support herself. Her dependence on men for security is a flawed strategy in a society where the American Dream increasingly rewards self-reliance and financial independence. During the last part of the drama (scene 11), she says to the doctor, “Whoever you are - I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.” summarizing the flaws in her strategy for survival and her reliance on men like Mitch for stability.

The economic downfall of Blanche can also be attributed to the personal life of William, as he underwent a major transition in his living situation when he relocated from Columbus, Mississippi, where he lived in a large home, to St. Louis, where he found himself in a small and run-down building. This parallels Blanche's situation, as she originally lived in Belle Reve but was compelled to move to New Orleans to live with Stella (CliffNotes). Her feelings of unease and struggle to adjust to her current, less glamorous situation may mirror the challenges faced by Williams when he moved from a laid-back small town to the fast-paced chaos of a big city. In this new environment, he grappled with adapting to life as a middle-class American, with his father being the sole earner of his family, working as a traveling salesman. The drastic economic fluctuations faced by Blanche are a poignant reflection of Williams's own experiences, adding depth and realism to the story.

As mentioned previously, Williams’s drama “The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” was set in the 1950s, a time that reinforced traditional gender roles, with women often being economically dependent on their husbands. According to some sources, women experienced a growing dissatisfaction with their role as housewives, leading to unrest and a desperation to be more independent (Lin). Maggie’s desperation to secure her and Brick’s financial future through Big Daddy’s inheritance reflects the limited economic opportunities for women during this period. Her survival was hanging on a thin thread due to her husband's indifference over their joint future and her dependence on navigating the patriarchal system that controls wealth and power. The play centers on the tensions between Gooper and Brick, the two sons of Big Daddy, over the estate's inheritance. Gooper’s wife, Mae, is particularly concerned with securing their financial future, often scheming to ensure that they inherit the property. In Act 3, Mae and Gooper reveal that they have already consulted a lawyer and drawn up a plan for Big Daddy’s estate as soon as they get the report for their father's condition from the doctor. Gooper explicitly tells Maggie, “We drew up this dummy outline with the advice and assistance of the chairman Boar'd of Directors of th' Southern Plantuhs Bank and Trust Company in Memphis,” demonstrating the sheer indifference the couple had over their father's deteriorating health. The family

was completely and blindly consumed by greed and the overwhelming desire to secure their place in society. This determination to secure inheritance reflects the economic anxieties of the time, particularly in the postwar South, where economic security was often tied to land ownership and the continuation of family wealth. It is important to note that Gooper was a successful lawyer, evidenced by the line “I’m not a corporate lawyer for nothing, I know how to protect my own interests” and in all probability was financially independent; however, his self-worth was tied to his inheritance and his control over the vast family estate. The Pollitt family’s internal conflict over Big Daddy’s estate highlights the fears of economic displacement and the desire to control wealth in a time of uncertainty. Gooper’s relentless pursuit of the estate symbolizes the cutthroat nature of economic survival and the lengths to which individuals will go to secure financial stability.

In addition, the play’s setting in a decaying plantation mansion and the references to the "mendacity" of the characters underscore the theme of economic decline. Big Daddy’s estate is both a symbol of his success and a relic of a bygone era, with the family’s future uncertain as the old Southern way of life crumbles. The decaying mansion reflects the broader economic decay of the Southern aristocracy in the mid-20th century. The once-glorious estates of the South were often in decline by the 1950s, with many old families losing their wealth and influence. The play’s Gothic elements, such as the focus on death, decay, and the grotesque, mirror the economic decay of the South and the decline of the traditional agrarian economy. The Pollitt family’s desperate attempts to cling to their wealth and status are emblematic of the broader societal struggle to adapt to new economic realities.

The Legal Context of Tennessee Williams' Plays

While the legal context is less overtly prominent in Tennessee Williams' plays compared to the social and economic contexts, it still plays a significant role in shaping the characters' lives and the choices they make. Although the legal realities of the time are not always directly addressed, themes related to power, authority, and societal norms often intersect with the legal structures of the era.

In “The Glass Menagerie,” Laura’s disability - both physical, with her limp, and psychological, with her extreme social anxiety - creates significant barriers to her independence, exacerbated by the lack of legal protections for disabled individuals in the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, there were no federal laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which would later ensure equal access to education, employment, and public spaces. (U.S. Department of Labor). As a result, individuals like Laura were often marginalized, with few opportunities for personal or professional growth. The absence of such legal protections forces Laura to completely depend on her family, especially Amanda, who controls much of her life and future. Amanda’s focus on finding Laura a suitor is not only rooted in societal norms but also reflects the legal reality that marriage was often the only viable path for financial security and social inclusion for women with disabilities.

In “A Streetcar Named Desire,” the Napoleonic Code, also known as the Civil Code of France, plays a notable role through Stanley Kowalski’s reference to it. Set in New Orleans, Louisiana - a state that follows a civil law system derived from the Napoleonic Code rather than the common law system prevalent in the rest of the United States - the play uses this legal framework to reflect both the societal and gender dynamics in the story (Britannica). Stanley brings up the Napoleonic Code as a way to justify his sense of entitlement over Blanche’s financial matters, particularly concerning her family’s lost estate, Belle Reeve. He says to Stella "Now let’s have a gander at the bill of sale... I don’t like to be swindled." Explaining to her that a husband has a legal claim to anything his wife inherits or possesses under the Napoleonic Code. In Louisiana, the community property laws derived from the Napoleonic Code mean that property acquired during marriage is considered jointly owned by both spouses, and anything inherited by one spouse may still be subject to legal scrutiny if the husband feels it affects his shared interest. Stanley sees Blanche’s lost inheritance as a financial loss to Stella and, therefore, to himself, resulting in him demanding that Blanche disclose what happened to Belle Reeve and for his investigation into Blanche’s financial affairs. From a legal perspective, Stanley’s understanding of the Napoleonic Code reflects how property and gender laws of the time placed women’s economic agency under the control of their husbands. Stanley’s aggressive pursuit of the financial details surrounding Belle Reeve shows his belief in his legal right to control and benefit from any property tied to his wife, regardless of her personal interests or Blanche’s past decisions. Stella leaves Belle Reve to be with Stanley, implying that she has cut ties with her history, yet Stanley insists on finding out what happened to the manor, effectively going against his wife’s wishes.

Furthermore, Blanche’s institutionalization at the end of the drama opens up important legal questions concerning mental health law, involuntary commitment, and the rights of the mentally ill. Blanche’s forced removal from society reflects broader themes of how legal systems have historically handled mental health issues, particularly in a time when protections for individuals suffering from mental illness were far less developed than today. Moreover, Stanley helped control Blanche's admittance to the institution, highlighting the unequal distribution of power between men and women during that time period.

The legal analysis of Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* reveals several major topics regarding inheritance law, marital rights, property conflicts, and wills. The plot concentrates on the Pollitt family, namely the conflict over who will inherit the estate of the family patriarch, Big Daddy. The play's legal aspects concern succession and property ownership, alongside the role of truth and deception in legal processes. Big Daddy's riches and land reflect significant economic power, and legally, the distribution of his assets is often governed by a will. However, in the play, Big Daddy has not yet put his intentions on paper, leaving the issue of inheritance open to guesswork and manipulation by his sons and their wives. This uncertainty around the estate is similar to real-life estate planning difficulties, in which the lack of clear legal documentation (wills, trusts, etc.) can lead to family disagreements and court battles over who has the legal right to inherit.

Big Daddy's disdain for Gooper and Mae, whom he sees as opportunists, reflects his belief that genuine justice is rooted in honesty and loyalty rather than mere legal claims. Even though Gooper and Mae fulfill their social responsibilities by raising a large family, their incessant quests for Big Daddy's wealth seem ethically questionable. This can be seen when Mae brings up Maggie's childless state at the dinner table, with the intention of highlighting her illegitimacy for the inheritance. Moreover, Gooper claims to be more engaged in the management and running of the plantation, arguing this as a justification for his claim to the inheritance. The couple also hire a lawyer even before Big Daddy has made a decision, reflecting their urgent desperation for the inheritance.

In contrast, even with Brick's tendency towards self-destruction through alcohol consumption, the bond between him and Big Daddy is rooted in deep emotional ties and a sense of familial loyalty. They have a deep conversation, and Brick is the one who reveals the truth about his father's condition to him. Similarly, Big Daddy tries to be sympathetic towards Brick and his hardships. Their relationship is more authentic in comparison to Big Daddy's more artificial love for his other son. Hence, the tension between legal rights and moral values prompts the question of whether true justice is achieved through strict adherence to the law or by placing greater emphasis on the ethical dilemmas that arise within a family context. Brick's decision to step back from the legal battle concerning Big Daddy's fortune signifies a wider dismissal of the conventional legal constructs surrounding success, masculinity, and the passing down of wealth. To him, the essence of his bond with Skipper holds greater significance than the legal and societal duties that encircle him.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the extent to which Tennessee Williams' plays were shaped by the realities of the economic, social, and legal contexts, concluding that his work was critically influenced by the norms dictating the era in which it was written.

His plays offer a powerful exploration of the social struggles faced by his characters, particularly around rigid gender roles and the stigmatization of mental illness in mid-20th-century America. In *The Glass Menagerie*, Laura's extreme shyness and disability isolate her from the world, reflecting Williams' own experiences of feeling out of place in society. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche and Stella represent two different responses to societal pressures - Blanche clings to the ideals of the past, while Stella embraces the reality of modern life. Yet, both women are ultimately trapped in their dependency on men for security and identity. Meanwhile, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* touches on the intense emotional burden of repressed sexuality as Brick struggles with his unspoken love for Skipper, a reflection of the deep-rooted homophobia of the time. Through these characters, Williams paints a picture of individuals struggling to break free from the societal expectations that confine them.

Economically, Williams' characters are emblematic of the instability and disillusionment with the American Dream. The struggle of the Wingfield family in *The Glass Menagerie* highlights the harsh economic realities of the Great Depression as Tom works a tedious job to support his family, echoing the broader frustration of a generation left behind by the promise of prosperity. Blanche's downfall in *A Streetcar Named Desire* reflects the economic collapse of the Southern aristocracy, as she loses her family estate and is left clinging to a fading past. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the fight for Big Daddy's inheritance exposes the desperation and greed that arise from economic insecurity.

Lastly, in the legal section, Williams highlights how the legal systems of his time limited freedoms, especially for women and marginalized groups. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley's mention of the Napoleonic Code underscores the control men had over women's property, while Blanche's forced institutionalization shows how little power those labeled as mentally ill had over their own lives. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the absence of a clear will sparks a battle over Big Daddy's estate, reflecting the complexities of inheritance and property rights. These legal struggles shape the characters' destinies and mirror the larger power imbalances in society.

Overall, Tennessee Williams' plays *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* serve as powerful reflections of the social, economic, and legal realities of mid-20th-century America. Through his plays, William captures the personal and societal struggles faced by individuals reflected on the background of their times.

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