

# Multigenerational Transmission Process in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the concept of multigenerational emotional process in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This concept is derived from the psychiatrist Murray Bowen's theory that is called Bowen family systems theory and it includes eight interlocking concepts: differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, sibling position, multigenerational emotional process, emotional cutoff, and societal emotional process. The concept of multigenerational emotional process expands the emotional system from the circle of the nuclear family to a larger circle of grandparents and extended family. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the distinctly multigenerational play in Williams's drama. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* signifies two noticeable generations representing the transmission of the Southern heritage intergenerationally on both emotional and cultural levels.

**Keywords:** Multigenerational process, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Tennessee Williams, Bowen

*The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play [cat] is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent – fiercely charged! – interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis.*

*(Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof)*

Tennessee Williams adapts *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to fit a family systems model rather than an individual's issue. Although Williams wrote another multigenerational play, *Candles to the Sun* (written in 1936 and published in 2004), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is linked to the concept of multigenerational process in Murray Bowen systems theory to depict the allegory of the patriarchal Southern family. Apart from the several themes of the play such as decay, mendacity, and patriarchal authoritarianism. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (hereafter in this article) is distinct within Williams's body of work as it is structured to include grandparents, parents, children, in-laws, friends, uncles, aunts, and cousins. The result of these multiple familial connections is both to make the audience more emotionally attached to the characters and to chart the dynasty and psychological legacy of a large Southern family. This is particularly the case because *Cat* has three generations of characters and Bowen's concept of multigenerational transmission process demands at least three generations in order to be clarified. Family dynamics in *Cat*, consisting of emotional functioning of three generations, make it the most useful play to explore Bowen's concept of multigenerational transmission process, as well as to explore the theme of cultural inheritance which is underrepresented in Bowen theory.

Williams clarifies in the stage note of *Cat* that "the bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in group of people" (Act II). He seeks to explore the interpersonal relations among family members rather than intrapsychic conflicts. Theatre historians R. Barton Palmer and William Robert Bray assert that "Williams's plays explored, in innovative and dramatically effective fashion, the drama of the self, probing the dark corners and difficulties of desire and exploring the ties of love and family that bind and (entrap) troubled characters" (2). Although Williams's drama concentrates on dysfunctional characters, it does not overlook the family and society of such characters. Gerald M. Berkowitz convincingly states that Williams moves American drama "towards its new function of illuminating psychological and emotional forces within his characters" (77). Williams's drama is considered a rich field for the Freudian psychoanalysis that dominated the stage in the aftermath of World War II. Berkowitz also mentions that Williams's dramatic voice is rich in "symbols, emotionalism, and rhetorical flourishes" (p.77). This thing makes Williams's theatre convenient for both psychoanalysis and family systems.

Bowen is considered one of the most prominent pioneers in family therapy in the 1950s United States. The shift from individual to group therapy can be traced through the years that the United States was involved in World War II due to the increasing stresses on the armed forces. As Nathan G. Hale demonstrates, although individual therapy was more systematic than group therapy, the latter was extensively used by social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists by the end of World War II (199). After the war family therapy started to appear more broadly, dealing with the family as a whole organism rather than merely focusing on individual or individuals within a group. The immersion of new family therapists, among them Murray Bowen, in the United States indicates the great need for solutions of family psychic and emotional obstacles in the post-World War II period.

For the purpose of this article I will consider the original Act Three of *Cat* from 1955, not the modified Broadway version that director Elia Kazan suggested, because the original version is more emotionally convincing in terms of the Pollitts' multigenerational process. In order to explain this aspect of Bowen's theory, the first part of this article will discuss the concept of multigenerational process and illustrates some examples within Williams's plays. Here, three nuclear families' level of differentiation of self (the ability of someone to differentiate between his thoughts and feelings) and the nuclear family emotional patterns will be discussed.

### **1. Multigenerational Transmission Process**

Bowen family systems defines family as an emotional system. This is to say that members of the family are connected to each other emotionally and any change in the functioning of a family member affect the functioning of the others. According to Bowen, the emotional transmission process through generations "defines the principle of varying degrees of immaturity (undifferentiation) to different children when the process is repeated over a number of generations" (205). Bowen assumes two main points in the multigenerational process: the first is that children's levels of differentiation of self-develop according to their parents' differentiation of self, while their parents' level of differentiation follows the same patterns as their parents and grandparents, and so on. The second is that children tend to choose spouses with similar levels of differentiation of self. Bowen hypothesises that the least-differentiated person is the product of a line of multiple generations as well as the well-differentiated one. The multigenerational process is a repetition of emotional functioning through generations of the same family. Multigenerational process does not indicate that all family members should have the same basic level of differentiation, but rather tend to slight upwards and downwards changes. The upwards and downwards possibilities of level of differentiation indicate that some children could have less, more, or the same level as their parents.

Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen also demonstrate that the emotional transmission through generations "is anchored in the emotional system and includes emotions, feelings, and subjectively determined attitudes, values, and beliefs that are transmitted from one generation to the next" (224). Generally speaking, it is agreed in the field of social sciences that individuals throughout history inherit the values, ideals, beliefs, and traditions of their parents and grandparents. People also inherit some natural genetic characteristics such as eyes and skin colour. Consequently, Hall clarifies that in this process particular emotional mechanisms are being concentrated on in the multigenerational transmission process, therefore affecting levels of differentiation of self through generations, rather than explaining "biological inheritance" in genetic terms (101). Kerr and Bowen mention that although genes are part of the emotional system, they are not responsible for the nuclear family emotional mechanisms (dysfunction in a spouse, marital conflict or family projection process) or the way in which they transmit through generations (224-5). From this perspective, differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, and family projection process, as well as sibling position, are all essential aspects of the multigenerational emotional process.

There are three main outcomes of the multigenerational process: social, physical, and

emotional dysfunction. The nuclear family in any part of the scale of differentiation produces dysfunction if it faces high levels of stress or anxiety. However, the most serious dysfunction is the outcome of a linear downward multigenerational functioning. On this model, the more differentiated the nuclear family across generations, the more stable the emotional transmission process, and therefore the more people become aware of their functioning in the present generation and predict the functioning of the future generation. Murder, violence, social irresponsibility, alcoholism, schizophrenia, homosexuality, cancer, and diabetes are examples of multigenerational dysfunctions that can be transmitted through the generations (Kerr and Bowen 236-51). Nonetheless, it was evidently known in the 1930s that some physical illnesses, especially diabetes, are genetically transmitted generationally to others, but this was not proved until 1974. It is common nowadays to hear about families that have a long history of a specific disease that is transmitted from one generation to the next. Kerr and Bowen argue that in spite of the fact that some diseases are linked to genes, “the clinical course of that disease in different family members is assumed to be significantly related to family emotional process” (248). According to family systems theory, first the emotional system is assumed to be inherited by ancestors and considered to be an automatic process that members of the family cannot control and which exists above and beyond specific contexts (Kerr and Bowen 248); and, second, if a specific disease develops across generations, it is considered to be a *symptom* of the emotional process that is the core of the family functioning (Kerr and Bowen 250).

In the following section, three generations will be examined in Williams’s *Cat*, because Bowen mentions that a minimum of three generations of the same family are required as a “starting point” to explain the function or dysfunction of a child in the multigenerational process (Bowen 384). However, Hall points out that if the behaviour of *more* than three linear generations from the same family is tested, the multigenerational process would be more obvious (101). Nevertheless, three generations are adequate for the purpose of analysing the multigenerational transmission process.

## **2. Multigenerational Emotional Transmission in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof***

*Cat* is William’s only multigenerational play of the 1950s and 1960s, being structured around three central characters (Big Daddy, Brick Pollitt, and the latter’s wife Margaret (Maggie the cat), and three additional main ones (Big Mama, Gooper and his wife Mae). Most readings of the play focus on Brick’s sexuality, Maggie and Big Daddy, and it is therefore hard to find specific readings about Big Mama, Gooper and Mae. It should be remembered that the division of the Pollitts’ emotional triangles does not depend on the main and minor characters, but rather the relationships between them. The hierarchal structure of the play comprises three generational relationships: the grandparents (Big Daddy and Big Mama), the parents, aunts, and uncles (Gooper/Mae and Brick/Maggie), and the children (Gooper and Mae’s five children). As previously mentioned, the multigenerational transmission process includes three aspects: first, children’s level of differentiation is slightly similar to that of their parents, and second, individuals typically choose spouses with a similar level of differentiation. Third, emotional patterns in the nuclear family are also repeated through generations. Accordingly, the levels of differentiation of self and the nuclear family mechanisms of the three couples in *Cat* will be interrogated.

Big Daddy is one of the most powerful characters in Williams's drama, symbolising Southern patriarchy, masculinity and supremacy that harks back to the Old South. He is the owner of a plantation estate of twenty-eight-thousand acres in the Mississippi Delta. He initially appears as "*a tall man with a fierce, anxious look, moving carefully not to betray his weakness even, or especially, to himself*" (Act II 46). Although he enters the scene nervously, Big Daddy hides in himself the fragile patient who is frightened by illness and the sense that he might be losing the patriarchal authority over his family and plantation. His rough treatment of Big Mama in front of her children embarrasses and hurts her, and it indicates that he does not sympathise with her. Being a successful planter has been Big Daddy's life purpose and all of his success is the result of his individual effort and great ambition. Big Daddy does not provide any information about his family's origins, but it can be concluded that his family was poor. He has an old maid sister, Miss Sally, who has a fairly minor role in the play. He quits school for unidentified reasons at the age of ten to work in the fields, then gradually rose to be an overseer for a pair of old bachelors and the genuine owners of the plantation, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello, finally becoming the owner of the estate upon their deaths. He is autonomous, wise, and "*a loud-mouthed man [and] aggressively frank*" (Donahue 72), and his hard nature could be the result of his difficult life. It is very difficult for him to accept that he is dying of cancer. E. Martin Browne, in an editorial note in *Cat*, points out that Big Daddy "*has the same warmth of the soil in him. The best poetry of the play is in his speeches, which distil the wisdom of primitive human nature*" (15).

Big Daddy's wisdom appears in his self-recognition, indicating a thoughtful realisation of life and an intuitive awareness that his ten million dollars in cash and twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land of the Nile valley are incapable of buying good health. He also mentions to Brick that thinking in this way is "*a very sobering thought, and that's a thought that [he] was turning over in [his] head*" (Act II 60). The fact that he is dying of cancer pushes him to recount several issues in his life and makes him "*wiser and sadder*". He realises also that "*the human animal is a beast that dies but the fact that he's dying don't give him pity for others*" (p. 61). Big Daddy mentions to Brick that the "*thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton! – is tolerance*" (Act II 78).

At first glance, one could consider classifying Big Daddy as having a very high level of the differentiation of self because he is autonomous, tolerant, realistic and goal-directed, and he has the ability to assume responsibility for both himself and others. Nonetheless, what excludes him from this is that his "*level of chronic anxiety is [not] very low and he can [not] adapt to most stresses without developing symptoms*" (Kerr and Bowen 107). Big Daddy has a high level of anxiety and develops a physical symptom, cancer, which according to Bowen is a result of a dysfunction in the emotional system. Although Big Daddy is one of Williams's most influential characters, this does not necessarily mean that he is very well-differentiated. He can differentiate between his thoughts as being the "*boss*" of the plantation and the head of the family and his feelings towards the other members of his family. Through his emotional conversation, Big Daddy confesses to Brick that he lives mendaciously, meaning "*to pretend stuff you don't think or feel*" (Act II 72, my emphasis). This indicates Big Daddy's awareness of the difference between thoughts and feelings, whilst still choosing to pretend to care and

love for Big Mama and Gooper throughout his life.

Big Daddy admits that his life with Big Mama has been a lie. Savran comments that Big Daddy exemplifies the conventional heterosexual masculinity of the 1950s that degrades and desires women all at once (Savran 101). He cannot stand Gooper and Mae and their five children; he is only sincere with Brick and devoted to being a successful planter. Big Daddy lives in a constant struggle between his feelings and thoughts, saying to Brick that “I couldn’t make up my mind” because he realises the difference between a responsible and successful but hated son and an irresponsible and alcoholic but loved one. Nevertheless, Big Daddy waits to see if Brick can pull himself together before drawing up his will for the estate. This supports the fact that Big Daddy’s “intellect recognizes that a bit of discipline is needed to overrule the emotional system” (Kerr and Bowen 106).

Big Daddy relates the reason of his illness to Big Mama as if he is a psychiatrist who analyses his own case. Two points can be concluded from this perspective: first, Big Daddy’s level of differentiation is moderate, as he possesses an average ability to differentiate between his thoughts and feelings living in “*disgust*” with Big Mama. This is because in most situations he “*has been regarding her [Big Mama] with a steady grimace of chronic annoyance*” (Act II 48). Second, and more likely, Big Daddy’s capacity to distinguish between his thoughts and feelings, like Ralph Bates in Williams’s *Period of Adjustment*, enables him to coexist with and care about Big Mama. This also could be the emotional reason that contributes to his severe cancer. So, he has the choice of whether to be governed by either his feelings or thoughts. It could be argued that Big Daddy’s marriage is based on economic conditions, especially because Big Mama’s family “*was maybe a little superior to Big Daddy’s but not much*” (Act I 32). He treats Big Mama as if she is one of his possessions that he can discard or retain whenever he wants.

Big Mama is as wise as Big Daddy but more tolerant than him, and as such they both complete each other. A careful analysis of her character and her emotional complementary role with Big Daddy reveals her role in maintaining the family integrity. Big Mama “*is a short, stout woman; her sixty years and 170 pounds have left her somewhat breathless most of the time*” and “*very sincere*” (Act I, p. 32). She is devoted to her family and she is honest in her love for Big Daddy who “*is famous for his jokes at Big Mama’s expense, and nobody laughs louder at these jokes than Big Mama herself, though sometimes they’re pretty cruel*” (Act II 47). This indicates that she is both wise and patient in absorbing her husband’s insults, or perhaps that she does not have an easy alternative as a Southern woman of her generation. Nancy Tischler comments that Big Mama’s acceptance of Big Daddy’s cruel jokes by laughing at herself and tolerating his hurtfulness makes her ample-bosomed, devoted, and “*a beautiful, strong study in unfulfilled love*” (Tischler 200-1). When the family receive the false report that Big Daddy is diagnosed with a “*spastic colon*”, Big Mama’s reaction indicates a sincere love of him. She tells Maggie and Brick that this news makes her shout, cry, and fall down on her knees.

Big Mama has a strong ability to differentiate between her thoughts and feelings regardless of the fact that her appearance and behaviour do not make this obvious. Her appearance suggests the features of an imprudent and superficial rich woman, but inside her there is an uncomplicated faithful wife and mother. Sobbing, she says to Big Daddy: “*In all these years*

*you never believed that I loved you? ... And I did, I did so much, I did love you!*" (Act II 55). In this respect, Big Mama could have a greater emotional capacity than her husband because she recognises his reactions, rigidity and hate. It is obvious that her interest in Big Daddy is not based on material purposes, but rather on love and recognition. Although he insults her, she justifies to them all that Big Daddy "loves his family, he loves to have them around him, but it's strain in his nerves" (Act III, p. 85) that makes him behave anxiously. When the family doctor informs her in front of her sons and daughters-in-law that Big Daddy actually has malignant cancer, she displays a deep devotion to him. She sadly rises, cries, and "*reviews the history of her forty-five years with Big Daddy*" (p. 90). Williams characterises Big Mama interestingly as "*true-hearted*" and "*simple-minded devotion to Big Daddy*" (p. 90), and this does not confuse her position on Bowen's scale of differentiation of self. On the contrary, her emotional reactivity in the most serious situations in the play indicates an emotional maturity and a choice to be governed by simple thoughts or passionate feelings. She also shows great understanding of what Big Daddy aims to do with the plantation, and even uses his language in his absence. Even her feelings towards Brick, Gooper, and Mae resemble Big Daddy's frank thoughts and feelings. She makes it clear that she follows Big Daddy's steps in controlling the house and remaining the head of it. Big Mama will not allow Gooper to take hold of the estate, realising that Brick is the right son to take hold of the estate if he straightens out himself.

Comparable with her maternal Southern counterpart Amanda Wingfield in Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, Big Mama realises the importance of patriarchal lineage, so she is the one who feels sad in losing Big Daddy as he is her supporter in keeping the family integrity. She admits to herself that Big Daddy is the central pillar of the family, and if he dies the family balance will deteriorate. She also believes that the family should "love each other an' stay together" (100). Big Mama could be also categorised as having a moderate level of differentiation of self due to her emotional ability to distinguish between her thoughts and feelings, to absorb and calm anxiety, and to save the emotional stability of the family, as well as to avoid developing emotional, social, or physical symptoms. She seems to consciously choose to be dominated and submit to Big Daddy. Accordingly, the nuclear family emotional system in Big Daddy and Mama's marriage could be classified as an emotional distance and dysfunction in a spouse. Regardless of the fact that Big Daddy develops a severe symptom (cancer), Big Mama is still the subordinate spouse, who adapts herself to absorb the family's anxiety. The emotional complementarity enables them to keep their family together for more than forty years: Big Daddy is the nervous anxious father and Big Mama is the calm patient mother. Nonetheless, the result of their dysfunctional marriage is transmitted to Brick and causes his projection and dysfunction, as will be discussed later on in this article.

The second couple in the Pollitt family is Gooper and Mae Pollitt, and their seemingly harmonious marriage results in five children. Both Gooper and Mae have similar levels of differentiation of self, and they are both referred to in the play as one identity; wherever Gooper is mentioned, Mae is mentioned too. Gooper's parents are well-known, but there are some hints about Mae's family background. Mae and Maggie's "catty talks" in the play disclose several facts about both of them. Mae Flynn, the cotton carnival queen, is the daughter of the Memphis Flynn who were very rich but they lost their money and no longer rate in Memphis society.

According to Maggie's investigations, Mae and Gooper relinquish their summer trip and start their plans to gain the plantation because they are pretty sure that Big Daddy's final reports indicate that he is dying of cancer. Maggie describes them as a couple of "cardsharps". They both behave as if they are two faces of the same coin. Big Daddy exposes Mae and Gooper's habit of spying and accuses them of being a couple of "peek-hole spies". This repetition of unity confirms that they are a very compatible and well-matched couple and have the same basic level of differentiation of self.

Big Daddy and Brick agree that Mae and Maggie are similar: both are nervous, not peaceful, and look like "a couple of cats on a hot tin roof" (Act I 56). Mae is keen to remind Maggie of her poor family and drunk father, and Maggie tries to dig deeper into Mae's rich family who lost their money. They both use the same strategy with Big Daddy and Big Mama by imploring their sympathy and attracting their attention; Mae through her five children and Maggie by her determination and discernment. However, in Big Daddy's opinion, although Mae and Maggie share similar behaviour, Maggie's physical appearance is better than that of Mae, whereas Mae is more fertile than Maggie. Big Daddy cannot believe that Brick and Gooper "being so different would pick out the same type of woman", and Brick answers him that both of them "married in society" (56). This signposts three main points: first, Gooper and Brick have different levels of differentiation of self; second, and more obviously, Mae and Maggie have the same level of differentiation of self; and, third, Gooper and Brick's method of choosing a partner is the same as that of their father, and thus all married for social, rather than personal, reasons.

Although Gooper and Mae's marriage seems harmonious, it is noticeable that their nuclear family emotional mechanism is a dysfunction in a spouse: in this case Gooper. In their conversation Mae gives the impression that she is repeating her husband's words, but in fact she guides his speech. For example, before revealing Big Daddy's report, she kisses and hugs Big Mama to stimulate the matriarch's curiosity. Then when Gooper starts to explain, "*For some reason she gives Gooper a violent poke as she goes past him. He slaps at her hand without removing his eyes from his mother's face*" (Act III 91). In several situations, Mae appears to be completing her husband's words, whereas she is actually attempting to remind him of what he should say. Further, when Gooper discusses with Big Mama his goal to control the plantation, Mae argues with Big Mama more than he does, which provides evidence that she is the dominant spouse and Gooper is the subordinate one.

Gooper's five children are labelled by Maggie as "no-neck-monsters". The oldest, Dixie, bursts into Brick and Maggie's room "*wearing an Indian war bonnet and firing a cap pistol at Margaret and shouting: 'Bang, bang, bang'*" (Act I 44). Williams reminds us of the child's vindictive nature when Dixie says to Maggie, after speaking with Brick about his broken ankle, "*with a precocious instinct for the cruellest thing: You're jealous! You're just jealous because you can't have babies!*" (p. 45). Dixie reflects her parents' emotional state, and repeats unconsciously what her parents say in front of her. Dixie knows that Brick and Maggie are childless and has a feeling that her parents do not like Maggie. Accordingly, Dixie's basic level of differentiation of self is shaped according to her parents' moods, thoughts and feelings. Consequently, and according to Bowen's dynamic of the transmission process through



generations, not only does Dixie develop an analogous level of differentiation of self to her parents, but so too do the other four siblings, albeit with slight differences. So, Dixie is incorporated in the emotional system and she is likely to repeat her parents' functioning in the future in her nuclear family.

The third couple worthy of analysis is Brick and Maggie. Maggie's character is as central to the play as Big Daddy. She could even be perceived as the implicit voice of Big Daddy. From a Bowenian perspective, Brick and Maggie's emotional anxiety is the driving force behind their marital dysfunction. Maggie struggles to keep her own family destroying itself, and being childless and emotionally, as well as physically, distanced from Brick cause her high levels of anxiety. Although Maggie seems calm and controlling, Williams describes her as a "*pretty woman, with anxious lines in her face*" (Act I 17). She is a complex presence on stage, combining anxiety, emotional longing, tenacity, solidarity, liveliness, love, charm, and determination. Hirsch describes her as one of Williams's "healthiest characters", despite this complexity, and she is a "normal, likable woman, who loves her distracted husband" (47-48). She does not fit into one or other of Williams's female types: she is neither the puritan Amanda Wingfield or Alma Winemiller nor the fragile Laura Wingfield or Blanche DuBois. Maggie is more genuine than Mae in her feelings towards Big Daddy and Mama, blessing their "ole soul" (Act I 22). She has a quiet capacity to differentiate between her thoughts about being childless and how to retrieve her intimate relationship with her husband on the one hand and her feelings of emotional loneliness and ignorance on the other hand. She stresses that she would not like to live alone, but as she tells Brick "living with someone you love can be lonelier – than living entirely *alone!*" (p. 24).

Maggie is as wise and patient as Big Daddy and tries to control her feelings of being emotionally and physically distanced from her husband. However, she mentions to Brick that although he does not love her, she is "determined to win" (Act I p. 26). Her determination to redeem the relationship with her husband and to inherit the estate do not stem from a vacuum; it develops from her earlier experience of poverty and of her father who "fell in love with his liquor" (p. 40), leaving her mother with a modest salary. She differentiates herself from her family of origin in an attempt to rid herself of poverty. She had previously a harmonious marital relationship with Brick despite their arguments and her belief that Brick dated and married her just to make a respectable social impression. However, he may not love Maggie, but his social position as the son of the richest Southern family forces him to marry and have a family regardless of this, exactly like Big Daddy's marriage to Big Mama.

According to Bowen, there are conscious (concerns and principles) and unconscious (emotions) dynamics that contribute in choosing a partner. Consequently, Maggie honestly loves Brick and marries him for economic purposes, similarly to Ralph Bates who marries Dorothea for economic purposes in Williams's *Period of Adjustment*, while Brick marries Maggie for social concerns. Big Daddy and Mama's nuclear family emotional system is repeated through Brick's marriage. Accordingly, and because the nuclear family of the grandparents is the "architecture" that shapes the behaviour, functioning, and thoughts of the next generation, Big Daddy's dysfunctional marriage and his anxiety is repeated through the multigenerational process and transmitted through Brick's marriage. So Maggie and Brick's nuclear family emotional system

is characterised by an emotional distance and a dysfunction in a spouse. Maggie declares to Brick what she thinks:

Maggie: Brick, I used to think that you were stronger than me and I didn't want to be overpowered by you. But now, since you've taken to liquor – you know what? – I guess it's bad, but now I'm stronger than you and I can love you more truly! (Act III 104)

From this perspective, it seems that Maggie and Brick's nuclear family emotional system is a marital conflict because both of them refuse to give in to the other at the beginning of their conjugal life. However, the adaptive pattern in Brick's nuclear family emotional system contributes to marital conflict, emotional and physical distance, and a social and emotional dysfunction (Brick's alcoholism) in a spouse. Further, Maggie's level of differentiation of self and emotional capacity enables her to absorb the anxiety in the nuclear family and be the overfunctioning (dominant) spouse because Brick withdraws and submits to his liquor, which she understands to be linked to the death of his best friend, Skipper.

It could be argued that Maggie is Big Daddy's self-image despite not being blood related, and she is his emotional successor and the symbol of family integrity. Christopher Weimer, mentions that Maggie represents a “woman notable for her hunger for motherhood, sensuality, sense of integrity, and unbreakable determination that ultimately gives her the strength necessary for self-empowerment” (522). They are the most dynamic characters in the Pollitt family's emotional system even though Big Daddy is dying of cancer. Bigsby demonstrates that Big Daddy and Maggie have the ability to love “but in neither case is that love entirely separate from their own ambitions” as both of them would like to live on through Brick (83). Alice Griffin finds that Big Daddy and Maggie's material and emotional possessiveness stems from their poor backgrounds (152). Maggie unconsciously compares Big Daddy with her father, who instead of building up property wasted his money on liquor. The transmission process makes Maggie determined and well differentiated. She refuses to repeat her mother's experience with an alcoholic husband. Maggie affirms to Brick that she was “born poor, raised poor, [and] expect[s] to die poor” unless Big Daddy's inheritance helps them to change their lives (Act I 44). This suggests that Maggie's desire to inherit overrides her feelings for Brick, therefore providing evidence that her functioning in the emotional system is governed mainly by her thoughts rather than feelings.

By examining the Pollitt family's level of differentiation, it has been noticed that Big Daddy, Big Mama, Gooper, Mae, and Maggie all have fairly moderate levels of differentiation, whereas Brick has a very low level of differentiation. The reason behind this is that Brick's sibling position as the youngest son, and the one most attached to the parents, impairs his functioning in the emotional system and makes him the most vulnerable member to family anxieties, family projection process, and multigenerational transmission process. When Big Mama tells Big Daddy that she loves him he talks to himself “*wouldn't it be funny if that was true*” (Act II 55). Similarly, before the end of the play Maggie confirms her love to Brick, to which he responds sadly “*wouldn't it be funny if that was true?*” (Act III 105). Both Big Daddy and Brick are emotionally distanced from their wives, as if Williams wants to indicate that Big

Daddy's miserable marriage continually repeats itself in Brick's. Further, Big Daddy's nuclear family system is classified as dysfunction in a spouse, emotional distance, and impairment of a child (Brick). Likewise, both Gooper and Brick's nuclear systems involve dysfunction in a spouse.

From a Bowenian viewpoint, alcoholism, homosexuality (both of which are listed in DSM-I (38-9) and DSM-II (25, 44) as psychiatric disorders), physical illness (such as Big Daddy's cancer), and social irresponsibility are symptoms of dysfunctional patterns repeated through the generations. Bowen mentions that "the symptom of excessive drinking occurs when family anxiety is high" (259). He also adds that alcoholism is considered as a dysfunction "in the context of an imbalance in functioning in the total family system" (262). From this standpoint, the whole family contributed to Brick's alcoholism by accusing him of homosexuality. What increases Brick's reputation of homosexuality is that Brick and Maggie occupy the former room of the old homosexual bachelors, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. In this connection, David Savran states that Big Daddy, structurally, "functions as the carrier of homosexuality" (p. 100). Indicating implicitly that Big Daddy's bowel cancer could be the result of sodomy in his youth, Savran explains that Big Daddy involuntarily passes the homosexual desires to Brick through the family male line. Williams mentions that Brick and Maggie's bedroom is "haunted by a relationship that must have involved a tenderness which was uncommon" (Notes for the Designer). This uncommon tenderness transmits emotionally to Brick and raises questions about his relationship with Skipper. Dean Shackelford also supports the idea that Big Daddy becomes the surrogate son of Jack and Peter (114). From a Bowenian perception, the previous owners of the plantation are included mechanically within the Pollitts' emotional system, and accordingly, the previous generation's reputation transmits to Brick emotionally.

As this article has demonstrated, *Cat* is the best of Williams's plays to reflect Bowen theory of dysfunctions that transmit through generations. Higher levels of functioning lead to a more flexible and less symptomatic multigenerational transmission process. Conversely, lower functioning indicates more emotional reactivity and more intense multigenerational process. Both Bowen's theories and Williams's plays (in which some family details are provided and some are withheld) show that the more information we have about earlier generations the more precise can be the predictions about the characteristics of future generations.

Multigenerational process is not only responsible for dysfunctions or moral transgressions, but also for enhancing positive characteristics that keep family integrity and the system's emotional and social equilibrium through generations. Accordingly, raising the level of differentiation of the family members increases their awareness and decreases their emotional reactivity. This dynamic enables them to cope with the circumstances of their relationship to each other, choosing partners with high levels of differentiation of self and producing well-differentiated generations and so on. In this regard, it could be deduced that the multigenerational transmission process underlines Brick's dysfunction as a product of inherited patterns repeated through generations. At the same time, Big Daddy's ability to adapt to stress transmits to Gooper and enables him to avoid the family anxiety and to some extent control his role within the emotional system. Maggie's original family transmission process enhances her ability to differentiate between her thoughts and feelings, and increases her determination

to win the plantation, to redeem her relationship with her husband, and to keep her nuclear family integrity without developing any symptoms.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, we are left with Maggie's victory and her efforts to turn the lie of pregnancy into truth and as she says: "What is the victory of a cat on a hot tin roof? – I wish I knew ... Just staying on it, I guess, as long as she can" (Act I 26). Although Big Daddy, the pillar of the family and the icon of its integrity, is dying of cancer, Big Mama's devotion and Maggie's determination to have a baby (a representative of a new generation representing Big Daddy's heir) and thus enhances the sense of family continuity.

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