

Chapter III

III. The causes of failure: Tom, Chance, and Brick

A. Tom is under economical pressures

In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom, the poet-narrator, appears both within and without the play. Tom begins to introduce the “memory play” by strolling across the fire escape outside his family’s St. Louis tenement apartment. This apartment was his former home, from where he had escaped:

TOM: Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have
 things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite
 of a stage magician. He gives you illusion
 that has the appearance of truth. I give you
 truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion (*Understanding* 108).

As he, Tom Wingfields, tells his story of illusion and despair, he controls time, past and present. Benjamin, a critic, says that when Tom escapes from a trap, an unbearable situation, there is really very little that is heroic or even positive and challenging in his departure. Three family members live in this small apartment in St. Louis. Tom lives with his sister, Laura, and their mother Amanda. Tom must go to work in a warehouse in order to defray the family expenses. Also, Amanda tries to help the family’s situation by asking people to subscribe *The Homemaker’s Companion*¹, because the extra money is always needed. Meanwhile, the slightly crippled Laura has become a burden for Amanda and Tom. Amanda knows that she cannot support Laura without Tom’s help, and so Tom must continue to work in the factory:

AMANDA: What right have you got to jeopardize
 your job? Jeopardize the security of us all?

¹ This magazine is a type of journal that describes the sublimate of being a lady such as delicate cuplike

How do you think we'd manage if you
were—

TOM: Listen! You think I'm crazy about the *ware-*
house?....For sixty-five dollars a month I give
up all that I dream of doing and being *ever!* (*Understanding* 114-15)

In Tom's description, he doesn't want to earn only sixty-five dollars per month to work like a slave in the factory and under the fluorescent tubes and giving up his dreams. He desires to leave their gloomy apartment, but there is the dilemma of choosing: If he chooses the family, he can not search for his dreams. On the other hand, if he chooses his own dream, no one will be there to support Laura and Amanda.

Amanda often recalls her greatest pride in the past of having sixteen gentlemen callers in the Blue Mountain, and her life among the planters of the Mississippi Delta. Furthermore, Amanda also wishes Laura could have some gentlemen callers as Amanda once had:

AMANDA: ...

My callers were gentlemen—all! Among
my callers were some of the most promi-
nent young planters of the Mississippi
Delta—planters and sons of planters! (*Understanding* 109)

She wants Laura to have an independent future by trying to learn typing and keeping her appearance to stay fresh and pretty:

AMANDA: No, dear, you go in front and study
your typewriter chart. Or practice your
shorthand a little. Stay fresh and pretty!—
It's almost time for our gentle men callers to
start arriving (*Understanding* 110).

But Laura says to her mother, “I’m just not popular like you were in Blue Mountain” (*Understanding* 110). However, the ironic part is that Amanda did not marry any of the gentlemen callers instead she was happily married to a telephone man, but later who escaped home because he had fallen in love with the “long distance”. At the same time, the family burden becomes unbearable for Tom. At that time, the meager salary Tom receives could have caused by the exploitation of capitalists. In *Marxism and the State*, Paul says that social power is an agent’s intentional use of causal powers to affect the conduct of other participants in the social relations that connect them together (Whetherly a: 38-9). Social forces can influence the whole society through power resources such as knowledge, physical force, and wealth. Social relations use these power resources to connect participants together. It is clear that Marxism’s basic theory of the state is based on its class structure. Social class refers to the hierarchical distinctions between individuals or groups in societies or cultures. Individuals are grouped by their economic positions as well as their political and economic interests. Paul says that classes are constituted by “the sum total of relations of production” (Whetherly a: 38-9). Production relations are an effective power which includes persons and productive forces. Under the class structure, Tom only gets sixty-five per month in the shoes company. He thinks that young men should not work in a warehouse. On account of the economic pressures and his nagging mother, Tom wants to be free, and to escape to the movie theaters:

AMANDA: Let me tell you—

TOM: I don’t want to hear any more!

....

AMANDA: I think you’ve been doing things that
 you’re ashamed of. That’s why you act like
 this. I don’t believe that you go every night

to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies
 night after night. Nobody in their right
 minds goes to the movies as often as you
 pretend to. People don't go to the movies at
 nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at
 two A.M.... (*Understanding* 114)

According to Paul, class interests express the purpose of two fundamental powers: the purpose of capitalists and workers of value through exploitation (Wetherly a: 41). Perhaps under some economic pressures of life, and Amanda's nagging, Tom escapes from home.

No doubt, his mother loves Laura. After she persistently tries to find a gentleman caller for his sister, Tom finally invites his friend Jim to have dinner at their house without knowing that Jim is engaged to be married:

AMANDA: It seems extremely peculiar that you
 wouldn't know your best friend was going
 to be married!

TOM: The warehouse is where I work, not where
 I know things about people! (*Understanding* 139)

Later, Amanda scolds Tom, saying that he only "lives in a dream" and "manufactures illusions" (*Understanding* 139)

When Amanda realizes that Laura is absent from the Business College, Amanda feels frustrated, and says earnestly to her:

AMANDA:
 ...I know so well what be-
 comes of unmarried women who aren't
 prepared to occupy a position. I've seen

such pitiful cases in the South—barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister’s husband or brother’s wife! —stuck away in some little mouse trap of a room—encouraged by one in-law to visit another—little bird like women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life!... (*Understanding* 112)

Amanda also expresses her feelings for the future to Laura: “we won’t have a business career—we’ve given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! What is there left but dependency all our lives?” (*Understanding* 113) For Amanda, without education, the only way out for Laura is to have her married to a nice young man and that is why she wants Laura to behave like a lady.

On the other hand, Amanda’s over-eagerness for Tom’s well-being has made her a nagging mother, because she is still insensitive to her son’s feeling by continues complaints about his eating habits, his smoking, and his going to the movies. She fails to understand the reasons for his staying out late, boredom with the warehouse job, and his need for adventure:

AMANDA (*to her son*): ... And chew—chew! Animals have secretions in their stomachs which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down (*Understanding* 109).

In Williams’ autobiography we learn that he was the son of a Puritanical mother; he has written many plays concerning Southern Gentlewomen, which could represent part of the

southern culture and gentility, as she asks Tom to eat gracefully at the table:

TOM: ...Eat
 food leisurely, son, and really enjoy it. A
 well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavors
 that have to be held in the mouth for appre-
 ciation. So chew your food and give your
 salivary glands a chance to function! (*Understanding* 109)

As a conservative Southern woman, Amanda also wants to control Tom's reading:

TOM: Yesterday you confiscated my books! You
 had the nerve to—

AMANDA: I took that horrible novel back to the li-
 brary—yes! That hideous book by that in-
 sane Mr. Lawrence.

I cannot control the output of diseased
 minds or people who cater to them—

TOM *laughs still more wildly.*

BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH

BROUGHT INTO MY HOUSE! No, no, no, no, no! (*Understanding* 114)

After Amanda calls D.H. Lawrence's book "filth", he begins to make up the story of his going to opium and gambling casinos to enrage her. In the heat of their argument, Tom drags his overcoat across the room and almost knocks down some of Laura's glass animals; at the sound, Laura cries out in fear. In fact, all three members of the Wingfields family are living in tension. To ease their tensions, Laura intends to live in her glass menagerie, Amanda lives in her past glory, and Tom has dreams of adventures.

B. Chance has the economical and psychological problems

Williams said that “the character of Chance Wayne spoke of something in all of us. He was very impressed by success” (Brown 253). “Here is the town I was born in, and lived in till ten years ago, in St. Cloud. I was a twelve-pound baby, normal and healthy, but with some kind of quantity “X” in my blood, a wish or a need to be different” Chance describes himself to Princess for the first time (*Sweet* 46). He said this because he thought he was very handsome and special, as he had been the star of the snob set, a group of people with big names and big money (*Sweet* 46-7). At a young age, Chance fell in love with Heavenly Finley. Heavenly becomes more important to Chance than anything else. They were close friends when Chance was only seventeen and Heavenly fifteen, and they had many great times together. Later, as Chance tells Princess Kosmonopolis, Heavenly’s father Boss Finley “figured his daughter rated someone a hundred, a thousand per cent better than me, Chance Wayne” (*Sweet* 51). Instead of letting Heavenly marry young Chance, Boss chased Chance out of town, which brings Chance endless misery. Boss Finley, with his wealth, could never let a poor boy like Chance take Heavenly away from him. According to Marx’s theory, people in higher social classes with greater power attempt to consolidate their own positions within society and maintain their ranking above the lower social classes in the social hierarchy. Social classes with a great deal of power are usually viewed as elites². Boss Finley, a politician, wants his daughter to marry, the doctor who cut out Heavenly’s diseased womb after Chance infected her. Felicia, another critic, also considers that “Chance” has “waned”, and that the town people now consider him a loser (Thomas 136). In fact, Bauer-Briski said that it was not only Boss who thought that Chance was not good enough for Heavenly, but also Chance himself felt he had to become a successful person in order to deserve her (Bauer c: 301). According to Marx, labors are determined by their own

² A sociological term for a small dominant group within a large society.

values. Wanting to be a successful man, Chance inadvertently becomes a gigolo to a rich woman who hires him for sex and companionship. At it turns out, his looks and sexual power are his only assets.

Chance even tries to intimidate the Princess:

CHANCE: You still got a name, you're still a personage, Princess. You wouldn't want "Confidential" or "Whisper" or "Hush-Hush" or the narcotics department of the F.B.I. to get hold of one of these tape-records, would you? And I'm going to make lots of copies. Hush? Princess?

PRINCESS: You are trembling and sweating... you see this part doesn't suit you, you just don't play it well, Chance.... (*Sweet 42*)

He tries to gain power over Princess by blackmailing her, because he needs money to be pretentious, to show the people in St. Cloud that he is successful.

But, in fact, Chance is twenty-nine years old, and without a plan for his life. He decides he must be a gigolo to an aging actress. Princess realizes Chance's hopeless situation, she sympathizes with him by saying: "Come here, kiss me, I love you.... [*Then to CHANCE with arms outstretched.*] What a child you are... Come here... (*Sweet 54*) Later, she allows him to buy fine clothes, to take her Cadillac, to drive around town to show off as he has wanted:

CHANCE: I want this big display. Big phony display in your Cadillac around town. And a wad a dough to flash in their faces and the fine clothes you've bought me, on me (*Sweet 54*).

According to Freud's theory in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the unconscious mind can be traced backwards "from a pathological idea into a patient's memory." The next step was

to apply to the dream itself as a symptom, and to apply to it the method of interpretation (Freud 15). In other words, dreams can be traced back to people's unfulfilled desires.

The big phony display of Cadillac and flashing of big dough by Chance are only his way to express his unfulfilled wish to tell his girlfriend: "Heavenly Finley that I've fought my way up for, and now that I've made it, the glory will be Heavenly, too (*Sweet* 93). When Aunt Noonie asks him:

AUNT NOONIE: For what? For a fake contest?

CHANCE: For love. The moment I hold her.

AUNT NONNIE: Chance.

....

CHANCE: I go back to Heavenly, or I don't. I live or die.

There's nothing in between for me (*Sweet* 83).

Aunt Nonnie can not accept the idea that Chance has become a gigolo, but she considers Chance is no longer a youth. Nonnie is serious toward Chance, and says to him: "What you want to go back to is your clean, unashamed youth. And you can't." She feels that Chance has to work hard by himself, not sell his soul. She has told him to go away from Royal Palms Hotel because it is dangerous to run into Heavenly and her father. Aunt Nonnie is one character who does not live in a dream.

Aunt Nonnie tries hard to awake him from the unreal dream. At the end of play, Chance still wishes he could be with Heavenly someday. However, Princess knows that Heavenly won't see him anymore. And also Heavenly's brother, Tom Junior is going to threaten him if Chance decides to stay in St. Cloud:

PRINCESS: I am going, now, on my way. [*He nods slightly, loosening the Windsor-knot of his knitted black silk tie. Her eyes stay on him.*] Well, are you leaving or staying?

CHANCE: Staying.

PRINCESS: You can't stay here. I'll take you to the next town.

CHANCE: Thanks but no thank you, Princess (*Sweet* 121).

In spite of Chance's rejections, Princess is still trying to persuade him to leave St. Cloud with her to the next town. But as Bauer-Briski says that Chance remembers what has really mattered to him is Heavenly. But he also realizes that there will be no common future for them, because he is solely responsible for Heavenly's misery (Bauer c: 321). In fact, he would rather face retribution than being part of Princess' "luggage."

C. Brick is under the economical, psychological and social influences

The play is introduced in the plantation home of a rich Mississippi, Delta family. Brick's older brother Gooper and his wife Mae have five children, Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, and Polly, whom are called "no-neck monsters" by Brick's wife, Margaret. Gooper and Mae have more children and so are trying to get bigger share of Big Daddy's inheritance after his death. At the same time, Margaret thinks that she and Brick also have the right to a fair share of the inheritance. However, Margaret is alone and feels lonely, because most of the time Brick does not pay any attention to her

MARGARET: [*intensely, fearfully*]:

The way y' were lookin' at me just now, befo' I caught your eye in the mirror and you started t' whistle! I don't know how t' describe it but it froze my blood! —I've caught you lookin' at me like that so often lately. What are you thinkin' of when you look at me like that?

BRICK:

I wasn't conscious of lookin' at you, Maggie.

MARGARET:

Well, I was conscious of it! What were you thinkin'? (*Cat 27*)

There are many similar complains, such as she expresses to Brick "I can't live on and on under these circumstances" (*Cat 40*). And she comments that he looks "so cool, so cool, and so enviably cool" (*Cat 30*). Margaret tries to awaken Brick's feelings, but he is totally indifferent and cool toward her. Brick only wishes to live according to his own will by avoiding having any connection with her. Margaret, on the contrary, strives to develop a good relationship with Brick.

At first, Margaret and Brick had a happy marriage. However, after Brick suspected that his intimate friend Skipper and Margaret had an unusual relationship; Margaret tried to explain to him: "This time I'm going to finish what I have to say to you. Skipper and I made love, if love you could call it, because it made both of us feel a little bit closer to you" (*Cat 55*).

Since Margaret believed that by making love to Skipper she could find out whether Skipper is a gay person or not, she went ahead with the act. After Skipper committed suicide, their marriage deteriorated further. Nervous and frustrated, Margaret is determined to fight for her marriage, and to mention her husband to get the share of inheritance. Margaret, on the other hand, tries to draw Brick's focus away from Skipper by saying: "But Brick?! — Skipper is dead! I'm alive! Maggie the cat is—alive! I am alive, alive! I am..." (*Cat 60*). Their current relationship is to "simply occupy in the same cage" (*Cat 35*). Margaret expresses her feelings about this big barrier in their marriage:

MARGARET:

Oh, Brick! How long does it have t' go on? This punishment?

Haven't I done time enough, haven't I served my term, can't I

apply for a—pardon? (*Cat 29*)

Later, Brick tells Big Daddy about his drinking:

BRICK:

This click that I get in my head that makes me peaceful. I got to drink till I get it. It's just a mechanical thing, something like a—like a—like a—

BIG DADDY:

Like a—

BRICK:

Switch clicking off in my head, turning the hot light off and
The cool night on and—(*Cat 98*)

In liquor, Brick finds relief from his pain. When Big Daddy and Brick have a revealing discussion which is a type of self-recognition, Big Daddy has mentioned his marriage to Brick:” Think of all the lies I got to put up with! —Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have any idea of? Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mama! —I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now! —even when I laid her! —regular as a piston...” (*Cat 108*) Big Daddy tries to cheer Brick up, but he continues to feel frustrated. On account of Brick's alcoholic problems, he sometimes sits by himself for a long time and without talking to anyone. Big Daddy cannot understand what his son is thinking about, and Brick finds that conversations with his father are so “painful”, and pointless:

BIG DADDY:

Well, if you do, you're smarter than I am, God damn it, because I don't understand. And this I will tell you frankly. I didn't make up my mind at all on that question and still to

this day I ain't made out no will! —Well, now I don't *have* to. The pressure is gone. I can wait and see if you pull yourself together or if you don't.

BRICK:

That's right, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:

You sound like you thought I was kidding.

BRICK:

No, sir, I know you're not kidding.

BIG DADDY:

But you don't care—?

BRICK:

No, sir, I don't care... (*Cat 110-11*)

Brick's drinking only keeps him away from people, because, psychologically, drinking lets him pay no attention to what other people say or think about him. Only his early memories in college can make him escape the trap of his friend's death and his marriage life for a short time. Economically, in college, Brick was a football player who did not have to worry about money, but after graduating from college, he had to think about earning money for his family. Brick often recalls his past when he was with his best football teammate, Skipper. Brick was crippled because he broke his ankles by jumping hurdles in a high school at the athletic field.

Brick still lives in his college years, but Margaret lives in the present. She considers everything realistically that she desires to inherit Big Daddy's huge estate and to save their marriage, as she explains to Brick: "you can be young without money, but you can't be old without it. You've got to be old *with* money because to be old without it is just too awful,

you've got to be one or the other, either *young* or with money, you can't be old and *without* it—That's the *truth*, Brick..." (Cat 54) In contrast, Big Daddy is rich, but he knows that when a life is spent, no one can buy it each:

BID DADDY:

Y'know how much I'm worth? Guess, Brick! Guess how much I'm worth!

[*Brick smiles vaguely over his drink.*]

Close on ten million in cash an' blue-chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile!

....

But a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished....(Cat 86)

Big Daddy spent most of his lifetime in the cotton fields, and Margaret tells Brick that, "he's still a Mississippi redneck, as much of a redneck as he must have been when he was just overseer here on the old Jack Straw and Peter Ochello place" (Cat 53). Big Daddy tells Big Mama that he worked hard to achieve success of his plantation and is not going to let anybody take his place. Big Daddy says: "I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger!" (Cat 77) His main goal is to encourage Brick to face up to his life not give up on it.

Both Big Daddy and Margaret try to help Brick to take responsibilities and rewards of life. However, Brick remains indifferent to his family members because he can not accept the truth of Skipper's confession about Margaret and himself therefore. To escape this reality, Brick drinks:

BRICK:

Yes!—I left out a long-distance call which I had from Skipper, in which he made a drunken confession to me and on which I hung up!—last time we spoke to each other in our lives...(*Cat* 124)

Big Daddy is now dying of cancer, a fact that is known to everyone in the family except himself and his wife, Big Mama. When Brick drops a hint of the truth about Big Daddy's health, Big Daddy wants him to finish it:

BRICK:

Aw, hell, Big Daddy, forget it. Come on out on the gallery and look at the fireworks they're shooting off for our birthday....

BIG DADDY:

First you finish that remark you were makin' before you cut off. "Many happy returns when they know there won't be any"? —Ain't that what you just said? (*Cat* 126)

The truth of Big Daddy's cancer is kept from him, and the play ends with Margaret's lie about her pregnancy. The play is full of lies for one reason or another, so Brick says that "mendacity" echoes throughout the play. However, Bigsby, a critic, explains that Williams thinks that the play equally characterizes the world in which characters live (Bigsby a: 82).