

Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or the dramatic aptitudes of the goddess Diana¹

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As is well known, and as the daily experience of culture proves, classical theatre –*stricto sensu* in this case: that is, Greek and Roman theatre- remains alive in our contemporary world as a result of a clear and never-questioned consciousness of the origins of Western scenic arts. I say it, of course, independently of the success –real or not- with which the great dramas of Classical Literature are performed for an audience which, on the other hand, may not be so demanding as necessary. But, besides *Antigones*, *Oedipuses*, *Phaedras*, *Medeas*, *Lysistratas*, etc., many contemporary playwrights refer to heroes, myths or historical events, which, in spite of coming from an ancient world, seem to endow their plays with an extra value. Well then, Tennessee Williams's plays are a good example of this fidelity to the classical legacy, and I hope that I will succeed in explaining accurately its nature and also its motives, which in my opinion are quite clear but not to the extent –since this is one of the author's inalienable rights- of revealing from the very beginning all their secrets. Later on I will approach the identification “Maggie the cat” = “Diana the huntress” that the American playwright introduces in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, but, for the time being, I should make some preliminary steps.

Indeed, T. Williams's plays have often been examined from the point of view of the classical legacy³ and I should like to mention, for instance, a good study by A. Gómez García entitled *Mito y realidad en la obra dramática de Tennessee Williams*⁴, which was published in Salamanca in 1988. In accordance with the literary tendency known as “mythical, archetypal or primitive”, she is in favour of relating –audaciously and at the same time carefully- several of T.

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³ See, e.g.: Coronis, A. *Tennessee Williams and the Greek Culture*. Athens: Kalendis, 1994. On his tragic conception: Asibong, E. B. *Tennessee Williams: the tragic tension: a study of the plays of Tennessee Williams from 'The Glass Menagerie' (1944) to 'The milk train doesn't stop here anymore (1966)*. Ilfracombe: Stockwell, 1978 and Fleche, A. *Mimetic disillusion: Eugene O'Neil, Tennessee Williams, and U. S. Dramatic Realism*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997. On *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: Welch: R. *Tennessee Williams. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: York Notes*. Harlow: York Press, 1996. On his bibliography and guides to research: Crandell, G. W. *Tennessee Williams: a descriptive bibliography*. Pittsburgh & London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995 and *Tennessee Williams: a guide to research and performance* (Philip C. Kolin, ed.). Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1998. Finally, as a general introduction to and criticism of his work: Griffin, A. *Understanding Tennessee Williams*. Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996; *The critical response to Tennessee Williams* (George W. Crandell, ed.). London: Greenwood. 1996; Tischler, N. *Student Companion to Tennessee Williams*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2000, and *Tennessee Williams. A Casebook* (edited by Robert F. Gross. New York & London: Routledge, 2002.

⁴ Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca.

Williams's plays with archetypal classical myths, which does not mean that the playwright, the good playwright in this case, becomes a prisoner of the prestigious and consolidated model but, on the contrary, he integrates it coherently into his personal symbolical world. With regard to T. Williams, then, this attitude shows an intelligent and skilful recreation or use of ancient myths because of their enigmatic, symbolical and non-temporary nature, so that A. Gómez establishes some significant associations such as: "Persephone in Saint Louis" and *The Glass Menagerie*; the "katábasis to Hades" and *Kingdom on Earth*; "Dionysus crowned with roses" and *The Rose Tattoo*; "Orpheus and Eurydice" and *Battle of Angels* and *Orpheus Descending*, and finally "Oedipus in search of his identity" and *Suddenly Last Summer*.

However, and quite surprisingly, A. Gómez García does not analyse the meaning of the explicit reference to the goddess Diana in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, either because she does not concede any special significance to it, or because she probably considers that, in this case, the allusion to the ancient myth does not play any relevant role. I will not deny that one of the well-known risks run by the "professionals" of Classical Tradition consists precisely of attributing a high significance –even exaggerated- to any classical reference, thus becoming victims of their enthusiasm for their specialised research. And, notwithstanding, I am reasonably convinced that a reading of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* which focuses on the "dramatic benefits" of the assumption of the values of Diana the huntress by Maggie the cat and other characters of the play is certainly a good way to discover, so to speak, its "essence"⁵. On the other hand, I also know the risks run by any researcher when he/she decides to follow the "archetypal method", that is, when he/she approaches a literary work conditioned by myth –Greek, Roman or any other. Indeed, myth can function not only as an inevitable reference but also as a hermeneutic dictatorship, because to follow the archetype is too often mistaken for "absolute fidelity", while T. Williams's plays would precisely prove that it is perfectly possible to "create" by relying on a consolidated paradigm and by feeling absolutely free at the same time to change, suppress, supply, adapt or juxtapose. Therefore, all these risks must certainly be taken into account but, on the other hand, given the presence of an explicit reference to an ancient myth, we should discover its hidden "secret".

Furthermore, he never admitted, against the opinion of his critics, to being a poetic realist: "The critics still want me to be a poetic realist, and I never was"⁶. He follows –it is true- the conventional laws of realism, and his characters, even when being grotesque, still show a clear desire to be credible, although the techniques that T. Williams uses in order to achieve this are not precisely conventional. In his opinion, characters must suggest and, in the end, go beyond the concrete reality of the drama: "I am not a direct writer; I am always an oblique writer, if I can be; I want to be allusive... life is too ambiguous to be represented in a cut and dried fashion"⁷. Consequently, his frequent appeal to the benefits of myth is really comprehensible, since, as unanimously admitted, *mythos* is neither logical *stricto sensu* nor univocal; on the contrary, it hides different meanings, stimulates our minds and it is highly malleable. To sum up: bearing in mind that the characters of T. Williams's plays are not very "normal", showing very often an extreme sensibility and seeming to be doomed to collide with the laws and customs of the

⁵ The play was performed for the first time on Broadway on the 24th march 1955 at the Morosco theatre in New York. It was directed by E. Kazan, reached 700 performances and T. Williams was awarded for the second time with the "Pulitzer Prize for Drama". E. Kazan introduced some changes into the third act in order to reduce the aggressiveness of Maggie the cat, but T. Williams always lamented having yielded to the famous director's requirements -needless to say, my analysis will follow the original version (regarding all these aspects, see e.g.: *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams* -Mathew C. Roudané ed.- Cambridge: C. U. P., 1997, chapter. 5 by Albert J. Devlin. "Writing in 'A place of stone': *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*".

⁶ A. Gómez. *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁷ A. Gómez. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

society in which they live, any language that, like myth, excels in suggesting rather than in rationalizing people, attitudes or events had to receive inevitably the American playwright's approval –leaving aside, of course, the role T. Williams himself played in the creation of another modern myth such as the South of the States⁸: its people, values, attitudes, etc.

Here ends the always necessary preface, having raised -maybe- too many cautions. However, I hope they will be useful in saving us from having to open explanatory parentheses later on. I start, then, both a reading and analysis of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* paying special attention, as pointed out before, to the significant role played by the allusion to Diana the huntress.

The identification Maggie the cat = Diana the huntress –which I still postpone- leads us in its turn to identify her husband, Brick, with the Hippolytus of Euripides's tragedy, i.e., the chaste son of Theseus who worships Artemis, the virgin goddess with whom he shares a true enthusiasm for a wild life in the woods where day after day he devotes himself to hunting⁹. Later on we shall learn the specific features and causes of Brick's anger against his wife but, for the time being, it is worth remembering the radical chastity and misogyny of Euripides's Hippolytus:

(The Servant): 'How then no word for a high and mighty goddess?'. (H): 'Who? Careful lest your tongue commit some slip'. (S. pointing to the statue): 'The goddess here, who stands beside your gate'. (H): 'I greet her from afar, for I am pure (ἀγνός)'. / ... / 'I like no god whose worship is at night'. / ... / (S): 'Yet since we should not imitate the young when their thoughts are like these, I shall pray, in words befitting a slave, to your statue,

⁸ See, e.g.: A. J. Devlin. *Op. cit.*: "Williams's maternal grandfather, the Reverend Walter E. Dakin, was the rector of St. George's Episcopal Church in Clarksdale from 1917 until his retirement in 1932. During that time, his grandson came to know the core and gossip of the town and Coahoma County from periods of residence and visitation at the rectory, and from joining his grandfather on calls to the privileged families of his parish" (102); and also Kenneth Holditch and Richard Freeman Leavitt. *Tennessee Williams and the South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002: "From all these southern experiences, the childhood in the Mississippi hills and the Delta, the years moving back and forth from New Orleans to Key West, Tennessee drew most of the material that he was to transform through the magic of his talent into great literature. To criticism that his portrayal of the region was not accurate, not realistic, he replied once that he was not a sociologist but a dramatist. 'What I am writing about is human nature', he said... He was not a realist, but the intensity with which he feels whatever he does feel is so deep, is so great, that we do end up with a glimpse of another kind of reality; that is, the reality in the spirit rather than in society" (103).

⁹ Robert Hethmon, in "The Foul Rag-and-Bone Shop of the Heart" (*Drama Critique. American Plays & Playwrights*. Vol. VIII, 3 (1965) 94-102), already pointed out this identification reaching at the following conclusion: "The myth is that of Hippolytus, and one need only recall Euripides's play to see the parallel Williams wishes to draw. A noble young man has devoted himself exclusively to an ideal way of life, the company of other young men, and the delights of athletic contests and hunting. He has refused to marry, is in fact quite ignorant of women, and has refused in any way to serve Aphrodite, whom Euripides wants us to see as the inescapable power of sex in all human life. The result is that Aphrodite, a benevolent power when properly honoured, becomes an implacable agent of destruction against whom ever Artemis, the huntress goddess of woods and fields who has been the exclusive object of Hippolytus's worship, is powerless" (99). He is convinced, then, of Artemis's inefficacy and, therefore, he does not believe in what I called the "dramatic benefits of the assumption of the values of Diana the huntress". Nevertheless, as I shall try to prove, in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Diana plays a significant role, even a paradoxical one, concerning the end of Hippolytus-Brick's celibacy. On the other hand, in my opinion the identification Maggie the cat = Phaedra proposed by Hethmon is certainly forced and implausible: "In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Williams constructs his own myth in which Maggie functions as Artemis, Aphrodite and Phaedra; in which Phaedra's death-dealing lie to Theseus about Hippolytus becomes Maggie's life-giving lie to Big Daddy about Brick; in which Hippolytus's honourable silence to Theseus about Phaedra becomes Brick's guilty silence to Big Daddy about Skipper..." (100).

my lady Cypris. One should be for giving: if youth makes someone's heart stiff with pride and he utters folly, pretend not to her him. For gods should be wiser than mortals' (99-120).

(Hippolytus): 'O Zeus, why have you settled women (γυναῖκας), this bane to cheat mankind, in the light of the sun? If you wished to propagate the human race, it was not from women that you should have provided this (οὐκ ἐκ γυναικῶν χοῆν). Rather, men should put down in the temples either bronze or iron or a mass of gold and buy offspring, each for a price appropriate to his means, and then dwell in houses free from the female sex (θηλειῶν ἄτερον)... That man has it easiest whose wife is a nothing, although a woman who sits in the house in her folly causes harm. But a clever woman, that I loathe (ἀλλ' ἀνωφελῆς εὐηθία κατ' οἶκον ἴδρυται γυνή. σοφὴν δὲ μισῶ)! May there never be in my house a woman with more intelligence than befits a woman (φρονούσα πλείον ἢ γυναικα χορή)! For Cypris engenders more mischief in the clever ones... It is in this fashion, despicable creature, that you have come to traffic with me in the sacred bed of my father (λέκτρων ἀθύκτον). I shall pour running water into my ears to wash away your proposals! How could I be such a traitor? The very sound of such things makes me feel unclean (οὐ... ἀγνεύειν δοκῶ)! I tell you plainly, it is my piety that saves you, woman. For if I had not been off my guard and trapped through my oath by the gods, I would never have kept myself from telling this whole story to my father. But as things are, while Theseus is out of the country, I shall leave the house and hold my tongue. But I shall return in company with my father and then see how you look upon him, you and your mistress. I shall know this, having had experience of your boldness. A curse on you all! I shall never take my fill of hating women (ὄλοισθε. μισῶν δ' οὐποτ' ἐμπλησθήσομαι γυναῖκας), not even if someone says that I am always talking of it. For they too are always in some way evil. Let a man accordingly either teach them to be chaste or allow me to tread upon them forever! (616-68)¹⁰.

Consequently, if, as is quite clear, I accept the paradigmatic misogyny of Euripides's Hippolytus as the inevitable mythical reference, I should honestly recognize that it would be far more logical to think of a Hippolytus (Brick) against Cypris (Maggie the cat) rather than to think of an unimaginable attack against Diana by Hippolytus. In fact, T. Williams seems to play this card first –and he will continue to do it throughout the play-, since he is also interested in emphasizing the incomprehensible and almost “obscene” abstinence –on account of being absurd and illogical- that Brick has imposed on both himself and Maggie. Indeed, his wife is the pure and genuine incarnation of the eternal feminine seductiveness or, in other words, she is Venus-Aphrodite in the world of human beings¹¹:

¹⁰ Translated by David Kovacs. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

¹¹ I have always believed that one of the great finds of the cinema-adaptation by Richard Brooks (1958) was precisely the reiterated image of Elizabeth Taylor, young and extremely beautiful, in front of the mirror changing her stockings or “emphasizing” –so to speak- the profile of her body while adjusting her blouse and skirt, so that bearing in mind –as I think Brooks did- the long pictorial tradition which shows Aphrodite-Venus in front of the mirror, it is not difficult to imagine a young Eros completely disposed with the help of his arrows to help his mother to triumph over such an unenthusiastic Hippolytus. With regard to the cinema-adaptations of T. Williams's plays, see, e. g: Maurice Yacovar. *Tennessee Williams and Film*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1977.

- . Stage direction: A pretty young woman, with anxious lines in her face, enters the bedroom and crosses to the bathroom door (17)¹².
- . Stage direction: She steps out of her dress, stands in a slip of ivory satin and lace (17).
- . Stage direction: Margaret raises her lovely bare arms and powders her armpits with a light sigh. She adjusts the angle of a magnifying mirror to straighten an eyelash... (19).
- . (Maggie to Brick): 'In fact! – I sometimes suspect that Big Daddy harbours a little unconscious 'lech' for' me... Way he always drops his eyes down my body when I'm talkin' to him, drops his eyes to my boobs an' licks his old chops!... I think it's mighty fine that that ole fellow, on the door-step of death, still takes in my shape with what I think is deserved appreciation!' (21).
- . Stage direction: She picks out a pair of jewelled sandals and rushes to the dressing-table (23).
- . Stage direction: She stands before the long oval mirror, touches her breast and then her hips with her two hands (36). How high my body stays on me! – Nothing has fallen on me – not a fraction... Other men still want me... last week in Memphis everywhere that I went men's eyes burned holes in my clothes... at Alice's party for her New York cousins, the best lookin' man in the crowd... followed me to the door and tried to force his way in! (37).

It would be useless to gloss the absolute eloquence of the words we have just read: of what they say and, above all, of what they suggest. I should dare to affirm, then, that all the power and beauty of the mythical Aphrodite-Venus has entered the stage and, on the other hand, the playwright seems to insist once and again that it would be as logical for Hippolytus-Brick to surrender to the charms of his particular Venus as for Venus-Maggie the cat not to be able to give up desiring and paying attention to the young, beautiful and perfect body of this chaste Hippolytus who despises her. These are, indeed, his identifying features:

- . Stage direction: He is still slim and firm as a boy... Perhaps in a stronger light he would show some signs of deliquescence, but the fading, still warm, light from the gallery treats him gently (18-19).
- . (Maggie to Brick): 'Yes, you should of been at that supper-table, Baby (22).
- . (Maggie to Brick): 'You've kept in good shape, though... I always thought drinkin' men lost their looks, but I was plainly mistaken... You're the only drinkin' man I know that it never seems t' put fat on... I wish you would lose your looks. If you did it would make the martyrdom of Saint Maggie a little more bearable. But no such goddam luck. I actually believe you've gotten better looking since you've gone on the bottle' (25).
- . (Big Mama): 'Why don't you get ugly, Brick, why don't you please get fat or ugly or something so I could stand it?' (31).
- . (Big Mama): 'Wha's my Brick, wha's mah precious baby!... you're my bad little boy' (47-48).
- . (Big Mama): 'That boy is just broken up over Skipper's death' (88).
- . He is 27 years old (96).
- . (Big Mama): 'My son, Big Daddy's boy! Little Father!' (104).
- . (Big Mama): 'Tonight Brick looks like he used to look when he was a little boy, just like he did when he played wild games and used to come home all sweaty and pink-cheeked and sleepy, with his –red curls shining' (100).

¹² All the quotations will correspond to the following edition and the numbers in brackets refer to it: *Tennessee Williams. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Other Plays*. London: Penguin Books, 1976.

As said before, Maggie the cat has all the necessary attributes of a charming Venus to catch and retain the attention of men –and, obviously, to awaken their desire-, but she has certainly failed with her particular Hippolytus-Brick. She has applied a wrong strategy and, as a consequence, thinks of a radical change since, some years ago, when she and Brick were young and it was still permitted to them to postpone the assumption of grown-up people’s responsibilities, they both enjoyed without restraint, as if they were the mythical Diana (Artemis) and Hippolytus, that total freedom and wildness experienced by those who are indomitable. We will know it thanks to an apparently trivial circumstance such as the fact that her hideous sister-in-law, Mae, reprimands Maggie because she has left a dangerous weapon, i.e. an arrow, within her nephews and nieces’ reach. Maggie finds immediately the suitable reply to such an insolent warning:

‘That’s my Diana Trophy. Won it at the intercollegiate archery contest on the Ole Miss campus... Brick and I still have our special archer’s licence. We’re goin’ deer-huntin’ on Moon Lake as soon as the season starts. I love to run with dogs through chilly woods, run, run, leap over obstructions’ (29).

After this highly significant information, it should be acknowledged that T. Williams shows an incredible ability to summarize in a few lines everything dictionaries of mythology present *in extenso* as the personal features –including the moon- of Artemis-Diana and her wild followers. We already suspect that, given the regression that Brick suffers, Maggie may have well thought that, as long as the present situation does not change, she should go back towards those previous times during which she relied on the complicity of true and loyal comradeships, that is, she should become “Dianized”, thus recovering ancient powers and excelling in the art of shooting her arrows, whether allegorically or not, against everybody and everything. And, on the other hand, being loyal to the values represented by the ancient myth, i.e. Diana, T. Williams helped, probably as no other American writer did, to create a contemporary one, that is to say, to consolidate the image of the vitality and “animalism” of people in the South of the States or at least of those who do not live anchored in an aristocratic pride which causes intellectual and vital paralysis. Page after page, then, this “Dianazation” process will develop until attaining the fitting degree in each case¹³. Here is, then, the “Dianized” Margaret of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*:

. Stage direction: Her voice has range, and music; sometimes it drops low as a boy’s and you have a sudden image of her playing boy’s games as a child (19).

. (Maggie to Brick): ‘Why are you looking at me like that?... Don’t you think I know that... That I’ve gone through this –hideous! – transformation, become – hard! Frantic! – cruel!... I’m not – thin-skinned any more, can’t afford t’ be thin-skinned any more’ (23-4).

. (Maggie to Brick): ‘You know, if I thought you would never, never, never make love to me again – I would go downstairs to the kitchen and pick out the longest and sharpest knife I could find and stick it straight into my heart, I swear that I would!’ (26).

. (Mae to Maggie): ‘Why are you so catty?’. (Maggie): ‘Cause I’m a cat!’ (30).

. (Maggie): ‘I feel all the time like a cat on a hot tin roof!’. (Brick): ‘Then jump off the roof, jump off it, cats can jump... uninjured... Take a lover!’. (Maggie): ‘I can’t see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see you!’ (31).

. (Maggie): ‘I am Maggie the Cat!’ (36).

¹³ I do not agree, then, with Robert Hethmon (*op. cit.*) when he affirms: “It is essential to realize that Maggie’s line of development in the play takes her far away from the moment in the first act when she can hopefully recall that they still have their ‘special archers’s license’” (100).

Indeed, Maggie must be “catty” because, in addition to the necessity of satisfying –if I may say so- the “demands” of the myth, in this South where she was born and lives most of the inhabitants are catty or, under certain circumstances, they hasten to leave aside all those civilized manners which, in their case, seem to be artificial additions. Medicine has given up hope for Big Daddy; he will have to transfer his empire very soon and, taking into account this harsh truth, people around him are determined both to give way to their primary instincts and to taste the honey of an avarice which has become a true passion.

However, it is worth noticing first to what extent the playwright takes care to model a literary world such as that ancient delta transformed into a rich plantation, which seems to be a natural reserve of wild and dangerous beasts rather than a civilized realm. And, needless to say, if the struggle for survival –or simply avarice- takes place among animals, the presence of Diana and Hippolytus, both always accompanied by animals and being at the same time good hunters, is absolutely justified:

- . (Maggie referring to Mae and Gooper’s children): ‘... no-neck monsters’ (17).
- . (Maggie): ‘Their fat little heads are set on their fat little bodies without a bit of connexion... you can’t wring their necks... all no-neck people are monsters... I don’t know where their voice-boxes are located... couldn’t you feed those precious little things at a separate table with an oilcloth cover? They make such a mess... five no-neck monsters slobbering and drooling over their food... pigs... They’ve brought the whole bunch down here like animals to display at a county fair’ (17-8).
- . (Maggie): ‘But Mae? Why did y’give dawgs’ names to all your kiddies? ... Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, Polly! –Sounds like four dogs and a parrot ... animal act in a circus!’ (29).
- . (Maggie referring to her sister-in-law): ‘That monster of fertility, Mae’ (20).
- . (Maggie explaining the anniversary dinner to Brick): ‘Mae an’ Gooper were side by side at the table, directly across from Big Daddy, watchin’ his face like hawks’ (22).
- . (Brick after Maggie’s references to Skipper): He breaks away from her and seizes the small boudoir chair and raises it like a lion-tamer facing a big circus cat (31).
- . (Big Mama –quoted before): ‘Tonight Brick looks like he used to look when he was a little boy, just like he did when he played wild games and used to come home’ (100).
- . Stage direction (referring to Big Mama who is going to tell Brick what she considers good news concerning Big Daddy): Big Mama appears through the opposite gallery doors behind Margaret, buffing and puffing like an old bulldog (32).
- . (Big Mama who wants to talk to Brick): Big Mama, entering through hall door like a charging rhino (47).
- . Stage direction (entering Brick’s room): Big Daddy appears first, a tall man with a fierce, anxious look (46).
- . Stage direction (Maggie in order to answer to Mae): ... turning on her fiercely, with a brilliant smile (51).
- . Stage direction (after Maggie has announced that she and Brick will have a baby): Brick shrugs slightly and drops an ice cube into another glass. Margaret crosses quickly to his side, saying something under her breath, and she pours the liquor for him, staring up almost fiercely into his face (101).

Ergo, this is a world of beasts, a wild world where, logically and comprehensibly, Maggie the cat has no other option but to run, jump, pursue and shoot if some day, after many unmerciful attacks, she has the intention of enjoying the economic safety that only thanks to the family heritage, finally in Brick’s hands, she will be able to achieve. In the meantime, however, this contemporary Diana knows perfectly well that her attributes are real and not cosmetic:

. (Maggie to Brick): ‘They’re up to cutting you out of your father’s estate (19)... you’re a perfect candidate for Rainbow Hill, Baby, and that’s where they aim to ship you –over my dead body!’ (20).

. (Maggie): ‘I’m facing the facts’ (39).

Indeed, Maggie the cat, a true Diana who is expert at the art of shooting, will face reality by shooting her arrows:

- a) against every sort of family conspiracy which, as just seen, ignores Brick and his rights;
- b) against the stupid pride of those who are merely successful climbers¹⁴;
- c) against the unfair conditions which are imposed upon others by pure people¹⁵;
- d) against the injustice of having to defend herself as a result of groundless accusations¹⁶;
- e) against the sexual indifference of her husband¹⁷;
- f) against all sorts of dreams of a future eternal life which, nevertheless, cannot save those who are going to die inexorably¹⁸;
- g) against poverty which only does not corrupt those who are lucky enough not to experience it¹⁹;
- h) against the civilized law of silence, thus giving birth to a cyst which needs to be removed²⁰;

¹⁴ (Maggie): ‘... The Flynns never had a thing in this world but money and they lost that, they were nothing at all but fairly successful climbers. Of course, Mae Flynn came out in Memphis eight years before I made my *début* in Nashville, but... I know who rates an’ who doesn’t rate in Memphis society. Why, y’know ole Papa Flynnn, he barely escaped doing time in the Federal pen for shady manipulations on th’ stock market...’ (22-3).

¹⁵ (Brick): ‘... I feel embarrassed for you!’. (Maggie): ‘Feel embarrassed! But don’t continue my torture. I can’t live on and on under these circumstances’. (Brick): ‘You agreed to’. (Maggie): ‘I know but’. (Brick): ‘Accept that condition!’. (Maggie): ‘I CAN’T CAN’T CAN’T’ (31).

¹⁶ (Big Mama): ‘... Some single men stop drinkin’ when they git married and others start! Brick never touched liquor before he’. (Maggie –crying out): ‘THAT’S NOT FAIR!’. (Big Mama): ‘Fair or not fair I want to ask you a question, one question: D’you made Brick happy in bed?’. (Maggie): ‘Why don’t you ask if he makes me happy in bed’. (Big Mama): ‘Because I know that’. (Maggie): ‘It works both ways!’. (Big Mama): ‘Something’s not right! You’re childless and my son drinks (Someone has called her downstairs and she has rushed to the door on the line above. She turns at the door and pints at the bed) - When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!’. (Maggie): ‘That’s... –not – fair...’. (35-6).

¹⁷ (Maggie): ‘... You know, our sex life didn’t just peter out in the usual way, it was cut off short, long before the natural time for it to, and it’s going to revive again, just as sudden as that. I’m confident of it. That’s what I’m keeping myself attractive for. For the time when you’ll see me again like other men see me. Yes, like other men see me. They still see me, Brick, and they like what they see. Uh-huh. Some of them would give their. Look, Brick!’ (36).

¹⁸ (Maggie): ‘It’s malignant and it’s terminal’. (Brick): ‘Does Big Daddy know it?’. (Maggie): ‘Hell, do they ever know it? Nobody says, ‘You’re dying’. You have to fool them. They had to fool themselves’. (Brick): ‘Why?’. (Maggie): ‘Why? Because human beings dream of life everlasting, that’s the reason! But most of them want it on earth and not in heaven’ (38).

¹⁹ (Maggie): ‘Always had to suck up people I couldn’t stand because they had money and I was poor as Job’s turkey... My daddy loved his liquor, he fell in love with his liquor the way you’ve fallen in love with Echo Spring! And my poor Mama, having to maintain some semblance of social position, to keep appearances up, on an income of one hundred and fifty dollars a month on those old government bonds! When I came out, the year that I made my *début*, I had just two evening dresses! One Mother made me from a patten in Vogue, the other a hand-me-down from a snotty rich cousin I hated! The dress that I married you in was my grandmother’s weddin’ gown... So that why I’m like a cat on a hot tin roof!’ (40).

- i) against avarice and ambition which so often disguise themselves as altruism²¹;
- j) against venomous thoughts and words; against poison in heart and mind²²;
- k) against malice and envy²³, and
- l) against -even by means of a nasty act of blackmail- both the peculiar and easy conformism of those who hasten to “give up” (Brick)²⁴.

Notwithstanding, all the points of this long list are not equally relevant. Maggie the cat, this brave woman of the South whom T. Williams has “Dianized” by giving her the wildest features of the virgin goddess, will fight above all against the “uranic” attitude of her husband, against the misunderstood purity of a man who, instead of satisfying the urges of his flesh, certainly natural, “apostatizes” from having accomplished the rite of marriage instead of having devoted himself to excellent goals. Maggie knows how to shoot against all this, i.e. against the purity that “uranic” people impose –obviously without asking for their permission- upon others who, as a consequence, are forced to kill in themselves the somatic dimension of the human *éros*.

Therefore, and bearing in mind that virginity is precisely the attribute which corresponds to the chosen mythic model, are we now faced with an insoluble paradox? The easiest answer would be to say that T. Williams, as warned from the very beginning, always exercises his right to write regardless of tyrannical fidelities, but very often paradoxes are created not to become aporias but to neutralize the opposite poles of an apparent contradiction. And, if so -as I shall point out later on-, very likely Diana continues to play her role, even when her arrows open the “road” towards the reestablishment of conjugal relations. Let us read, however –and I beg your pardon for the length of the following quotation-, the key points of the merciless confrontation between the two main protagonists of the drama, Maggie and Brick:

. (Maggie to Brick): ‘Oh excuse me, forgive me, but laws of silence don’t work!... When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don’t work, it’s just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hope of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn’t put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant (26-7)... 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... you asked too much of people, of me, of him, of all the unlucky poor damned sons of bitches that happen to love

²⁰ (Maggie): ‘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. You see, you son of a bitch, you asked too much of people, of me, of him, of all the unlucky poor damned sons of bitches that happen to love you...’ (41).

²¹ (Gooper): ‘I’ve got a right to discuss my brother with other members of MY OWN family which don’t include you. Why don’t you go out there and drink with Brick?...’. (Maggie): ‘This is a deliberate campaign of vilification for the most disgusting and sordid reason on earth, and I know what it is! It’s avarice, avarice, greed, greed!’ (96).

²² (Gooper): ‘... I’ve resented Big Daddy’s partiality to Brick ever since Brick was born, and the way I’ve been treated like I was just barely good enough to spit on and sometimes not even good enough for that. Big Daddy is dying of cancer... it’s poisoning of the whole system due to the failure of the body to eliminate its poisons’. (Maggie): ‘Poisons, poisons! Venomous thoughts and words! In hearts and minds! – That’s poisons!’ (97).

²³ (Maggie): ‘Why don’t you stop venting your malice and envy on a sick boy?’ (98).

²⁴ (Maggie): ‘And so tonight we’re going to make the lie true, and when that’s gone, I’ll bring the liquor back here and we’ll get drunk together, here, tonight, in this place that death has come into... What do you say?’. (Brick): ‘I don’t say nothing. I guess there’s nothing to say’. (Maggie): ‘Oh, you weak people, you weak, beautiful people!, who give up. What you want is someone to (She turns out the rose-silk lamp) take hold of you. Gently, gently, with love! And...’ (105).

you... And so we made love each other to dream it was you, both of us!... It was one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends, it couldn't be anything else, you being you, because it was love that never could be carried through to anything satisfying or even talked about plainly... (Brick): One man has one great good true thing in his life. One great good thing which is true! –I had friendship with Skipper. –You are naming it dirty!... Not love with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper was that one great true thing, and you are naming it dirty! ... (Maggie): Brick, don't brain me yet, let me finish!... I know... that it was only Skipper that harboured even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure between you two!... You married me early that summer we graduated out of Ole Miss, and we were happy... we... hit heaven together ev'ry time that we loved! But that fall you an' Skipper turned down wonderful offers of jobs in order to keep on bein' football heroes –pro-football heroes. You organized the Dixie Stars that fall, so you could keep on bein' team-mates for ever! But somethin' was not right with it! –Me included! –between you... I said, 'Skipper! Stop lovin' my husband or tell him he's got to let you admit it to him!' –one way or another! He slapped me hard on the mouth! –then turned and run without stopping once... When I came to his room that night a little scratch like a shy little mouse at his door, he made that pitiful, ineffectual little attempt to prove that what I had said wasn't true... In this way, I destroyed him, by telling him truth that he and his world which he has born and raised in, yours and his world, had told him could not be told?... From then on Skipper was nothing at all but a receptacle for liquor and drugs... Who shot cock-robin? I with my merciful arrow!... Christ, no! Brick, I'm not good. I don't know why people have to pretend to be good, nobody's good... Skipper is dead! I'm alive! Maggie the cat is alive! I am alive! I am' (41-4).

On the stage we see now neither the bow nor the arrows of this brave Diana. Indeed, Skipper was killed by the truth, which is the enemy of silence or simulation, when Maggie intended to prevent that cancer –because certainly it could still be removed- from becoming malignant and terminal. Maggie the cat was not “good” because she did not want to play a secondary role, or, in other words, she is selfish in a natural way. First, she seems to be disposed to fight in favour of all those “Lord Alfred Douglasses” –Oscar Wilde's beloved- throughout the centuries, thus claiming the rights of loves “which dare not speak their name”, but we see quite clearly very soon that, rather than by an apologetic will, she is moved by the firm determination to control her husband's attitude. Brick is ashamed of himself and she will be generous enough to try to understand the sublimated friendship between Brick and Skipper, but neither at the cost of closing her eyes to injustice nor at the one of keeping silence on it. Indeed, Maggie knows how to denounce the abominable vice consisting of sublimating natural urges to the extent of causing, sooner or later, insurmountable episodes of human pain, both physical and spiritual, which might have been avoided. Skipper's breakdown and death was the high price to be paid for having created a false realm of purity, an imposed one at least concerning Brick's friend. Maggie simply unmask the game that both friends and athletes wanted to perpetuate, since the true “pandemic” dimension of Skipper's love and desire for Brick made it possible –and only with a little outside help- to put an end to long years of false and tyrannical idealism. This “Dianized” Maggie, whether paradoxically or not, seems to have been conceived to denounce the misery of the most Platonic –and hostile to matter- love. One can think of the speeches by Phaedrus, Pausanias, Aristophanes, Diotima or Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, but, in the end, Brick's angry self-defence can only find its legitimacy by establishing a parallel with “one of those beautiful, ideal things they tell about in the Greek legends”, one of those “uranic” masculine loves which

assassinate human senses with high and often mortal doses of sublimated companionship²⁵. Maggie the cat, vital and above all “alive”, almost animal and “rooted” deeply in the present world, might have given up and even withdrawn if both friends had logically assumed the carnal dimension of their love –or at least if Brick had wanted to listen first and to consent afterwards to Brick’s probable sexual demands. But, finally, Brick shows the tragic nature of his personality, divided into body and soul, stain and purity²⁶, to anyone who dares to torture him with malicious insinuations, thus perpetuating unconsciously -but implacably- the most offensive and classical – i. e. Greek- misogyny:

. (Brick to Big Daddy): ‘You think so, too? You think so, too? You think me an’ Skipper did, did, did! –sodomy! –together?... You think we did dirty things between us, Skipper an’... You think that Skipper and me were a pair of dirty old men?... ducking sissies? Queers?’ (77).

. (Brick): ‘Why can’t exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship! Between two men be respected as something clean and decent without being thought of as... Fairies... Skipper and me had a clean, true thing between us!... Normal? No! –It was too rare to be normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be normal’ (78-9).

. (Big Daddy to Brick): ‘You! –dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it! –before you’d face truth with him!. B: His truth, not mine!’ (81).

²⁵ Remember, for instance, the Pausanias’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* 181a-c: ‘For every action it may be observed that as acted by itself it is neither noble or base (οὔτε καλὴ οὔτε αἰσχρὰ). For instance, in our conduct at this moment, whether we drink or sing or converse, none of these things is noble in itself; each only turns out to be such in the doing, as the manner of doing it may be (ὡς ἂν παραχθῆ). For when doing of it is noble and right, the thing itself becomes noble; when wrong, it becomes base. So also it is with loving, and Love is not every case noble or worthy of celebration, but only when he impels us to love in a noble manner. Now the Love that belongs to the Popular Aphrodite is in very truth popular and does his work at haphazard: this is the Love we see in the meaner sort of men; who, in the first place, love women as well as boys; secondly, where they love, they are set on the body more than the soul; and thirdly, they choose the most witless people they can find, since they look merely to the accomplishment and care not if the manner be noble or no. Hence they find themselves doing everything at haphazard, good or its opposite, without distinction: for this love proceeds from the goddess who is far the younger of the two, and who in her origin partakes of both female and male. But the other Love springs from the Heavenly goddess who, firstly, partakes not of the female but only of the male; and secondly, is the elder, untinged with wantonness: wherefore those who are inspired by this Love betake them to the male, in fondness for what has the robuster nature and a larger share of mind (τὸ ἐρρωμονέστερον καὶ νοῦν μᾶλλον ἔχον)... They love boys when they begin to acquire some mind (νοῦν) –a growth associated with that of down on their chins. For I conceive that those who begin to love them at this age (νεόν) are prepared to be always with them and share all with them as long as life shall last: they will not take advantage of a boy’s green thoughtlessness (ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ) to deceive him and make a mock of him by running straight off to another’ -translated by Lamb, W. R. M. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

²⁶ On this aspect of T. Williams’s dramas, see e.g.: *Magical Muse. Millennial Essays on Tennessee Williams* (edited by Ralph F. Voss. Tuscaloosa and London: the University of Alabama Press, 2002, chapter 6 by Robert Siegel. “The Metaphysics of Tennessee Williams”: “From Parmenides’ s insistence that language instead of empiricism could lead us to immutable truths, to Plato’s forms... to Descartes’s distrust of an evil genie who deceives his senses, and to Kant’s sense of isolation, the human being trapped in his body without ever knowing what another body thinks and feels, Western rationality has regarded the flesh as an impediment and an impostor, a troublemaker thwarting the mind’s awareness of the self and the world. Nowhere in modern theatre is this spirit examined and evaluated as it is in the work of Tennessee Williams”.

. (Brick to Big Daddy): ‘I think that Maggie had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed, which is not much closer than two cats on a –fence humping’ (80)²⁷.

It was not sodomy, they were not a pair of dirty old men, ducking sissies, queers. It was a true and deep friendship between two men, a clean and decent one, and as such too rare to be normal. On the contrary, his conjugal relations with Maggie were merely animal, as if they were two cats completely unable to dominate their instincts by means of a reason which is alien to them. Brick is very conscious of the nobleness of his vindication, but he seems not to notice –i.e. T. Williams- that his arguments are precisely those which, many centuries ago, led Plutarch to write his *Eroticus* in order to associate for evermore “woman” (*gyné*) with love and friendship (*éros kai philía*), thus questioning the common opinion of traditional pederasty represented in his dialogue by Protogenes who, *mutatis mutandis*, perpetuates himself –so to speak- in this American Hyppolitus:

Since it is necessary (marriage) for producing children, said Protogenes, there is no harm in legislators talking it up and singing its praises to the masses. But genuine Love has no connection whatsoever with the women’s quarters. I deny that it is love that you have felt for women and girls any more than flies feel love for milk or bees for honey or than caterers and cooks have tender emotions for the calves and fowls they fatten in the dark. In a normal state one’s desire for bread and meat is moderate, yet sufficient; but abnormal indulgence of this desire creates the vicious habit called gluttony and gormandizing. In just the same way there normally exists in men and women a need for the pleasure derived from each other; but when the impulse that derives us to this goal is so vigorous and powerful that it becomes torrential and almost out of control (*πολλήν και δυσκάρηκτον*), it is a mistake to give the name Love to it. Love, in fact, it is that attaches himself to a young and talented soul (*εὐφροῦς και νέας*) and through friendship (*διὰ φιλίας*) brings it to a state of virtue (*ἀρετήν*); but the appetite (*ἐπιθυμία*) for women we are speaking of, however well it turns out, has for net gain only an accrual of pleasure in the enjoyment of a ripe physical beauty (*ἀπόλαυσιν ὥρας και σώματος*)... The object of desire is, in fact, pleasure and enjoyment (*ἡδονή και ἀπόλαυσις*); while Love, if he loses the hope of inspiring friendship, has no wish to remain cultivating a deficient plant which has come to its prime, if the plant cannot yield the proper fruit of character to produce friendship and virtue (*φιλίαν και ἀρετήν*). If, however, such a passion (*πάθος*) must also be called Love, let it at least be qualified as an effeminate and bastard love (*θηλιν και νόθον*), that takes its exercise in the women’s quarters as bastards do in the Cynosarges... there is only one genuine Love, the love of boys (*παιδικός*). It is not ‘flashing with desire’, as Anacreont says of the love of maidens, or ‘drenched with unguents, shining bright’. No, its aspects is simple and unspoiled (*λιτὸν... και ἄθροπτον*). You will see it in schools of philosophy (*ἐν σχολαῖς φιλοσόφοις*), or perhaps in the gymnasia and

²⁷ And even then Brick’s indifference dominated: (Maggie) ‘You were a wonderful lover... and I think mostly because you were really indifferent to it... Never had any anxiety about it, did it naturally, easily, slowly, with absolute confidence and perfect calm, more like opening a door for a lady or seating her at a table than giving expression to any longing for her’ (26). In fact, Brick does not like any sort of physical contact, not even a kiss: (Big Mama): ‘Brick never liked bein’ kissed or made a fuss over, I guess because he’s always had too much of it!’ (48). Stage direction: She (Big Mama) comes over to him (Brick) and runs her fat shaky hand through his hair. He draws aside as he does from all physical contact) (100). (Maggie has announced that they will have a baby). Stage direction: She (Big Mama) rushes at him (Brick). He averts his face from her sobbing kisses (104).

palaestrae (γυμνάσια καὶ παλαίστρας), searching for young men whom it cheers on with a clear and noble cry to the pursuit of virtue when they are found worthy of its attention. But that other lax and housebound love (ὑγρὸν... καὶ οἰκουρὸν), that spends its time in the bosoms and beds of women (ἐν κόλποις... καὶ κλινίδιαις), ever pursuing a soft life (τὰ μαλθακὰ), enervated amid pleasure devoid of manliness and friendship and inspiration (ἡδοναῖς ἀνάνδροις καὶ ἀφίλοις καὶ ἀνευθουσιάστοις), it should be proscribed, as in fact Solon did proscribe it. He forbade slaves to make love to boys or to have a rubdown, but he did not restrict their intercourse with women. For friendship (φιλία) is a beautiful and courteous relationship (καλὸν καὶ ἀστεῖον), but mere pleasure (ἡδονή) is base and unworthy of a free man (κοινὸν καὶ ἀνελεύθερον). For this reason also it is not gentlemanly or urbane to make love to slave boys: such a love is mere copulation (συνουσία), like the love of women (ὁ τῶν γυναικῶν)’ -translated into English by W. C. Helmbold. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969. (750C-751B)²⁸.

Having paid attention to one of the central points of the drama, we should continue by approaching the general theme in order to check that -on this occasion without both the physical presence of the bow and the explicit reference to the arrows- the “Dianizing” process that I have tried to illustrate has to do not only with Maggie the cat but also with other protagonists of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in different moments and degrees. And, obviously, Big Daddy, the man who made himself and transformed the delta into a rich plantation, the man who, having lived in misery for a long time, succeeded in avoiding any sort of dangerous self-resignation, also has catty eyes with the help of which he knows how to focus and shoot:

- a) against the hypocrisy of his own life²⁹;
- b) against Gooper and Mae’s nosiness and their betrayal of Brick and Maggie³⁰;
- c) against any kind of useless luxury³¹;
- d) against the misery of the children on the hills around Barcelona, which formed a contrast with the fat priests on its streets³²;

²⁸ Plutarch’s final retort appears in 769 B-C: “So it is ridiculous to maintain that women have no participation in virtue. What need is there to discuss their prudence and intelligence, or their loyalty and justice, when many women have exhibited a daring and great-hearted courage which is truly masculine? And to declare that their nature is noble in all other relationships and then to censure it as being unsuitable for friendship alone –that is surely a strange procedure. They are, in fact, fond of their children and their husbands; their affections are like a rich soil ready to receive the germ of friendship; and beneath it all is a layer of seductive grace. Just as poetry adds to the prose meaning the delights of song and metre and rhythm, making its educational power more forceful and its capacity for doing harm more irresistible; just so nature has endowed women with a charming face, a persuasive voice, a seductive physical beauty”.

²⁹ (Big Daddy to Big Mama): ‘... I been through the laboratory from A to Z. I’ve had the goddam exploratory operation, and nothing is wrong with me but a spastic colon – made spastic, I guess, by disgust! By all the goddam lies and liars that I have had to put up with, and all the goddam hypocrisy that I lived with all these forty years that we been livin’ together!’ (55).

³⁰ (Big Daddy to Mae): ‘... You listen at night like a couple of ruttin peek-hole spies and go and give a report on what you hear to Big Mama... I’m goin’ to move you an’ Gooper out of that room, I can’t stand sneakin’ an’ spyin’, it makes me sick’ (57-8).

³¹ (Big Daddy to Brick): ‘... Y’know how much I’m worth?... 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...’ (60).

³² (Big Daddy): ‘The hills around Barcelona in the country of Spain and the children running over those bare hills in their bare skins beggin’ like starvin’ dogs with howls and screeches, and how fat the priests are on the streets of Barcelona...’ (60).

- e) against child prostitution in Morocco³³;
- f) against the hypocritical silence which prevents men and women from confessing their fears³⁴;
- g) against hiding sexual desire³⁵;
- h) against the lack of communication or civilized silence between fathers and sons³⁶;
- i) against his son's alcoholism, against that click which does not give him peace and, furthermore, postpones the assumption –often a painful one- of grown-up people's responsibilities³⁷;
- j) against any sort of metaphysics, which is absurd from his point of view, since it insists on speaking of a future life after death for human beings instead of putting them on the same level with fishes, birds, reptiles and insects³⁸;
- k) against the stupid reason which leads his son to throw his life away like something disgusting he picked up on the street³⁹;
- l) against lying and liars, against that mendacity his son loathes⁴⁰;
- m) against any attitude consisting of escaping from life⁴¹;
- n) against the temptation, which he finally rejects, of talking around, leaving something unspoken and, as a result, in favour of a true dialogue and communication between fathers and sons⁴²;
- o) against the fact that there are loves which dare not speak their name, thus not offending parents' hearing and consciences but leading their children to an insurmountable and unfair fight against themselves⁴³;
- p) against intolerance⁴⁴ and, above all,

³³ (Big Daddy): '... And then in Morocco, them Arabs, why, prostitution begins at four or five, that's no exaggeration, why, I remember one day in Marrakech...' (61).

³⁴ (Big Daddy): 'Ignorance – of mortality – is a comfort. A man don't have that comfort, he's the only living thing that conceives of death, that knows what it is' (63).

³⁵ (Big Daddy): '... Yes, boy, I'll tell you something that you might not guess. I still have desire for women and this is my sixty-fifth birthday' (63).

³⁶ (Big Daddy): '... Stay here till this talk is finished, young fellow'. (Brick): 'I thought it was finished, Big Daddy'. (Big Daddy): 'It ain't even begun' (64).

³⁷ (Brick): 'I have to hear that little click in my head that makes me peaceful. Usually I hear it sooner than this... I just haven't got the right level of alcohol in my blood-stream yet!...'. (Big Daddy): 'If you ain't careful you're gonna crawl off this plantation and then, by Jesus, you'll have to hustle your drinks along Skid Row!' (Brick): 'That'll come, Big Daddy'. (Big Daddy): 'Naw, it won't. You're my son, and I'm going to straighten you out!' (67-8).

³⁸ (Big Daddy): 'When you are gone from here, you are long gone and nowhere! The human machine is not different from the animal machine or the fish machine or the bird machine or the reptile machine or the insect machine! It's just a whole God damn lot more complicated and consequently more trouble to keep together' (68).

³⁹ (Big Daddy): '... Why do you drink? Why are you throwing your life away, boy, like somethin' disgusting you picked up on the street?' (70).

⁴⁰ (Brick): '... lying and liars...'. (Big Daddy): 'Who's been lying to you, has Margaret been lying to you, has your wife been lying to you about something, Brick?'. (Brick): 'Not her. That's wouldn't matter'. (Brick): 'No one single person and no one lie... The whole, the whole thing' (71).

⁴¹ (Big Daddy): '... I've lived with mendacity! Why can't you live with it? Hell, you got to live with it, there's nothing else that you can live with!' (72).

⁴² (Big Daddy to Brick): (Big Daddy): 'Wait! – Brick... Don't let's leave it like this, like them other talks we've had, we've always – talked around things, we've just talked around things for some ruten reason, I don't know what, it's always like something was left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us was honest enough with the other...' (73).

⁴³ (Big Daddy): 'I seen all things and understood a lot of them... When Jack Straw died – why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin' like a dog does when its master's dead, and died, too!' (76-7).

- q) against the human temptation of not believing in the cancer that Brick finally confirms, because it is much easier to think that his son's words have been simply for revenge on account of having previously subjected him to the torture of confession⁴⁵.

Even Brick, Big Daddy's favourite son, for whom not Medicine but he himself and his tortured and deceitful spirit have given up hope, still seems to keep -at least during the short time in which the click has not taken him towards the wonderful world of induced amnesia- enough courage to attack and harm. It is he in fact who does not stand that the birthday-feast in honour of his father has become a great show of tragic irony where, given that everybody knows that the "hero" is going to die irremediably, the fact of seeing him being still proud of his capacities and power transforms him into a tragicomic character⁴⁶. Brick refuses to tell lies on anything; he despises the polite custom of talking to parents about nothing; he loathes lying and liars, and a noble conception of friendship forces him not to fall into the error of mendacity⁴⁷:

. (Brick): 'I didn't get him a present'. (Maggie): 'I got one for you'. (Brick): 'All right. You write the card, then'. (Maggie): 'And have him know you didn't remember his birthday?'. (Brick): 'I didn't remember his birthday'. (Maggie): 'You don't have to prove you didn't!'. (Brick): 'I don't want to fool him about it' (28).

. (Big Daddy): '... Stay here, you son of a bitch! – till I say go!'. (Brick): 'I can't'. (Big Daddy): 'You sure in hell will, God damn it'. (Brick): 'No, I can't. We talk, you talk, in – circles! We get nowhere, nowhere! It's always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don't have a ruttin' thing to say to me!' (68-9).

. (Brick to his father after having told him that he is going to dye): 'Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an' death's the other... we've been friends... – And being friends is telling each other the truth' (83)⁴⁸.

And as the end of my analysis I should like to present some passages of *La mort dans les yeux. Figures de l'Autre en Grèce ancienne*⁴⁹ by Jean-Pierre Vernant. I should like to because,

⁴⁴ (Brick): 'Why can't exceptional friendship, real, real, deep, deep friendship! Between two men be respected as something clean and decent... (Big Daddy): It can, it is, for God's sake... Brick, nobody thinks that that's not normal!' (78-9).

⁴⁵ (Brick): 'Who can face truth? Can you?... How about these birthdays congratulations, these many, many happy returns of the day, when ev'rybody but you knows there won's be any!...'. (Big Daddy): '... What did you start to say?... FINISH WHAT YOU WAS SAYIN!'. (81-2).

⁴⁶ On the influence of Greek tragedy on T. Williams's plays see e.g.: P. Gilabert. "Indagación edípica e ironía trágica: el modelo sofocleo en *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* de Tennessee Williams", which will be published in the *Actas del Congreso Canariense sobre el teatro de Sófocles, desde la Antigüedad a nuestros días: obra, pensamiento y tradición*, La Laguna, 2003.

⁴⁷ Here, on the contrary, I agree with Robert Hethmon (*op. cit.*) absolutely: "Williams as an outsider dramatist is completely aware that the basic, allegorical theme of his plays as a whole is a process of corruption in society. He accuses society, as a whole, of succumbing to a deliberate mendacity, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is perhaps his fullest exposition of this theme" (96).

⁴⁸ Even in Big Mama, at least when she does not become totally eclipsed by the power and force of those who surround her, we could grasp some moments of resolute decision, of sharp diagnosis and consequent application of the necessary therapy: 'Death commences too early –almost before you're half-acquainted with life ... we just got to love each other an' stay together' (100). On women's role in T. Williams's plays see e.g.: Mathur Charu. *Women in the Plays of Eugene O'Neil and Tennessee Williams*. Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002.

⁴⁹ Paris: Hachette, 1985, pp. 16-20: "She is the goddess of the untamed world on all levels: wild beasts, non cultivated plants and lands, and the young insofar as they are not yet integrated into society, not yet civilized... We should not think of a totally wild space representing a radical alterity with respect to the

when I recognized the licences that the playwright allowed regarding the chosen mythic model, I spoke once and again of “apparent” paradox, so that the time has arrived not to postpone any longer the presentation of the proofs or, at least, the time has arrived to check whether my reading is plausible or not:

Elle serait d’abord la déesse du monde sauvage, sur tous les plans: les bêtes sauvages, les plantes et les terres non cultivées, les jeunes tant qu’ils ne son pas encore intégrés à la société, civilisés... Plutôt que d’espace de complète sauvagerie, représentant par rapport à la ville et aux terres humanisées de la cité une altérité radicale, il s’agit des confins, des zones limitrophes, des frontières où l’Autre se manifeste dans le contact qu’on entretient régulièrement avec lui, sauvage et cultivé se côtoyant, pour s’opposer certes, mais pour s’interpénétrer tout autant... Artémis n’est donc pas sauvagerie... Artémis est par excellence la *Courotrophe*. Elle prend en charge tous les petits, ceux des animaux et ceux des humains, qu’ils soient mâles ou femelles. Sa fonction est de les nourrir, de les faire croître et mûrir jusqu’à ce qu’ils deviennent des adultes accomplis. Les enfants des hommes, elle préside, à la pleine socialité, la jeune fille entrant dans l’état d’épouse et de mère, l’éphèbe dans celui de citoyen-soldat... Pendant le temps de leur croissance, avant qu’ils n’aient sauté le pas, les jeunes occupent, comme la déesse, une position liminale, incertaine et équivoque, où les frontières qui séparent les garçons des filles, les jeunes des adultes, les bêtes des hommes, ne sont pas encore nettement fixées... Atalante, la plus artémisienne des *parthénoi*, la vierge qui veut demeurer toute sa vie dans la sphère d’Artémis sans jamais franchir cette frontière qui fait de la jouvencelle ce qu’elle a vocation de devenir : une épouse, une matrone comme toutes les femmes... Devenue *téleia* ou *horaia*, c’est-à-dire ayant atteint l’âge où la femme est mûre et doit fructifier, elle refuse le *télos* du mariage, l’accomplissement de la féminité... En se vouant toute à Artémis, en se voulant, comme Artémis, jeune vierge à jamais, Atalante réduit la féminité entière à son stade préliminaire; elle refuse de connaître et de franchir la frontière qui sépare l’alterité juvénile de l’identité adulte.

town and the humanized terrain of the city. What really counts is the presence of boundaries, border zones, and frontières where the Other is manifested in the regular contacts that are made with it, where the wild and the cultivated exist side by side –in opposition, of course, but where they may also interpenetrate one with another... Artemis, then, is not wildness... Artemis is the *Kourotrophos* par excellence. She takes all the little ones in charge, both animal and human, whether male or female. Her function is to nurture them, to make them grow and mature until they become fully adult. With human offspring, she leads them to the threshold of adolescence. Abandoning to her their lives as children, they must, with her consent and assistance, cross this threshold in order to accede to a fully socialized status through rituals of initiation over which she presides –the young girl entering into the state of wife and mother, the epebe into that of citizen-soldier... During the time when they are growing up, before they have taken that step, the young, like the goddess, occupy a liminal position that is uncertain and equivocal, where the boundaries separating boys from girls, the young from the adults, and beasts from men are not yet clearly fixed... Atalanta, the most Artemisian of all *parthenoi*, the virgin who wants to remain in the sphere of Artemis all her life without ever crossing to the other side of that boundary, which makes the girl into what she is supposed to become, a wife matron like all other women... having become *téleia* or *horaia*, that is, having reached the age when a woman is mature and is supposed to prove fertile, she refuses the *télos* of marriage, the fulfilment of her femininity... In dedicating herself completely to Artemis, in wishing, like Artemis, to be a young virgin forever, Atalanta reduces the whole of femininity to its preliminary stage. She refuses to recognize and cross the boundary that separates the alterity of the young from adult identity” (Jean-Pierre Vernant. *Mortals and Immortals. Collected Essays* (Edited by Froma I. Zeitlin). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991,197-199).

First of all, I must admit that to present a text that T. Williams obviously was not able to read seems quite unfair, above all when one thinks of the evolution experienced by the study of Greek Mythology throughout the 20th century. However, not everything Vernant says fits precisely with what my analysis demands, so that very probably I shall be worthy of readers's absolution. Artemis is the goddess of the wild world and at the same time she is not wildness, while we have seen that Maggie the cat in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is certainly wild and practices wildness. She is led to it both by the great avarice of those who surround her and the merciless fight between opposite interests in a realm which, in spite of having been transformed into a civilized plantation, was not pervaded by solidarity, neighbourliness and justice. Maggie the cat is not the *Kourotrophos par excellence*, but her husband's shameful resign, striving to gain the purity of an adolescent and, therefore, past life, forces her to think of a special -and from the perspective of the referenced myth- hardly orthodox attack. This Artemis who comes from the South of the States -or this Dianized Aphrodite- gave up being virgin in order to get married and, after having failed with the help of the beauty of her body, now she is going to put all her cerebral wildness at the service of a maternity which will save both her and her particular Hyppolitus. It is thanks to her ignoble attack, i.e. true blackmail, that Brick will go beyond the limit at which he had stopped:

- . (Brick to Big Daddy): 'Maggie declares that Skipper and I went into pro-football after we left 'Ole Miss' because we were scared to grow up... she laid the law down to me, said, Now or never, and so I married Maggie' (80).
- . Stage direction (referring to Brick): He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who given up the struggle (19).
- . (Maggie referring to Brick): 'You always had that detached quality as if you were playing a game without much concern over whether you won or lost, and now that you've lost the game, not lost but just quit playing, you have that rare sort of charm ... the charm of the defeated. -You look so cool, so cool, so enviably cool' (25-6).

And, as just said, Maggie will also have to go far beyond the limit permitted by the mythological model or mirror in which she looks at herself. But Diana will finally triumph and, given that she continues to be Venus at the same time, she will do it with the help of her son: Eros or Love:

- . (Maggie): 'Brick and I are going to have a child!' (101).
- . (Brick to Maggie): 'Give me that pillow in the big chair, Maggie...'. (Maggie): 'Not tonight, Brick' (103).
- . (Maggie to Brick): '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... I'm stronger than you and I can love you more truly!' (104).
- 'I really have been to a doctor and I know what to do and -Brick?- this is my time by the calendar to conceive!' (104).
- . (Brick): 'But how are you going to conceive a child by a man in love with his liquor? M: By locking his liquor up and making him satisfy my desire before I unlock it!' (104).
- . (Maggie): 'And so tonight we're going to make the lie true, and when that's done, I'll bring the liquor back here and we'll get drunk together, here, tonight, in this place that death has come into... What do you say?'. (Brick): 'I don't say nothing. I guess there's nothing to say'. (Maggie): 'Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you want is someone to take hold of you. Gently, gently, with love! And I do love you, Brick, I do!'. (Brick): 'Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?' (105).

The paradox, then, was not insoluble; it was only apparent and becomes neutralized by an intellectual and free play of the mind thanks to which the playwright's freedom demands in the end some licences that only the "fundamentalists" of the Classical Tradition –and this is certainly not my case- would not allow.