

Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: Reading from the perspective of Existential Nihilism

Dr. Ramesh Prasad Adhikary

Assistant Professor

Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

M.M. Campus, Nepalgunj

Nepal

ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to explore the theme of meaninglessness and futility of human life. The main focus of this article is on Brick, the main character of the drama, who is unable to make his life meaningful. Brick is completely indifferent towards his wife and parents. He wants to avoid the reality by drinking alcohol all the time. Williams has presented him as a character, frustrated, depressed and unsatisfied with everything and with every relationship in his life. In the whole drama, Brick is just showing nihilistic or meaningless attitudes. All the other members of his family are also involved in futile effort of making their life coherent and meaningful. They are directly or indirectly living a nihilistic life. So also, the setting of the play and the costumes of the characters present nihilistic perspective of human life.

Key Words: Existentialism, Nihilism, Absurdity, Pessimism, Inactivity, Free Choice.

INTRODUCTION

This research paper analyzes Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) from the perspective of nihilism. The life of Brick, one of the major characters of the play as well as other characters is living their meaningless lives. Nihilism is a theoretical idea that focuses on the meaninglessness of human life. Brick, the favorite son of Big Daddy and Big Mama, once a good athlete, has now become a sports announcer. He is completely indifferent towards his wife and other members of the family. He always talks about 'the click', which he is searching all the time, but is unable to get. He is rich; he has a beautiful wife; and his mother loves him very much, but still he is in pain. This paper raises the question on the futile attempt of individuals to run their life in the so-called meaningful way to get success and happiness. In this play, Williams shows that human life is meaningless, incoherent and having no purpose at all, regardless of piles of social and family methods and materials.

The whole plot of the play revolves around Brick who was a popular football player, but later on due to his broken ankle, he settles as a sports announcer. Though he is the favorite son of the family, after the death of his close and homosexual (as told by other members of the family) friend Skipper, he becomes alcoholic, indifferent and aloof from all. He is indifferent even towards his wife Margaret, both physically and spiritually. Although the family gathers to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday, he is not interested to involve in family conversation rather he involves in drinking alcohol all the time. Williams tries to show the crisis in the relation between Brick and his wife Margaret (in the play she is usually called Maggie or "Maggie the cat"). The main reason behind the problem in their marital relationship is due to his nihilistic attitude towards the world. Williams has presented Brick as

a character without any goals and ambition of life. He does not want any property of his father, nor does he want to have babies. Brick is emotionally and spiritually far away from family matters. Gooper, who is the elder brother of Brick, and Mae, the wife of Gooper are trying to get all property from Big Daddy; but the favorite son of the family is completely indifferent both in the relationship as well as in family property.

Nihilism assumes all invented values, rules, and moral are pointless. A nihilist is a person who strongly assumes that the principles, moralities and values were falsely originated, so they are worthless. Though these codes of morality and civilization are made to make human life meaningful, coherent and purposeful, in reality nothing can make human life meaningful, coherent and purposeful. Brick does not care about these norms and assumptions. As a result, he even ignores his beautiful wife instead of showing love and care for her. Most of the time, he is found half- naked and always tends to be far away from the reality of life. The whole story of the play primarily revolves around Brick, who is isolated from everybody and everything, and remains aloof and silent.

Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has been analyzed by different critics from different angles. This play is one of Williams' personal favorites. It won the Pulitzer Prize for play in 1955, and Tony Award in the same year. In 1958, its big screen adaptation was made by MGM, directed by Michael Billington. For this film, Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman had received Oscar nomination for their performance who played the role of Margaret and Brick respectively. Eric Bentley comments on this play that "the play was heralded ... as the play in which homosexuality was at last to be presented without evasion. But the miracle still hasn't happened" (qtd. in Quinn 65). He means to say that Williams has just touched homosexual aspect, but he has not shown this issue in a clear way.

Michael Billington sees the play with reference to the philosophical aspect that life is the interplay of truth and illusion as:

First, its worth reminding ourselves what it's actually about. At its most basic, it confronts the issue that runs through all great American play, From Eugene O'Neill onwards: the conflict between truth and illusion. Set on rich Mississippi plantation, Williams' play shows the conflict from many angles. Brick, an alcoholic ex-athlete, refuses to sleep with his vivacious wife Maggie, Supposedly, Brick's father, a towering patriarch known as Big Daddy over inheritance the family squabbles, is equally unable to fade up to the fact he is dying of cancer. The two illusions meet head-on in the great father-son confrontation in the second act. But, although the play offers a social critique and rich southern humor, it finally asks whether it is better to lives by lies or truth. (Para. 2)

Billington holds that conflict between truth and illusion is its subject matter. Similar to Billington, Susan Neal Mayberry from Alfred University describes the play as a piece of work, which centers on the major conflict between appearance and reality but the reality in the winning side:

Although the Southern dialect, mannerisms, and setting apparent in *Cat on a Hot Roof* reveals Tennessee Williams' usual regional focus, the idea feelings and restricted but, on the contrary, are of universal import. The play depicts the feelings and consequences of greed, frustration, guilt, desire and hypocrisy, but most importantly it deals with the conflict between appearance and reality and its resolution in truth. Williams is concerned with man's drive to escape his problems either by totally ignoring them or by affecting a façade of illusion. (365)

Mayberry indicates that the play does not only limit the values of the South but it is about the universal subject matter. It describes the universal feelings and human emotion. He opines that Williams tries to depict how humans tend to avoid problems either by ignoring it or by living in illusion.

Claire Nicolay interprets the play as a parable of the changing American dream and its effects on masculinity, which in turn affects the structure of the family and the lives of women. He further comments that particularly, the 'Notes for the Designer' and offstage Presence of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello; Big Daddy's meditation on his hobo past; the relationship between Brick and Big Daddy and their troubled marriage; Maggie's assumption of power, all are part of a subtle yet persistent historical narrative (Para. 1). Here, Nicolay comments on the family aspect of the play criticizing on masculinity and American dream. He finds that the play is somehow like a typical play, which includes a conflict between family members, envy among blood relation, deception, lack of peace of mind, and lack of understanding among people.

Similarly, Amy Brooks in her thesis talks about the troubled relationship between Brick and Maggie:

Brick's refusal to maintain "a socially approved sexual relationship" with his wife, a form of conscientious objection made concrete by the specter of vacant double bed, is the most controversial of his violation. This resistance torments Maggie, chagrins his parents and siblings, thwarts the propagation of an heir to the Pollitt estate, and exposes him to continued suspicion of a homosexual attachment to Skipper. (25)

Amy talks about the troublesome sexual behavior of Brick and Maggie. Brick is not interested in sexual relation with his wife though sexual relation between husband and wife is legal and approved by everyone. Brooks has picked out the homosexual relation of Brick with Skipper as the reason behind his not having close relationship with his wife.

These various responses of different critics show that the play is analyzed from different perspectives but not exactly from the nihilistic approach. So, this study aims to explore the nihilistic way of life in the life of the characters of the play especially focusing on Brick.

Theoretical Framework: Nihilism

The term 'nihilism' came from a Latin word 'nihil' which means nothing. So, nihilism denies the existence of meaningful aspects of life. Nihilism is a philosophical doctrine that advocates the meaninglessness of life. Nihilism assumes that life holds no certain meaning, no objectives, purposes or intrinsic values. It rejects everything which is called meaningful. It supports the idea that nothing is permanent in this world. All the rules and regulations, morals and principles, even the advancement of science and technology cannot make human life meaningful, coherent and happy.

The nihilists believe that it is futile attempt of an individual to search coherence, meaning and purpose in life because life itself has no certainty. According to this theory, every reputedly meaningful aspects of life is falsely created. In the real sense, the theory denies all the philosophies, and believes that nothing can be known or communicated.

Nihilism has its origin associated with Friedrich Jacobi who used the word to denote negative characterization of transcendental idealism. The word 'nihilism' became popular after its evolvement in Ivan Turgenev's novel *Father and Sons* (1862). This novel is taken as an important book on the philosophy of nihilism. Bazarov is a nihilist character in the novel. This novel has defined a nihilist as "a man who declines to bow to the authority or to accept any principles on trust, however, sanctified it may be" (23). The history of nihilism is somehow associated with the Russian revolutionary movement that had rejected the authority of the state, church and family. The novel shows the relationship between French revolution and nihilism as:

Strictly speaking, a nihilist believes in nothing, but as we are told, they believed in the denial of all authorities in the cause of freedom and social justice. Turgenev came to regret his revival of the word nihilist- it had first been used to designate political radicalism in Russia in 1840- because he thought he had given his opponents a stick to beat him with. Howe's view of Bazarov's impoverishment as revolutionary is itself a twentieth- century echo of contemporary objections to the novel on its first appearance. The context of its publication is vital. (VI)

While analyzing the history of nihilism, it is connected with many other philosophers and scholars, too. Many philosophers believe that there is connection between existentialism, nihilism and absurdism. Existentialism believes that there is no meaning in the universe. One has to construct meaning oneself. An Absurdist believes that this world is meaningless and an attempt to make life meaningful is also meaningless. Among different categories, existential nihilism believes that the world is without meaning and purpose, and every individual is an isolated being thrown into the undefined universe.

By the late twentieth century, even the postmodern philosophers and scholars are said to have similar perspective to nihilists. They also see that the world is meaningless and one should accept the way it is and should live within the problem itself. Relating with these postmodern perspectives, World Book Encyclopedia has defined nihilism as:

... the name used for variety of extremes, negative philosophical and political views. The term nihilism comes from a Latin word meaning nothing. The most radical nihilist would deny that anything exists. A slightly less radical view which is usually called skepticism that anything can be known. (218)

This book has defined nihilism as a philosophical doctrine which carries extremist and radical concepts. Radicalism can be seen in politics as well as in philosophies.

Some of the scholars have connected nihilism with spirituality. It means, by rejecting everything, one can get salvation. Freydish explains nihilism in this way:

Nihilism is primarily skepticism coupled with reduction, but in practical reality it takes on more than one facet which often leads to a confusion of definitions. In the most general sense nihilism has two major classifications, the first is passive and usually goes by the term existential or 'social' nihilism and the second is active and is termed 'political' nihilism. (Para. 2)

Regarding these two types of nihilism, Freydish further explains the existential nihilism as a "passive world view which revolves round such topics as suffering and futility". In a more direct sense existential social nihilism is manifest within the sense of isolation, futility, angst, and the hopelessness of existence increasingly prevalent within the modern digital world, an effect referred to as the 'downward spiral'. So, existential nihilism is related with pessimistic view towards life. It rejects every meaningful aspect of life whereas political nihilism is the radical one that revolts against the powerful authority. Anyway, the essence of nihilism is to believe that everything is meaningless, nothing is permanent and all the attempt of people to make life meaningful is also futile.

Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher whose works of literature are often considered as nihilistic. Nietzsche's Will to Power is taken as one of the important books on nihilism. Many scholars have analyzed this book and other work of Nietzsche in their own ways. Bernard Reginster has analyzed Nietzsche's notion of nihilism by showing the relationship between pessimism and nihilism:

Contrary to the prevalent interpretation, the bulk of Nietzsche's analyses of the concept of nihilism support an interpretation of it in terms of despair. In fact, the passage about the 'devaluation of the highest values' I cited previously is one of few in which nihilism is explicitly presented as acclaim about values. By contrast, the view that despair is Nietzsche's primary conception of nihilism is confirmed by much of his unpublished discussion of this concept. (28)

Many scholars and philosophers have associated nihilism with pessimism similar as in this book. They point out that nihilists devalue everything. They devalue everything, which they get in their life; relationship, property, future planning, dreams, etc. As a result, they just want to lead their life without any optimistic idea.

Another feature of nihilism is to be far away from the reality. Nandita Bishwas Mellamphy includes the points of German philosopher Muller- Lauter in this way:

The radical nihilist rejects reality the Overman's affirmative openness must be equally total. His Yes must extend to the whole world, after the nihilist has condemned this whole. The concept of 'the overman' for Nietzsche is the way to face the reality not in direct straight forward way rather indirectly, with a mix of them. Lauter strongly affirms that nihilism means to deny the reality. It means that nihilists reject the reality of the life. They want to be far away from the real circumstances. It is very difficult for nihilists even to accept simple reality of their own daily life. Thus, they try several ways to be far from the realistic world. As a result, they involve in such imaginary life through the use of drugs, alcohol or some nihilists who have positive vibes even go for meditation to be far from the reality.

Often willingness to death is connected with nihilism. It is the belief that nihilists do not care about physical body. As a result, they choose death directly or indirectly. Mellamphy, connects nihilism with death in the following expression:

In several passages, Nietzsche extols the 'willing at the right time to die'; death.- One must convert the stupid physiological fact into a moral necessity. So to live that one can also will at the right time to die! Not every or just any act of willing self-annihilation is in accordance with the criteria necessary to overcome nihilism. The general intention to kill oneself is not what Nietzsche means by 'free death'. Freedom towards death as the necessary criteria for willing the over-coming of nihilism is only available to the one who has already destroyed all faith and belief in present human morality. Nietzsche thus suggests that the metamorphosis between negation and affirmation happens as an accident. (79)

It shows that Nietzsche praises "willing to die at right time"; he is in support of those who think it is their right to kill themselves. It means that nihilists believe that it is their right to end life when they want. In this way, willing for death is one characteristic of the philosophy of nihilism. Nietzsche has made deep analysis on "willing to die" on right time in a positive way.

Different scholars have defined nihilism in their own ways, but the essence of nihilism is meaninglessness, pessimism, and nothingness, rejection of the reality, willing to death, destruction, radicalism, and even futile attempt of an individual to make life meaningful. This idea of nihilism has been used in this study to analyze Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Textual Analysis: Nihilism in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Brick, one of the main characters of the play, shows nihilistic attitude through his behavior. He was a popular football player, but due to an injury on his ankle, he settles as a sport announcer. Despite being the main character of the play, he lacks

objective, meaning and purpose in life. Throughout the play, he demonstrates the nihilistic attitude that causes his indifference towards his wife and other members of the family.

Another striking thing about Brick is that he can neither accept his homosexual (as told by other members of the family) relation with Skipper nor can he maintain his marital relation with his wife in a normal way. He is unable to face the reality of life. His distinctive perspective of life is not understood by his family members, as can be seen in the following dialogue between the husband and the wife:

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!

MARGARET: I'm not naming it dirty! I am naming it clean.

BRICK: Not love with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper was that one great thing, and you are naming it dirty! (1.1.315)

Brick says that Skipper is just his friend not more than that but after the death of Skipper, he is ruining his life in alcohol. He is not interested in his wife. All the members of family are busy in celebrating sixty fifth birthday of Big Daddy but the favorite son of the family is avoiding conversation with family members and is busy in alcohol all the time.

So, Brick is trying to escape from the reality of life in alcohol. Not only this, he is not even aware about his being alive. It might be that he even wants to die rather than to live, as most of the nihilists do.

BRICK: I'm sorry Big Daddy. My head don't work anymore and it's hard for me to understand how anybody could care if he lived or died or was dying or cared about anything but whether or not there was liquor left in the bottle and so I said what I said without thinking. In some ways I'm no better than the others, in some ways worse because I'm less alive that makes them lie and alive that makes me sort of accidentally truthful- I don't know but- anyway- we've been friends. (2.1.352)

Thus, Brick's conversation with Big Daddy reveals his desire to be far away from life. He even does not want to accept that he is alive. He himself tags as less alive. It means that he wants to be far away from one of the important and big reality of life, that is, to be alive. He denies calling himself as alive. His only concern is in alcohol. He always drinks alcohol though he knows the harm of excessive drinking.

Williams has presented Brick as a frustrated, pessimistic, depressed and unsatisfied character with everything and every relationship that is regarded as normal. This pessimistic attitude can be seen with his statement, "I don't have do anything I don't want to do" (1.1.303). Pessimism is one of the key features of nihilism and it is seen in his character. People with pessimistic nature do not want to do anything because they do not believe in it. As a result, they lose interest and activeness. Brick shows this that makes him a nihilistic character.

Williams has shown Brick as a character exhibiting nothingness. He has no aim and no future plans to achieve but ruins his life by doing nothing. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

BRICK: I don't remember thinking of anything, Maggie.

MARGARET: Don't you think that- ? Don't you-? - Think I know that?

BRICK: Know what, Maggie? (1.1.298)

Brick does not think about anything. It means that he loves nothing. He is even not interested towards the property of his father. He has no enthusiasm to do any everyday activities, maintain his relation with and closeness to his father. This lack of the interest of father-son closeness is shown as in the following dialogue:

BRICK: Well, Sir, ever so often say to me, Brick, I want to have you, but when we talk, it never materializes. Nothing is said. You sit in a chair and gas about this and that and I look like I listen. I try to look like listen, but I don't listen, not much. Communication is- awful hard between you and me, it just doesn't- happen. (2.1.333)

Here, Brick says that when they talk, their talk never materializes. It means that there is no meaningful sharing in their communication. He says that nothing is said. As his life, his dialogues are also full of nothingness.

Brick is not interested in anything. He even does not have interest in his wife. He has not touched Margaret till now. That is the reason why they do not have a child. On the other hand, Margaret is desperate to get love from her husband.

BRICK: Then jump off the roof, jump off it, cats can jump off roofs and land on their four feet uninjured!

MARGARET: Oh, yes!

BRICK: Do it! - fo' God sake, do it...

MARGARET: Do what?

BRICK: Take a lover!

MARGARET:.. I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see You! Why don't you get ugly, Brick, why don't you please get fat or ugly or something so I could stand it? [She rushes to hall door, opens it, listens.] The Concert is still going on! Bravo, no- necks, bravo! [She slams and locks door fiercely.]

BRICK. What did you lock the door for?

MARGARET: To give us a little privacy for a while.

BRICK: You know better, Maggie. (1.1.305)

Margaret wants love from her husband and even tries to seduce him for love making. She to closes the door in order to have some private time with him, Brick is not interested even to talk romantically with her.

So, Brick is totally uninterested in his beautiful wife. If he is homosexual, why he does not clearly state that? He always denies his homosexual relation with Skipper. Thus, the reason behind his problematic relation with wife is not his intimacy with Skipper, but it is his nihilistic attitude towards everything.

Another character of Brick is to be far away from reality. He is unable to face his real life. As a result, he keeps himself away from family conversation and spends his whole time just by spending time in alcohol. The following conversation between father and son reveals it:

BRICK: No, I can't. We talk, you talk, in circles! We get nowhere, no where! It's always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don't have a fuckin' thing to say to me!

BIG DADDY: Nothin' to say when I'm tellin' you I'm going to live when I thought I was dying?!

BRICK: Oh- that! - Is that what you have to say to me? (2.1.339)

Brick's conversation with Big Daddy too reveals his attitude to be far away from reality. He even does not want to accept that his conversation with his father is meaningful. He is not interested even to talk with his father.

Brick seems to be far away from reality all the time. He avoids conversation with family members.

BRICK: The click I get in my head when I've had enough of this stuff to make me peaceful... Will you do me a favor?

MARGARET: Maybe I will. What favor?

BRICK: Just, just keep your voice down!

MARGARET: [in a hoarse whisper] I'll do you that favor, I'll speak in a whisper, if not shut up completely, if you will do me a favor and make that drink your last one till after the party.

BRICK: What party?

MARGARET: You know this is Big Daddy's birthday!

BRICK: No, I don't, I forgot it.

MARGARET: Well, I remembered it for you. (1.1.302)

Brick always talks about the click that he is searching all the time, but unable to get. He is rich; he has beautiful wife and loving parents, but still he is not satisfied. He frequently mentions 'the click', which he might get after drinking alcohol, avoiding the reality of life because he is unable to adjust himself with his daily life. He is incapable to get satisfaction despite having property, beautiful wife and loving parents. He thinks that he might get it by drinking alcohol and making himself aloof from the world.

Brick was a popular football player. Later on, due to being injured on his ankle, he settled as a sport announcer and started his married life. He did these to make his life happy. But still, he is missing something and is making futile attempt to fulfill it by drinking alcohol. Drinking has become his mechanical way of life as he admits, "A click that I get in my head that makes me peaceful" (2.1.337). For him, that 'clicks' gives peace and goes on drinking until he gets that.

According to Brick, he gets a click or satisfaction by drinking alcohol. He confesses that he will continue to drink up to the time he does not get peace in his mind. He is neither interested to talk with his wife nor with his father. What he wants is just to drink. But he cannot get peace by drinking alcohol, it is only his addiction.

Nihilist people often make futile attempts to make life purposeful and peaceful. Nihilism advocates that all code of society is useless. Moral, principles, system are made by human and they are useless. Mae and Gooper's absurd reaction towards cancer (upcoming death) of Big Daddy too makes this play nihilistic. If this code of society was real, Gooper and Mae would look after Big Daddy. Their first priority would be health of Big Daddy. They would be sad and emotional after listening about cancer of Big Daddy, but in contrast, they only have evil eyes on his property. Mae is very much conscious of the affair between Brick and Big Daddy. But Big Daddy does not like Mae's interference. Rather, he wants privacy.

In the play, Big Daddy and Big Mama looks perfect couple from outside. People think that they are a very happy couple because they have spent forty years together. Their marital relation and the family look perfect for the society. Big Daddy is a rich head of Big Plantation Company, and they have two sons. They have everything that modern human beings wish for happy and significant life. But the reality is not as it seems to the society. The couple has a problem in their marital relation opposite to the reality though for the society, it is a model of a successful, rich and happy life. Big Daddy does not even talk with Big Mamma in a kind way. Thus, there is a problem not only in the marital relation of Brick and Margaret, but also in the relation between Big Daddy and Big Mama. There is some sense of gloominess as it can be seen in the following dialogue:

BIG MAMA. In all these years you never believed that I loved you?

BIG DADDY. Huh!

BIG MAMA. And I did so much, your hate and your hardness, Big Daddy! [She sobs and rushes awkwardly out onto the gallery.]

Big Daddy. [to himself] wouldn't be funny if that was true...(2.1.327)

This conversation between Big Daddy and Big Mama suggests that their marital life is also deprived of the sense of happiness. Big Daddy does not believe in love of his wife even after many years of marriage.

The above conversation in the play dismantles the concept that marriage binds people happily. The continuation of married life, having children and sufficient property are the basic criteria of a happy and successful life. But in reality, they are the false construction. Marriage is also falsely constructed as suggested by this play,

Nihilism does not believe in marriage-like concepts of society. It denies that true love ever happens between people. Marriage is also falsely constructed as suggested by Williams in this play. Therefore, this play depicts nihilistic attitude directly or indirectly. Nihilism suggests that life is meaningless and useless despite all the constructed social codes, or the infrastructures invented by people and society. Society has constructed codes of marriage and family in order to make people happy, satisfied and social but in reality, they are taken as negative attributes. As a result, many young couples like Brick and Margaret as well as old couples are ruining their relationship by different reasons. Thus, this play tries to dismantle the purpose and meaning of social and family codes constructed by the society since the long past.

Big Daddy is recollecting his struggling days and his futile attempt to make his life meaningful but at last, he is unable to save his own life. He narrates his past that due to poverty he quit his school at the age of ten. He even worked in the field as a nigger. He rose from zero to hero with his own hard work. He then worked hard to be rich by himself. When he knows that he is suffering from cancer, he feels very sad. He feels guilty of the past hard work.

He becomes very sad knowing that he is dying soon. He feels sadder when he realizes that he could not save his life with his money. At last, the head of the Mississippi Delta's Plantation Company becomes helpless. He now realizes that money is nothing. However, still he is searching meaning of life, "seen all things and understood a lot of them, till 1910. Big Daddy's realization of life also makes this play a nihilistic one. The most striking point here is that Big Daddy is being frustrated even with his family members. He knows that Gooper and Mae are looking for his property and waiting for his death for it. But he is also being unfaithful towards his wife. Thus, it is not hard to say that Big Daddy is being a nihilist in his old age. His frustration and depression after knowing his condition can be realized in the following dialogue:

BIG DADDY: You git you a piece of land, by hook or crook, an' things start growin' on it, things accumulate on it, and the first thing you know it's completely out of hand, completely out of hand!

BRICK: Well, they say nature hates vacuum, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY: That's what they say, but sometimes I think that a vacuum is a hell of a lot better than some of the stuff that nature replaces it with. Is someone out there by that door? (2.1.329)

Big Daddy seems to be a completely nihilistic here. He says that he loves vacuum. It means he loves nothing. He hates the stuff. He says that he likes the vacuum without its replacement with any stuff. Here, he might refer to relationships, property, and hard work as stuff in the life. In his old age, he realizes that life is the vacuum without stuff and meaning and purpose.

The setting of the play matches the plot and mind- set of characters of the play. Thus, it is not too adventurous and larger than life. Simple and not so attractive settings of the play too reflect nihilism directly and indirectly. Dress worn by the characters also represents nihilistic spirit. For instance, Brick is almost semi-naked most of the time:

He stands there in the bathroom doorway drying his hair with a towel and hanging onto the towel because one ankle is broken, plastered and bound. He is still slim and firm as a boy. His liquor hasn't started tearing him down outside. He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle. (294)

The above description suggests that Brick is still handsome by outside. The line "His liquor hasn't started tearing him down outside" means he is depressed by inside but his outlook is still attractive. At heart, he is lacking peace; he is very much frustrated inside.

As a result, he accessibly drinks alcohol ignoring about his health and family. He is aloof in nature. His only company is his glass of alcohol, which he carries all the time. One can notice nihilistic attitude like pessimism, frustration, and meaninglessness of Brick even by looking at his customs.

From the above analysis of the play it can be concluded that Williams adopts nihilistic attributes directly and indirectly from the beginning to the end. The main character Brick is a pessimist and frustrated man who loves nothing, which proves that he is leading his life in the nihilistic way. Not only Brick; other characters including Big Daddy do not present themselves as active, optimistic and enthusiastic ones. The plot, stage, costumes and dialogues of character show nihilistic attributes sometime in direct and sometime indirect ways. There is a problem not only on the relationship between Brick and Maggie's marital life but there is some sense of gloominess even in the relationship of Big Daddy and Big Mama. They are all suffering with some sense of unfulfillment, unkindness and lack of understanding even from their nearest and dearest ones.

CONCLUSION

Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* shows meaninglessness of life. Brick is full of nihilistic attributes – frustration, depression, nothingness, pessimism and inactivity. He was a popular football player, but due to his injured ankle, he settled as a sport announcer. He married Margaret, but he is connected with her neither spiritually nor physically. He is suspected of having homosexual relationship with his friend Skipper, but he refuses that relation on the ground of only having intimate friendship. What he does, how he acts, how he wears clothes and how he treats his wife and others reflect his nihilistic attitude.

The play deals nihilistic attributes directly and indirectly from the beginning to the end. It is not only Brick who is pessimist, frustrated and loves nothing, leading his life in a nihilistic way but also other characters, as well as the stage of the play, dress worn by the characters, description of the setting etc. also represent nihilistic attitude and behavior. Brick is almost semi-naked most of the time. There is a problem not only in the relationship between Brick and Maggie's marital life but there is some sense of gloominess even in the relationship of his parents, Big Daddy and Big Mama. Though all the characters are busy in their attempts to achieve their goal in their life in their own way, at the end they achieve nothing. On the whole, the plot of the play is revolving around nihilistic features of the major characters especially of Brick's reaction towards his own life; family and relation as well as the futile and absurd life of all of the characters though vary in degree. Brick's absurd reaction to his marital life, Big Daddy's cancer, Big Mamas gloominess, Mae and Gooper's quest for wealth, Big Daddy's desperate condition in spite of his hard working and prosperous past make life a meaningless pursuit.

REFERENCES

Billington, Michael. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: Tennessee Williams' Southern Discomfort." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. 30 Sept. 2012. Web. 05 June 2017.

Brooks, Amy. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof: 60 Years of American Dialogue on Dec, Gender, and the Nuclear Family." *MA thesis*. University of Massachusetts, 2016. Print. 03 May 2017.

Freydish. "What is Nihilism?" *CounterOrder.com*. Sept. 2009. Web. 05 June 2017.

Mayberry, Susan Neal. "A Study of Illusion and the Grotesque in Tennessee Williams." *Alfred U. n.d.* Web. 15 May 2017.

Mellamphy, Nandita Bishwas. *The Three Stigmata of Friedrich Nietzsche: Political Physiology in the Age of Nihilism*. Canada: Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Nicolay, Claire. "Hoboes, Sissies, and Breeders: Generations of Discontent in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*. Web. 05 June 2017.

Reginster, Bernard. *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. New York: Harvard UP, 2006. Print.

Turgenev, Ivan Sergeevich. *Fathers and Sons*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1996. Print.

Williams, Tennessee. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." *Elements of Literature*. 4th ed. Ed. Carl H. Klaus. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. 291-373. Print.



Biography of the author

Dr. Ramesh Prasad Adhikary is an assistant professor of Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal. He has been teaching English literature at M.M. Campus since 2007. He has completed his PhD in Existential philosophy and has been doing his research on English language, literature and literary theories. He has created more than 40 international articles and 18 books on various topics of English literature.