

Mendacity vs truth in cat on a hot tin roof

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Tennessee Williams' book *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* takes place entirely in the plantation home of the Pollitt family in the Mississippi Delta. The plantation once belonged to a pair of bachelors, and "Big Daddy" Pollitt had worked for them as an overseer, but he is now the owner of the plantation, which he has built into a dynastic empire. Big Daddy's family has met at the house to celebrate his birthday. Maggie, a beautiful and witty girl, has escaped a childhood of poverty to marry into the wealthy Pollitt family, but finds herself in an unfulfilling marriage.

She is married to Big Daddy's son, Brick. He is an aging football hero, and constantly neglects his wife. Brick further infuriates her by ignoring his brother's attempts to gain control of the family fortune once Big Daddy passes away. Brick's coldness towards Maggie and his alcoholism can be attributed to the death of his best friend, Skipper. Big Daddy has been feeling a bit under the weather, and what he believes is a spastic colon ends up being a form of cancer.

Big Daddy is unaware that of his illness and that he doesn't have much time left to live, so his doctors and his family have conspired to keep this information from him. The web of lies that is spun throughout this book is huge, pning nearly every member of the family. Big Daddy comments on it towards the end of the book after he is told the truth by Brick, as he questions "What's that smell in the room? Didn't you notice the powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity?"

According to Big Daddy, "Mendacity is one of them five-dollar words that cheap politicians throw back and forth at each other. The dictionary

definition tells us that mendacity is a falsehood, a lie, or a tendency to be untruthful. Mendacity is seen throughout the play and is a negative effect on the characters. All the characters are affected, but some are impacted more than others. Those greatly affected are Brick, Maggie, Big Daddy, and Gooper. The whole “ lie vs. truths” plays a crucial role in developing the storyline and plot structure of the novel. As I previously mentioned, Brick was always very cold towards Maggie, yelling at her and even attempting to hit her with his crutch.

The very fact that Brick uses a crutch to walk is symbolic, in that the alcohol was his crutch to deal with Skipper's death. Skipper and Brick have a great friendship, and it can almost be viewed as homosexual. The fact that Skipper killed himself the night after he played in a football game without Brick and had many fumbles and played very poorly overall. Maggie states that “ it was only Skipper that harbored even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure between you too! (Williams, 833)

Brick believes Maggie is the reason that Skipper killed himself, because she was ruining their friendship. Brick mourns his love for Skipper, which was the only true and good thing in his life. Maggie never dares speak of the forbidden love, and therefore Big Daddy is forced to step in as the judge. When Big Daddy confronts Brick about the homosexual attraction between himself and Skipper, Brick becomes extremely defensive and explains how their friendship was nothing more than a pure and true friendship.

Big Daddy presses the issue, and Brick can no longer lie about the cause of Skipper's death. It is then revealed at the climax of the book that before

Skipper took his own life, he called Brick long distance and drunkenly confessed his love to him, finally removing the weight of the lie that was Skipper's life, pretending that him and Brick were heterosexual friends. Brick however, didn't say a word, and just hung up. This ended up being the last time Brick ever heard Skipper's voice, and because of this, Brick drinks heavily to deal with the pain of taking his best friend's life.

This moment in the book is very impactful for it is one of the only times that mendacity isn't in the air, as Brick and Big Daddy are being real with each other, with no veil of lies to hide behind, perfectly put as Big Daddy says, "then there is at least two people that never lied to each other." The big deception throughout the play is that of Big Daddy's health. The entire family and the Doctor are all in on this, and each person becomes split into 2 or 3 individuals because of all the deceit. Big Daddy's other son Gooper and his wife Mae are both guilty of mendacity.

To Big Daddy and Big Momma's faces, they put on the guise as loving people, when in fact it is all an attempt to get Big Daddy to sign over the land and money to them in his will. They constantly bring up that they have children while Maggie and Brick don't, and that Brick is an alcoholic.

Basically pointing out all the flaws of their "competition" to try and better themselves in Big Daddy's eyes. Big Mama lies to herself by thinking that a child from Maggie and Brick would turn Brick into a non-drinking, family man qualified to take over the family place.

Big Mama had to have been distraught by the fact that her husband has less than a year left to live, and is being lied to by his entire family, talking on

how he will live forever and people toasting to his health. Big Daddy is even wrapped up in the mendacity, as he admits to Brick during their heart-to-heart that everyday of his life is consumed with lies, as he pretends to like Gooper and Mae, but when in reality, he cannot stand them. Big Daddy never loved Gooper, but only desired for him to be successful and have a family.

Gooper, in attempt to gain Big Daddy's love, he always did what he thought Big Daddy would have wanted for him, like having children and becoming a lawyer. The two never talk about their lack of relationship, as Gooper only tries to win Big Daddy's love, but Big Daddy never listens to him. Therefore because of this mendacity Gooper does not care about Big Daddy's affection, as I previously mentioned, his main intention is to inherit his land. Their relationship is filled with lies because they never talk about their lack of a relationship, which makes the relationship worse.

One of the most important relationships in the book is that of Brick and Maggie. Throughout the entire novel, their conversations are mostly them fighting with each other, and it seems they are a married couple, in name only. Their relationship is based on lies and filled with mendacity, which tears them apart. Maggie lies to Brick and tells him that she and Skipper had an affair, because she was afraid that he was going to steal her husband away. The aforementioned homosexual love affair between Brick and Skipper caused a great deal of turmoil throughout the house.

The biggest lie in the entire book comes at the very end of the novel, in which Maggie proclaims to Big Daddy that she is pregnant with Brick's child. Big Daddy is overjoyed by this news, and decides to put Brick down as the

sole beneficiary to the land. The final scene involves Maggie and Brick in the bedroom, with Maggie locking the door and telling Brick that tonight they were going to “ make the lie true. ” The false reality that Maggie created by lying will soon to come to fruition and all will be good in the Pollitt household.

Brick ends the play by responding to Maggie’s profession of love with “ Wouldn’t it be funny if that were true...? ” Although Brick sounds confused at her words, but he may simply be assuming that because he had been indifferent towards her, she must also be that way towards him. The lies and mendacity of the entire Pollitt family nearly tear the very structure of their being apart, but in the end, the lies end up creating a better reality, one in that Brick and Big Daddy have come to terms with each other, and Maggie the Cat is finally going to be a mother (assuming her and Brick went through with the sexual conception).

Mendacity has caused the Maggie to become much more than just a cat on a hot tin roof, she is now the sole light in Big Daddy’s life, for he’s long awaited for grandchild is finally on the way, and the rekindling of her and Brick’s relationship ends the book on a feel good note. It’s somewhat ironic that after all the pain and suffering caused by the lies, that the happy ending is a product of the biggest lie of them all.