

A characteristic of female protagonist in tennessee williams' play

[Family](#)



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Everyone wants to be wanted. This is especially true in the case of Maggie, the female protagonist in Tennessee Williams' play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Maggie's bothersome sister-in-law, Mae, is always flaunting the fact that she has five children (and a sixth on the way) while Maggie has none. In a Southern household where Mae is viewed more favorably for these children, Maggie is ostracized for her lack thereof to a point where she cannot truly be herself. This is just one of the several challenges that Maggie must face. Though she faces many challenges that stand in the way of her being socially accepted, Maggie perseveres on the path to being wanted while being herself.

Maggie's lack of children is the biggest obstacle in her path to social acceptance. The main cause of this obstacle is Mae and her children, who Maggie calls "no-neck monsters" (Williams 17). Mae and her husband, Gooper, already have five children while Maggie and Brick have none. Critic Dawn B. Sova implies that Mae and Gooper may not have the purest intentions when having children, but may have them solely to ensure that they will inherit Big Daddy's estate. (Sova) The fact that she is childless does not begin to bother Maggie until she arrives at the plantation of Big Daddy, her father-in-law, for his birthday celebration. It had been established by this point that Big Daddy is dying of a malignant tumor. Due to his hard work, Big Daddy has amassed quite a fortune which Mae and Gooper hope to inherit. However, because Brick has always been the favored son, Big Daddy wants to bequeath him his large fortune rather than Gooper. Motivated by the thought of the vast amount of wealth that could be gained, Mae seeks to undermine Maggie by showing off her children. Mae's assault begins with "

constant little remarks and innuendos about that fact that [Maggie and Brick] have not produced any children, are totally childless and therefore useless!" (Williams 19). In addition to their mother's verbal attacks, Mae's children have also reminded Maggie that she is childless, seen when one of the children shouts at Maggie, " You're just jealous because you can't have babies!" (62). At such a young age, the little girl could only think this if it had been specifically taught to her. It is clear that this is Mae working to make Maggie look bad in any way she can. However, Mae's advances are not the only cause of Maggie's lack of social acceptance. The other major reason lies in her relationship with her husband, Brick.

The strained relationship between Maggie and Brick is the cause of her lack of children, and therefore her lack of social acceptance. It is quite obvious from the beginning of the play that Maggie is the more active participant in this relationship and Brick seems to be along for the ride. Brick never outwardly confirms or denies that he is in love with Maggie, but he is loyal to her. The conflict in the relationship arises when the needs of the two are examined: Brick does not need anything from Maggie but Maggie needs love from Brick. Brick realizes what is happening and attempts to compensate for it by giving Maggie the possibility of cheating on him, which he thinks would bring her happiness, but it only makes her more miserable. Though Maggie and Brick do share a connection, the love Maggie has for Brick is not reciprocated. Smith-Howard and Heintzelman remarked that " Brick's love for Maggie has been usurped by another: the memory of his beloved Skipper, whom Maggie exposed" (Smith-Howard, Heintzelman) and as a result of this, Brick blames Maggie for Skipper's death. The strained relationship between

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Maggie and Brick can be explained through Maggie's saying " I'm not living with you. We occupy the same cage." (35). Of course, their " cage" was not built instantly but formed overtime. It coincides with the beginning of Brick's alcoholism. Because he drinks excessively, Brick is incapable of dealing with his problems, especially those concerning his relationship with Maggie.

Maggie becomes a frustrated housewife and Brick becomes a detached husband, and they both play a part in the endless tragic cycle of their relationship (Banache). He submits to her plans not out of love and desire for what she wants, but out of indifference and despair (Bell). All this affects Maggie's ability to develop as a person because she has based herself on her love for Brick.

In addition to finding social acceptance for her lack of children, Maggie also struggles with finding acceptance for being herself. It is in her relationships that the difficulty to be herself arises. With Brick, who repeatedly refers to her as " Maggie the cat", the struggle comes from a situation that Maggie describes as being like " a cat on a hot tin roof" (31), which is the central metaphor of the play (Banache). She ponders throughout the play "-What is the victory of the cat on a hot tin roof? – I wish I knew..." (31). This cat on a hot tin roof represents Maggie and her emotional struggle during the play, for as she concludes, " Just stayin' on it, I guess, for as long as she can" (31) is the only way for the cat to succeed as the cat knows she cannot stay on the roof forever. In addition to Brick, Big Mama and Mae both prevent Maggie from being herself and socially accepted. Big Mama is more concerned with the welfare of her son than that of her daughter-in-law, a fact that does not escape Maggie's notice. Mae goes out her way to reveal all of Maggie's faults

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out of jealousy and greed. Maggie notices Mae's little remarks but there is nothing she can do to deny them as the claims that Maggie and Brick do not have sex are true. With all the pressure placed on her by people that question her words and actions at the plantation, it is easy to see why Maggie cannot be herself.

The Greek word "hetaira" means "courtesan". It generally refers to a woman companion that can either make or break a man, referred to as "femme inspiratrice", a woman who guides and motivates her man to higher goals, or "femme fatale", a woman who uses her feminine wiles to do the opposite. Maggie, however, is a mixture of these two things. On one hand, she truly wants the best for Brick; she loves him and would have no other man but him. On the other hand, however, Maggie has the potential to be incredibly devious when she deems it necessary. It was Maggie, as a "femme fatale" who inspired Skipper to reveal his homosexual attraction toward Brick and, indirectly, caused his death. Through Maggie's viewpoint, Skipper appeared as a threat to her ideal marriage to Brick. In exposing Skipper's feelings for Brick, Maggie created an unintentional problem: Brick's alcoholism, which slowly causes the marriage to deteriorate. As a result, Maggie becomes more self-conscious about herself; she questions Brick constantly about her appearance but only received curt replies. She soon turns into a "femme inspiratrice" in an attempt to bring Brick out of his drinking and back to the social being he was before. (Kataria)

Though she faced many challenges during the play, Maggie finally makes headway at the end when she lies and says she is pregnant. By doing this,

she has claimed her social acceptance as she will finally have children. Now that she will have children, Brick and she can inherit Big Daddy's land and be more socially accepted for their position and wealth. It would be possible then for Maggie to finally be herself as the obstacles for her social acceptance have been moved out of the way. Maggie the Cat will no longer have to worry about the hot tin roof.