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and Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman(1975)*

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*My brother Yacine*

*My sister Melissa*

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*My lovely ants Djamila, Djidji, Rachida With her two daughters*

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*And all my teachers*

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*To*

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## Abstract

*This dissertation is a comparative study between American playwright Tennessee Williams' **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** (1955) and the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka's **Death and the King's Horseman** (1975). Our main purpose in this research paper is to study how modern tragedy is depicted in the selected plays and to examine the analogies between them. Relying on Arthur Miller's theory **Tragedy and the Common Man** (1949), we have deduced that the two plays depict the tragic fate of the common man. Our discussion is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the tragic heroes as ordinary people and their struggle for dignity, whereas the second chapter discusses two other characters as anti-heroes and their failure. Finally, the third chapter tackles the effect of social dominance over the main characters in a modern world.*

Keywords: tragedy, common man, tragic hero, anti-hero, failure, social dominance, modern world, Soyinka, Williams.

## **I. Introduction**

This dissertation falls within comparative literature. It aims to compare the African playwright Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King Horseman* (1975) and the American playwright Tennessee Williams's play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). It seeks to investigate the ways in which both playwrights depict modern man's tragedy. In fact, tragedy is regarded as an important subject in literature, as it highlights different cultures in different times. It also questions Man's existence and his misfortune. It explores various backgrounds, their richness, and contribution to literature in general.

It is important to note that Africa and America have a rich background concerning religion, culture and beliefs; this richness causes many issues in the two continent especially socio-cultural ones. On the one hand, during the 50s America was a conservative country. Consequently Americans were close-minded concerning certain aspects of life like homosexuality. Just as America, Africa also was a conservative country concerning their religion and traditions and African's faithfulness to their beliefs imposes on them to perform rituals even if they are not convinced by the ritual's usefulness.

Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* depicts American socio-cultural experience after the World War II. The play presents the casual domestic family life in America and how Americans faced issues during the 50s. On the other hand, despite the havoc that was wreaked by European colonialism in the African continent, Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman* points out another cultural richness in the black continent, and the faithfulness of the African communities to their customs and traditions.

Last but not the least, both playwrights have used tragedy as a means to question human existence and its misfortune. Indeed, the themes displayed in the two plays have led us to realize that the realization of the theory of *Tragedy and the Common Man* (1949) by Arthur Miller is more appropriate to conduct our comparative study.

#### **a. Review of the literature**

In this part of our memoir, we have tried to review some of the previous literature written on Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Wole Soyinka and Tennessee Williams are among the most outstanding figures of African and American literatures, respectively. Consequently, their two plays *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) have been regarded as two important plays that received great scholarly attention.

The African Noble prize winner, Wole Soyinka is considered as a leading figure in African drama and literature. Most of his literary projects, aim to promote and defend the African culture against European Universalism that considers the Africans as being devoid from culture. He wrote many plays that have received critical attention especially *Death and the King's Horseman*. The latter has been studied from different perspectives.

To start with, the PHD scholar Ms. A. Nevedhini, in her article entitled "**The African World in Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman**", focuses on Soyinka's position vis-a-vis the literary African writers' project to create an absolute African world. She argues;

In contrast to these writers Wole Soyinka disavowed movement but celebrated African or black identity though he was keen to insist that he was not the idea of African world as such. One of the staunchest defenders of African cultural interests, it would appear that he was wholly committed to the idea of an African world but not its celebration.<sup>1</sup>

According to Ms. A. Nevedhini, Soyinka is different from the other writers that celebrate black identity, even though he is a committed playwright. Indeed, he spent years defending African culture against the dominance of the West but he differentiates himself from the movement that was held by some African writers who want the rehabilitation of the African cultural image.

Another critic, Mark Ralph Bowman, in his article “**Leaders and Left-overs**”: **A Reading of Soyinka’s “*Death and the King’s Horseman*”** (1975) Studies the play from the politico-cultural point of view. In this sense, he says “at the nadir of his spiritual fortune, Elesin Oba uses the culture conflict excuse, but Olunde demonstrates these whine of culture conflict employ Eurocentric formula with no substance”<sup>2</sup>. It is clear from the quotation that, Bowman regards Soyinka’s play *Death and the King’s Horseman* as counter-discourse for the cultural hegemony of the Universalism of the West over “the other”, in spite of the fact that Soyinka has avoided shedding light on this cultural conflict explicitly. Bowman goes further when he describes Soyinka’s, **Death and the King’s Horseman** as an elitist work of literature and addressed to a specific kind of people. He claims “the play does not speak to the common man, it might be rejected by those with that particular ideological prescription for art”<sup>3</sup>

The last piece of criticism by James Booth in his journal article “***Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice in Death and King’s Horseman***” he studies the play from different perspective. He distinguishes two kinds of sacrifice, self –sacrifice, and human one. In this regard he states;

Olunde’s death by ritual is interpreted as a powerful metaphor for all sacrifice of self, though the word “efficacy” strikes a strangely practical note in this metaphorical note in the metaphorical context.<sup>4</sup>

It follows from the above quote that Olunde's death is considered to be self-sacrifice. On the other hand, James Booth presents another kind of sacrifice which is human sacrifice in generic sense. In this respect, he declares "as inevitable sacrifice of human life required by cosmological necessity"<sup>5</sup>. According to James Booth, Olunde's suicide is self-sacrifice because he has chosen himself as sacrificial figure instead of his father. In Yoruba cosmology, the sacrifice should be done by someone to save the burden of the family and community and this is what Booth confirms "human sacrifice".

Tennessee Williams is considered as an important figure of American modernist literature. His literary career has received academic attention, and his play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has been studied from different aspects.

Dean Shackelford in his article "**The Truth that Must be Told, Gay Subjectivity, Homophobia and Social History in *Cat on Hot Tin Roof***", study the play thematically; one of the themes studied is "homosexuality". He demonstrates that society has its role in creating problem of homosexuality because it can dehumanize men. He claims;

The play also demonstrates the extent to which society dehumanize men through it over homophobia. As such, the play largely demonstrates that homosocially-oriented social structure is responsible for problematizing homosexuality.<sup>6</sup>

Shackelford adds that Williams is a very courageous man, because he has spoken about an interesting issue in his play which is homosexuality. It was considered as security risk especially during the period of McCarthy. He suggests that "the work of Williams is positive since homosexuality and the Gay subject were never treated before, and the issue is held in Williams's **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**".<sup>7</sup> It is clear from the given evidence that Dean Shackelford considers or sees Williams's work *Cat on Hot Tin Roof* as a protest against the dehumanization of the Gay people on the one hand and glorifies or praises his courage for speaking about real issue, on the other hand.

As another piece of critical study, Donald Pease has studied the play from psychoanalytic approach. He sheds light on the existence of “Freud's primal scene” in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In his essay, “**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Restoring Tennessee Williams's production of the 1950's primal scene**”. Pease compares Williams's play context to Freud's Wolf man's primal scene. The first, falls within the Cold War climate, and the second on the political unrest that has led the exclusion of the aristocracy class. In this context he argues:

Freud located the wolf man's primal scene at the matrix of structural Shift that resulted in the elimination of the aristocracy from post-revolutionary Russia. Williams situated *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* at the site of the Cold War state's violent replacement of New Deal liberalism with cold war anti-communism<sup>8</sup>

As still another piece of criticism, Bruce McConachie studies the play from the historical point of view. In his work, **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and the Grotesque in the Cold War**, he shows how Williams embodies the "grotesque", in his play, as a literary device for political purpose. He highlights;

Williams understood the regional prejudices of his northern spectator and used them to trap his audience into questioning many of the primary assumption of containment liberalism. In effect, Williams deploys realist in *Cat* to challenge the cultural imperialism of the North<sup>9</sup>

## **b. Issue and Working Hypothesis**

As it has been mentioned in the given criticism on both selected works, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, and Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* are rich for literary investigation. In spite of the reviewed criticism, it is surprising how no previous or very little attention, to our best knowledge, has been given to the issue of modern tragedy in both works, and more surprising is that no study has been undertaken so as to bring both plays and playwrights together in spite of the great literary kinship

existing between the two. Therefore, it is our aim, in this piece of research to investigate the aspects of “modern tragedy” in Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* as they are very clearly depicted in both works.

The basic hypothesis of our piece of research is based on our assumption that both Tennessee Williams’s and Wole Soyinka’s treatment of such issue comes from their society’s conventions. We also believe that Williams and Soyinka are among the important engaged figures of their time; they struggle for their own cause. Two of them have social issues. Therefore we suppose that their two works are a powerful weapon to fight against social conventions. Soyinka writes about Yoruba people to defend his culture, despite its brutality, he aims to show the morality of Yoruba culture. Rather Williams struggles more about his personal issue, since he is a homosexual in time when America was a conservative country. But the main characters of both plays live a tragedy.

### **C. Methodological Outline**

Our memoir is undertaken following the IMRAD system. Our work begins with an Introduction that states our main purpose. It includes a review of the literature on Williams’s play **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and Soyinka’s **Death and King’s Horseman**. It also contains the issues and working hypothesis. The Method and Materials section provides a short summary of the modern Tragedy, borrowing from Arthur Miller’s theory **Tragedy and the Common Man** (1949) that we are going to apply in our analysis. It also includes brief summaries of the two plays, their historical backgrounds and settings, as well as short biographies of the playwrights. The results section contains our findings. The Discussion section consists of three chapters. In the first one, we apply Arthur Miller’s theory on the tragic heroes of both plays and how they struggle to gain their dignity. In the second chapter we analyze the figure of the fathers as anti-heroes and their failure to

achieve their duties. In the third Chapter, we discuss society dominance that is depicted in the two plays. Our dissertation ends with a general conclusion that sums up the main issues dealt with this piece of research.

## Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup>Nevedhini, A, *The African World in Wole Soyinka's Death and King's Horseman*. International Journal of Trend in Research and Development. ISSN: 2394-9333,. Ariguar Anna Art and science college, India. Aug 2017. P 346. [www.ijtrd.com](http://www.ijtrd.com)
- <sup>2</sup>Bowman, Mark Ralph. *Leader and left-overs A reading of Soyinka's Death and King's Horseman*. Research in African literature, Vol.1, NO.1, Special Issue on Soyinka Wole (spring, 1983),pp81-97. Indiana University Press. Accessed in: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/38187552>.
- <sup>3</sup>ibid.
- <sup>4</sup>Booth, J. *Self-sacrifice and human sacrifice in death and king's horseman*.Research in African literature, Vol.19, NO.4, Special Issue on Literature and Life History (winter, 1983), pp530. Indiana University Press. Accessed in: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819802>.
- <sup>5</sup>ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>Shackelford, D. *The truth that must be told: Gay subjectivity, Homophobia and social history in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations 2011. pp71
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid. p71.
- <sup>8</sup>Mcconachi, B. *Cat and the Grotesque in the Cold War*. Bloom's modern Critical Interpretation. 2011 pp129
- <sup>9</sup>Pease, D. *Cat on Hot Tin Roof: Restoring Tennessee Williams' Production of the 1950s Primal Scene*.2016.pp11 <https://fliphtml5.com/ownj/sbfx/basic>

## II. Method and Materials

This section of our research paper aims to explore the methodological elements and materials that will be applied in our study of tragedy in both Williams's and Soyinka's mentioned plays. The method section includes the summary and the explanation of the theoretical approach used in our analysis. The materials section provides the biographies of the two dramatists, In addition to the summaries of the selected plays as well as the historical context of America and Nigeria. The aim of this chapter is to draw parallels between the socio-historical contexts of the two selected plays.

### 1. Methods;

As we intend to deal with the issue of tragedy, particularly that of common people in Tennessee Williams' **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** (1955) and Soyinka's **Death and the King's the Horseman** (1975), we will borrow from Arthur Miller's theoretical perspective on tragedy.

Arthur Miller is one of the most renowned American playwrights of the modern time. He is famous for his play **Death of Salesman (1949)**, which received criticism and rejection from the audience. As a reaction to those critics, Miller wrote an essay entitled **Tragedy and The Common Man (1949)** in which he gives his own conception of tragedy that challenges the Aristotelian one without making reference to the play itself.

Miller starts his essay by pointing out that the number of tragedies written during the 20th century is very few compared to the comedies, and it is believed that, "the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us"<sup>1</sup>, this lack is justified by the absence of the very highly placed, the king or the kingly, and people no longer believe anymore in heroes after the Second World War. Miller in contrast states: "I believe that the common man is as apt

a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were”<sup>2</sup>, he considers that the tragic hero doesn’t have to be from a higher rank or have an important social position; he can be an ordinary man and be as suitable subject to tragedy just as the nobles were; tragedy is not restricted to the kings and kingly, the modern world is full of heroes in form of normal people.

Miller suggests, a general rule for tragedy; according to him, a hero is every person “who is ready to lay down his life, if need to be, to secure one thing his sense of personal dignity”<sup>3</sup>, he is a character who is ready to struggle to gain his “rightful” position in society”<sup>4</sup>, because he think that he is not given a right place or he is misjudged. Moreover the common man is constantly fighting in order to attain his goal for the first time, or to change the place he occupies in his society that he considers inappropriate for him to a valued one. Miller argues “tragedy...then is the consequence of a man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.”<sup>5</sup>

For Miller, the “tragic flaw” of the hero causes his final ruin; he cannot conform to the conditions that challenge his dignity. His incapacity to remain passive in front of things that do not suit him leads to his tragic end. This aspect makes them heroes because, in the modern world, most people accept that conditions without any reaction, they are passive and they do not act against the things that degrade them. They are submitted to the established order of society. The downfall of the modern tragic hero is justified by his inability to remain passive.

Miller states that if the particular problems encountered are those of higher rank only, those problems define those of tragedy. Consequently, the classical tragedy excludes the common man as a tragic hero. On the contrary, Miller argues that the common man fits tragedy; he is subject to fear more than nobles. “It is the common man who knows fear

best.”<sup>6</sup> For him a tragedy doesn’t need necessarily to be attached to pessimism that there is a possible victory can be considered”, he states “I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy”<sup>7</sup>, it requires a fair balance between what is possible and what is impossible.

It is clear from the above review that Miller’s theory fits our work, and then it is our aim to study tragedy of a common man in the selected work.

## **2. Materials**

### **a. Biographies**

#### **➤ Tennessee Williams Biography**

Tennessee Williams given name was Thomas Lanier Williams, was an American playwright and author of many stage classics. Most of his renowned work was adapted for the cinema and he also wrote short stories, poetry, essays and a volume of memoirs.

As a dramatist in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century American Drama, Williams is considered the figure of the theatre dramatic poetry. His drama was a lyric or poetic one. Frank Durham referred to him as “theatre poet in prose”<sup>8</sup>, as a Southern writer he inserted in his plays the natural rhythm and melody of southern speech. Williams uses a realist action in his work, his characters are often inspired from his family members, and to create content he uses his own life experience. Williams reflects his tragic life in his plays, since he suffers as person with a gay identity in a conservative society. Beside to his harsh depression, and his addictions to sleeping pills and liquor, which explains his writing themes that turns around; drug abuse, alcoholism, and domestic violence; also subjects of homosexuality in time from when it dare not speak its name

Tennessee Williams first play production was **Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay** in 1935, at the age of 16 he published his first work, wining third place in an essay contest

sponsored by smart set magazine, the essay titled **Can a Good Wife Be a Good Sport**, Tennessee became famous with his play **The Glass Menagerie** and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award as the best play of the season. The two plays **Street Named Desire** and **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** turned into film which he received two Pulitzer Prize for both.

Tennessee Williams suffered from depression which led him to alcoholism and he had become addicted to prescription drugs. ” On February 25, 1983, Williams was found dead in his suite at the Elysée Hotel in New York at age 71”<sup>9</sup>.

### ➤ **Wole Soyinka’s Biography**

Akinwande Bluwole Babatunde Soyinka (Wole Soyinka) is one of the African greatest writers, playwrights, poets and political activists, who is awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize for literature in 1986, the first African to receive this prize.

Born on July 13, 1934 in western Nigeria, Soyinka grows up within a religious environment by Christian parents, learning their Christian teachings, as well as the Yoruba culture and tribal customs of his grandfather. He attended the University of Ibadan in Nigeria before being admitted to Leeds University in England where he earned a degree in 1958, he worked in British theatre serving as a dramatist at the royal court theatre in London.

Soyinka has written some of the most politically and socially engaged plays in the history of African drama which he gave an international space, the writer exposes the traditional life of Africans and shows their cultures and religious life, more specifically he exposed the moral vision of the Yoruba people such as in his play ***Death and the King Horseman***.

Wole Soyinka is a political writer and a public activist who took an active role in Nigeria’s politic history and its struggle for independence from Great Britain. During the

Nigerian civil war (1966) he published a controversial article demanding cease fire, he was imprisoned for that for 22 months after being accused of conspiring with the Biafra rebels to overthrow the current administration, in October 1969, when the civil war came to an end, amnesty was proclaimed and Soyinka and other political prisoners were freed.

His plays deal with a variety of themes ranging from comedy to tragedy and from political satire to power struggles of the indigenous people. Some of his most influential plays: *A Dance of The Forest (1963)*, which deals with the struggles facing Nigeria and other African nations that had recently achieved independence. *The Lion and The Jewel (1963)*, which is an amusing comedy that points out the Yoruba culture and traditions. *Aké: The Years of Childhood (1981)*, an autobiography where Soyinka tells his story as a child in a village called “Aké “ where he spent the first 12 years of his life. Soyinka was awarded for this work an Anisfield-Wolf Award in 1983 (an American literary award for written works) . *Death and King’s Horseman (1975)*, the play describes the cultural clash between Yoruba people and the British colonizer, but not only, it is also about honor and freedom of choices and morality of the Yoruba community, freedom to choose death rather than losing dignity, what makes from the play a complete tragedy .

## **b. Synopsis**

### **➤ Synopsis of Williams’s Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** was performed in Broadway in **1955**, directed by Elia Kazan. It won every theatrical award for the best play including the Pulitzer Prize. The play is set in the plantation home in the Mississippi, Delta of Big Daddy Politt a wealthy cotton planter. **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** is a domestic and psychological tragedy, Williams writes with poetry and lyricism. It is about a martial conflict among members of Big Daddy’s family over a complex inheritance confirmation.

There are three acts in it. First, the two characters Brick and his wife Maggie the cat, she addressed to her husband Brick a former athlete and sport announcer, who is turned to alcohol after the suicide of his teammate and best friend Skipper, Maggie struggles to regain her husband's love, re-establish him to health, and have a child to assure his right to inheritance.

In the Second act, Brick and Big Daddy, father and son talk to one and another and make revelations, that Brick is Big Daddy's favoured son and rightful heir, he wants a grandson for him. However, when Big Daddy asks Brick about his alcoholic problems, it is with difficulty that Brick let go his secret about his sexual disgust, which result from his friend skipper who confesses his love to Brick, and then Skipper received the rejection that led to his suicide. In this act also Big Daddy and Brick help each other to face reality about themselves without illusions.

The third act indicates that nothing have changed, despite the discussion with his father, Brick remains in state of spiritual despair. The end of the act is left with an ambiguity whether Brick will join the lie that Maggie made about her fake pregnancy.

➤ **Synopsis of Soyinka's Death and King's Horseman**

*Death and the King's Horseman* is no doubt one of Soyinka's masterpieces that represent the Yoruba world view of the universe. According to their legacy there are three worlds that coexist, the world of the dead, the living and unborn one. The play includes very well these three worlds in a coherent way.

The play opens with a traditional festival for the dead king. Elesin Oba, The king horseman gets into the market place followed by drummers and some of the local dwellers. Poetry, songs and majestic dance concerning the world of the ancestors are performed.

The aim of this ceremony is to keep the same ritual, so that the king travels to the world of the dead. Elesin Oba's soul must accompany the dead king in order to respect the established orders of the ascendants. As a sign of his interest in life, Elesin Oba proclaims that he wants a beautiful young woman who is destined to the mother of the market-place, Iyaloja's son, she finally agrees, but she warns Elesin to keep his goal in mind ( death ritual).

The British officer in the tribe, Simon Pilkings is preparing for masquerade party with his wife Jane. The fact that he is not Nigerian prevents him for understanding the culture of Yoruba. So, he intends to arrest Elesin when he hears about his intention to die. Olunde, the son of Elesin has returned from England in order to bury his father as soon as he hears about the king's death. After seeing his father alive, Olunde kills himself for being ashamed because Elesin has failed in doing his duty toward the family reputation and completes the ritual. As a reaction of seeing his son dead the king's horseman puts an end to his life before Pilkings can stop him. The play ends with the bride closing Elesin's eyes.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Arthur, Miller. *Tragedy and the Common Man*. 1949, p 1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p 1

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p 1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p 1

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p 3

<sup>8</sup>Subashi, Esmeralda and Ostrosi Veliaj, Miranda. "Tennessee Williams's Dramatic World." *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 1, No.3.2015: 76-81. P:77

<sup>9</sup>Koch,E. *A short summary of Arthur Miller's tragedy and the common man*.

Interestingliterature. <https://interestingliterature.com/2017/10/03/a-short-summary-of-arthur-millers-tragedy-and-the-common-man/> Accessed on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2019

### III. Results

This section of our research paper aims to clarify the findings of our comparative study on the issue of tragedy of the common man in Tennessee Williams' **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** (1955) and Wole Soyinka **Death and The King's Horseman** (1976). Our purpose is to explore the issue of modern tragedy in both selected works and find the affinities between them. For this objective, we have relied on Arthur Miller's theory **Tragedy and the Common Man** (1949), and borrowed its concepts to discuss the characters, themes and the plays in general.

Our handling of American literature through **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and Nigerian literature in **Death and the King's Horseman** has allowed us to come to the result that despite the distance between the two playwrights, they tackle the same theme of the modern tragedy, and it focus on the tragedy of common men, that is to say that any ordinary man suffers and experiences failure in this life. Tennessee Williams highlights the American modern tragedy by the portrayal of the ordinary American people in the fifties, and how they face challenges and struggle to gain their place in society. Wole Soyinka on the other hand, portrays the tragedy with death in Nigerian society which is linked to their traditions; he also depicts the failure of the ordinary man in accomplishing his duties.

After analysing the two plays, we conclude that tragedy can occur in different manners, that tragedy is not only a final physical death, but it can be an emotional or social death; a total indifference and a total nonchalance that surrounds the individual. In addition, our study is concerned with social dominance, we have understood that Arthur Miller in his theory assures that society is the reason behind the suffering and the misery of the individual despite the effort to save his place, and eventually that leads him to his tragedy.

In conclusion, we may say that both plays **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and **Death and the King's Horseman** share many aspects which define them as modern tragedies relying on Miller's conception of tragedy.

#### **IV. Discussion**

In this part of our work, we will investigate Soyinka's and Tennessee Williams's presentation of tragedy in their plays **Death and the King's Horseman** and **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**. The first chapter focuses on the two selected plays' modern tragic heroes. In the second chapter, we have studied two other characters as anti-heroes. The final chapter discusses the social dominance imposed over the characters that have been studied.

##### **Chapter one: The Tragic Hero in Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman***

In his essay entitled *Tragedy and the Common Man (1949)*, Arthur Miller defines the tragic hero as being an ordinary person who struggles for his dignity. He insists on the fact that a tragic hero should not necessarily be from a higher rank or belong to a royal family. He is an ordinary man who attempts to reach his rightful place within society, he states "...the underlying struggles that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the character of Brik Pollitt in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and the king's son in *Death and King's Horseman* are the two characters that represent the figure of a tragic hero according to Miller's conception of tragedy. In his essay, Miller gives a description of characters that fits the modern world; they are common people facing problems of modern life to secure their sense of dignity.

## a. the Horseman's Son and Brick Pollit as Modern Tragic Heroes

In **Death and the King's Horseman**, Soyinka depicts the conflict existing between the beliefs of the colonizer and the Nigerian people, as well as the disagreement between their two different customs. Olunde is portrayed as a victim of his own thoughts and beliefs, which led to his tragic ending. Olunde is the eldest son of Elesin, the king's horseman; he lived a normal life in Nigeria studying at a local school before being helped by an English district officer called Mr. Pilkings to integrate a medical school in England. This is shown through the play;

PILKINGS: don't you remember? He's that chief with whom I had a scrap some three or four years ago. I helped his son get to a medical school in England, remember? He fought tooth and nail to prevent it.

JANE: oh now I remember. He was that very sensitive young man. What was his name again?

PILKINGS: Olunde. [...] <sup>2</sup>

In his essay Miller, proclaims that tragedy fits the common man as well as the highly placed and kings, for him "it is the common man that knows fear best"<sup>3</sup> his viewpoint challenges the Aristotelian definition of tragedy which placed people of high status as center and pillar of a perfect tragedy. However, Miller gives his own perception that placed the ordinary man at the front. Amar Guendouzi in his article *Tragedy in The Modern Age: The Case of Arthur Miller* argues that;

According to Miller, the common man can pretend to a tragic status and his story can provide materials for tragedy provided that his story engages issues of importance. Such as the sense of personal dignity, the survival of the race, or the relationship of Man to god<sup>4</sup>

In fact, we can say that Olunde is the tragic hero in **Death and the King's Horseman** since he fits Miller's conception of tragedy. Olunde's purpose when he returns to Nigeria is to bury his father; as soon as he hears about the king's death, he knows that his father will put an end to his life as the tradition suggest it, he intends to lead a normal life

after that as an ordinary man who has to study and to continue his training as a medical student. This is depicted through the play;

JANE: Olunde, please..., Promise me something. Whatever you do, don't throw away what you have started to do. You want to be a doctor. My husband and believe you will make an excellent one. Don't let anyone throw away your training.

OLUNDE (*genuinely surprised*): of course not. What a strange idea I intend to return and complete my training. Once the burial of my father is over <sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, nothing went as it should, Olunde is convinced by the death of his father after hearing the change performed by the drummers; he states "I have a funeral to arrange. Excuse me."<sup>6</sup> but a few minutes after, he realizes that his father is still alive, this means that it would be a calamity for the entire tribe and the community that would not forgive that act, Olunde does not accept this situation and he is furious against his father because he failed to achieve his duty to die. This passage demonstrates this;

ELESIN: [...] Oh son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!

OLUNDE: (*he moves for the first time since he heard his voice, brings his head slowly down to look on him*) I have no father, eater of left-overs.<sup>7</sup>

Olunde leaves the place, we do not know his destination or his intention until the last page; we discover that he commits the suicide that his father failed to achieve, he accomplishes that act that they consider to be the duty of his father. The following passage shows that;

(ELESINE has stood rock-still, his knuckles taut on the bars, his eyes glued to the body of his son. the stillness seizes and paralyzes everyone, including PILKINGS who has turned to look.[...])<sup>8</sup>

A common man can be a tragic hero, this is the case of Olunde who manifests his indignation and his frustration toward the failure of his father to achieve his duty, he still holds on the beliefs and traditions of his ancestors, then for him, it is a shame for the whole family. He feels deeply disappointed to see that all what he has planned will not be reached,

his goal to be a doctor will probably not happen. His sense of duty is stronger than his hopes for the future; consequently he puts an end to his life.

Like Olunde, Brick Pollitt, the tragic hero in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), lives an ordinary life before his tragic fall. Brick is the youngest son of Big Daddy Pollitt, a rich southern cotton planter; he was a successful football player before being injured and settles as a legendary sports-announcer. A moment later he also quit his job. His perfect world collapses when his homosexual friend commits suicide, thus, he sinks into alcoholism and in a moral paralysis that prevents him from living a peaceful and normal life, indeed, all his social relationships are damaged and his life becomes meaningless. As it is stated in the play;

BRICK: will you please give me my crutch so I can get up of this floor?

BIG DADDY: first you answer my question. Why do you drink? Why are you throwing your life away, boy, like somethin' disgusting you picked up in the street?<sup>9</sup>

Even his sexual orientation becomes doubtful after the death of his friend, especially when he rejects his wife Margaret. As it is shown in the play;

BRICK: what did you lock the door for?

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

BRICK: you know better, Maggie

MARGARET: no I don't know better

*(She rushes to gallery door, draws the rose-silk drapes across them)*

BRICK: don't make a fool of yourself.<sup>10</sup>

And also shown in MAE's speech

MAE: do you know why she's childless? She's childless because that big beautiful athlete husband of hers won't go to bed with her.<sup>11</sup>

It is good to remind that America during the 50s was not tolerant regarding some aspects of life like sexuality orientation, during that period speaking about it was barely possible, and women were expected to stay virgin until they were married, then being homosexual or lesbian was seen as a crime; society does not permit such deviation

considering them as a threat to the traditional family ideal. “Gay man and lesbians were considered security risk”<sup>12</sup> “gay man and lesbians are considered mentally ill”<sup>13</sup>

Brick Pollitt is suspected several times of being gay by his wife Margaret and his father, he denies the fact furiously, his reaction shows his total denial of what he is accused of. As it is indicated in the play;

MARGARET: [...] why I remember when we double-dated at college, Gladys Fitzgerald and I and you and skipper, it was more like a date between you and skipper. Gladys and I were just sort of tagging along as if was necessary to chaperone you! \_\_\_to make a good public impression \_\_\_

BRICK: (*turns to face her, half lifting his crutch*): Maggie, you want me to hit you with this crutch? Don't you know I could kill you with this crutch?<sup>14</sup>

Brick's life is meaningless, he is ready to give up on his life just as his friend did with an overdose of alcohol, and he does not show any interest in life. His sexual orientation is not clearly stated and remains a mystery during all the play, as Tennessee Williams wrote “some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a play”<sup>15</sup>, but Brick seems as if he is trying to hide his true nature and feelings for fear of society's judgment, Harold bloom in his book states: “it becomes clear to most viewer/ reader, especially the gay ones, that Brick and skipper are both, without doubt, homosexuals.”<sup>16</sup>

Both characters, Olunde and Brick are living an ordinary life, however, they are subjected to the same conditions that affect their self-esteem and honor. The tragedy for Miller should rely on realistic events that suit the modern world; their sense of dignity pushes them to react and stand in front of the things that degrade them.

### **b. Tragic heroes struggle for dignity**

The Struggle for dignity is one major point introduced in Tennessee's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. It is clearly depicted through

the two characters' daily life and experience. The two characters are facing challenges that confront them to some serious difficulties that impose on them a certain reaction, in fact they are trying to attain or gain their right place within the society even if this leads to their own demise, and this struggle in both plays makes these common people tragic heroes.

To start with, Soyinka portrays Olunde as a quiet sensitive young boy having a great sense of responsibility. The failure of his father to achieve the ritual is something that he could not bear, his reaction after seeing his father alive is a proof of his indignation and frustration, and he states "I have no father, eater of left-overs"<sup>17</sup>. For Olunde the destiny of the community and the world is threatened as the dignity of the family is too, thus he could not permit such a thing.

Arthur Miller demonstrates in his essay that the deficiency of any tragic hero takes place in his incapacity to remain insensitive in front of what challenges his dignity and his rightful image, this position pushes the character to react and try to improve the state in which he is, or to secure his sense of self-esteem, he states;

The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing \_\_and need to be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face in what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity.<sup>18</sup>

Against all odds, Olunde puts an end to his life, his respect to the traditions lead him to achieve heroically the ritual which initially had to be performed by his father, he accomplishes that act that they consider to be the duty of the king's horseman to secure his dignity and the safety of his community. The following words demonstrate this;

IYALOJA: (*moves forward and removes the covering*). Your courier Elesin, cast your eyes on the favored companion of the king.  
(*Rolled up in the mat, his head and feet showing at either end the body of OLUNDE.*)

There lies the honour of your household and of our race because he could not bear to let honour fly outdoors. [...] the son has proved the father Elesin [...]<sup>19</sup>

A common man has to struggle for his dignity. In the case of Soyinka's play *Olunde* does not accept the position in which he is placed; he holds on the beliefs and customs of his ancestors, it is good to remember that *Olunde* grew up within the Yoruba culture, so traditions and dignity are more important than anything else, in fact, he accomplishes what he thinks to be the best option for him and the entire community without being selfish. He sacrifices himself to secure his honor and rightful image.

Miller states that one aspect of modern tragedy is to be ready to sacrifice one's life in order to save the honor or to secure the destiny of a whole community, which is what *Olunde* has exactly done, sacrifice himself for the good of all; his sense of duty causes his final fall and death, Miller states;

I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need to be, to secure one thing- his sense of personal dignity<sup>20</sup>

Like *Olunde*, Brick Pollitt, the tragic hero in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955)*, struggles for his dignity. However, Brick's struggle is different from *Olunde's*. He lives in America of the 50s that was not tolerant at all, consequently, he leads a silent struggle that ends up with his destruction, Tennessee Williams in his note of explanation about the modifications made on act three states "...I felt that the moral paralysis of Brick was a root thing in his tragedy, and to show a dramatic progression would obscure the meaning of the tragedy on him"<sup>21</sup>

Brick's struggle for his honor is hidden, no one around him succeeds to surround his attitude or figure out the reason of his decline and disgust, the reason why he becomes totally passive and negligible, not caring about anything around him, nothing interests him as long as there is liquor in his glass, he does not care about his wife, about the results of the laboratory concerning his father's cancer, or about the inheritance. He leads an internal struggle for his personal dignity. Arthur Miller states in his essay *Tragedy and The Common Man (1949)*;

[...] but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.<sup>22</sup>

Brick can't change what he really is but he can hide it, from there came his total indifference to what surrounds him, his only aim is to secure his social position, he even marries Maggie just to prove that he is not the homosexual people think he is. All this is in order to save his social image. In this regard, in his essay Miller argues that: "from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy"<sup>23</sup>

Both characters, Olunde and Brick are exhibiting their indignation about the society's judgment in two different ways; however, they are subject to the same conditions that affect their self-esteem and honor, as Miller claims it, the unwillingness of characters to stay passive in front what challenges their dignity led to their tragic ending, brick on his side chooses alcohol to escape from his reality and hides his sexual orientation, after he realizes his disorder he doesn't accept it, he chooses to run away from his reality. Tennessee Williams through the character of Brick Pollitt, shows that the final fall of the protagonist is not necessarily death; it can be a social suicide that prevents people from living a normal life, a moral paralysis that causes his weakness in a modern life. Henry I. Schvey in his work **The Tragic Poetics of Tennessee Williams** claims that

In Williams's universe, it is these "weak and divided people" (as Alma calls them in *Summer and Smoke*) whose fall demands our interest and our sympathies and forms the basis of the playwright's tragic poetics. Williams' idea of a poetics of tragedy is therefore not about hubris or "stature"; rather, it is constructed of human weakness and vulnerability.<sup>24</sup>

Brick represents perfectly that weak and hopeless modern man that escapes from reality and isolates himself from society. Alcohol becomes a refuge. His social death constitutes his tragedy.

Unlike Brick, Olunde chooses a more radical option. He possesses a great sense of responsibility and loyalty even if he spent years in England, his migration allows him to understand the English way of thinking without changing his, or influences his perception and devotion for his traditions. As it is shown in his conversation with Jane:

JANE: I see, so it isn't just medicine you studied in England.

OLUNDE: yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learned from you.

JANE: not so far Olunde. you have learned to argue I can tell that, [...]<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, his devotion to his Yoruba community is limitless. Thus, he judges that it is a necessity for him and a duty to complete the ritual, and he finally chooses to commit suicide. Soyinka demonstrates the importance of the Yoruba culture through Olunde's sacrifice; James Booth in his work, "**Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman**" states;

Olunde's sacrifice symbolizes the determination to be true to one's root and to assert the value of higher duty against both the internal threat of materialistic self-interest (Elesin's tragic flaw) and the external threat of an imposed alien culture<sup>26</sup>

Both Brick Pollitt and Olunde fight for their honor, both of them pay the price of losing their life to secure their self-esteem; Olunde commits suicide and Brick Pollitt commits another kind of suicide that is social suicide.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949.p 1
- <sup>2</sup>Soyinka, Wole.*Death and King's Horseman*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd Fetter Lane.1975. p:28
- <sup>3</sup> Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949, P2
- <sup>4</sup>Guendouzi, amar. *Tragedy in the Modern Age: The Case of Arthur Miller*. University of TiziOuzou-Algeria. P 2
- <sup>5</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*.1975. p 54-55
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid, P55
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, P60-61
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid, P75
- <sup>9</sup> Tennessee, Williams."Cat on a Hot Tin Roof".In Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955, edited by Poirier Richard, 873-1005. 14 East 60<sup>th</sup> street, New York: Literary classics of the United States, 2000, P 939
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid, P898
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid, P997
- <sup>12</sup>Shackelford, D.*The truth that must be told: Gay subjectivity, Homophobia and social history in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations (2011),P69
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid, P70
- <sup>14</sup>Tennessee, Williams."Cat on a Hot Tin Roof". In Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955, P910
- <sup>15</sup> ibid 945
- <sup>16</sup> Poteet, W.M *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations 2011, P151
- <sup>17</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman* 1975. P61
- <sup>18</sup>Miller, Arthur.*Tragedy and the Common Man* 1949. P1
- <sup>19</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*.1975. p75
- <sup>20</sup>Miller, Arthur.*Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949. P1

<sup>21</sup>Tennessee, Williams.”*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*”. In Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955,2000. P978

<sup>22</sup>Miller, Arthur.*Tragedy and the CommonMan*.1949. P1

<sup>23</sup>Ibid P1

<sup>24</sup>Schvey, H. *The Tragic Poetics of Tennessee Williams*. Études anglaises, Vol. 64(1), 74-85, 2011. P 77

<sup>25</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King’s Horseman*.1975. p53

<sup>26</sup>Booth, J. *Self-sacrifice and human sacrifice in death and king’s horseman*.Research in African literature, Vol.19, NO.4, Special Issue on Literature and Life History (winter, 1983), pp 538.Indiana University Press. Accessed in:[https://www.jstor.org/stable/3819802?read-now=1&seq=11#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3819802?read-now=1&seq=11#page_scan_tab_contents)

## **Chapter two: Big Daddy Pollitt and Elesin: the figure of the father as the anti-Hero**

In this chapter, we will deal with two other important characters in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Both modern tragedy and the classical one share one important feature, the disastrous ending, but we can notice several differences. Indeed, Aristotelian tragedy has a unified plot, and has one central character unlike the modern one which has several important characters which have an important impact on stage.

The two tragic heroes Olunde in *Death and the King's Horseman* and Brick Pollitt in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, there are the two fathers that play important roles in the tragedy; both are tragic figures who confront their inevitable destiny, that is, death.

### **a. Big Daddy pollitt and Elesin as tragic Anti Heroes**

The two fathers are important figures on stage. Their tragic ending is demarked by some challenges and actions that they face all along the play. On the one hand, we have Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* whom Tennessee Williams portrays as a representation of the American man of the 50s; a man who sacrifices his values for money, a man who achieves commercial success but who is a failure in his family life. Big Daddy represents that figure; he is an ordinary rich cotton planter who is vulgar and distant from all the members of his family. He acts as if money is the ultimate thing to have, as if only his richness defines his value as a human being. He loves to act like a boss and a ruler. This is shown through his speech when he says: "Do what I tell you! I'm the boss here, now! I want you to know I'm back in the driver seat now!"<sup>1</sup>. He is convinced that he is dying of cancer, but after he discovers that he does not have that illness, he acts

disagreeably with his surroundings in order to recover his status as a boss and prove who the ruler is. In his essay *Tragedy and the Common Man* Miller states: “ the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what or who we are in this world.”<sup>2</sup>, Daddy Pollitt acts authoritatively to recover his status of a ruler, he says;

BIG DADDY: [...] I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it turns out that I am and you ain't \_\_and that's my birthday present\_\_and cake and champagne! Because three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made [...] <sup>3</sup>

Daddy Pollitt acts rudely especially with his wife Big Mama. He is disgusted even by her presence around him, he confesses to Brick his intention to get another woman in order to have pleasure with her. He publicly shows his regret about staying married to Ida for many years, he says;

BIG DADDY: [...] having, for instance, to act like I care for big mama! \_\_ I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now! Even when I *laid* her! Regular as a piston[...] <sup>4</sup>

Big Daddy is dying of cancer, but his family decides to hide the truth from him for a while. After telling him that he has only a spastic colon, he feels that life has given him a second chance, thus he reveals the truth about his feelings toward his family and the hypocrisy with what he lived for many years. He never loved any of them except Brick for whom he has “some kind of real feeling for”<sup>5</sup>. Late, in Act two, Brick accidentally reveals to Big Daddy that he is dying of cancer; the latter is shocked by the news and does not accept that the end is near. In his essay, Arthur Miller states “from this total examination of the “unchangeable” environment - comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy”<sup>6</sup>

Big Daddy is confronted to the unchangeable truth by which he is terrified; his imminent death. His tragedy is that he will die surrounded by liars and a family that would

not be honest with him. In the original Act Three, Big Daddy does not reappear on stage, just as "a long-drawn cry of agony and rage which fills the house"<sup>7</sup>, according to the director Elia Kazan "Big Daddy was too vivid and important a character to disappear from the play except as an off-stage cry after the second act curtain"<sup>8</sup>.

On the second version performed on stage, Tennessee Williams made some adjustments that were suggested by his director in order not to lose his interest; he brought Big Daddy back since he was a key character according to Kazan.

In *Death and King's Horseman*, Soyinka portrays Elesin at first as an honourable and respected chief who will sacrifice himself for the good of the Yoruba community. Elesin is supposed to commit suicide after the death of the king in order to accompany him in the afterlife and prevents his community from an inevitable calamity "the world is in your hands"<sup>9</sup> said the women addressing Elesin. He is a vivacious man who appreciates the pleasures of the living like rich clothes, he states;

ELESIN: words are cheap. We know you a man of honor'. Well tell me, is this how a man of honour should be seen? Are these not the same clothes I came among you a full half-hour ago?

*(He roars with laughter and the woman, relieved, rise and rush into stalls to fletch rich cloths )<sup>10</sup>*

He also shows his interest in life when he expresses his desire to marry a young girl who is already engaged to Iyaloja's son, the mother of the market. Elesin understands his duty and does not fear death, but on his last day, he is distracted by the beautiful girl. These aspects prove that Elesin's subconscious refuses the fact that he will put an end to his life, while the community imposes on him to do so. He seems to accept his destiny to preserve his dignity; otherwise he will dishonor his household.

In this regard Miller discusses the challenges that defy the dignity of the common man, he states;

The flaw, or the crack in the character is really nothing and needs to be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Elesin is ready to sacrifice himself in order to preserve his sense of personal dignity, he says "... life is honour. It ends when honour ends."<sup>12</sup>. He is also reputed to be an honorable man among the women of the market; they tell him "we know you for a man of honour"<sup>13</sup>, but the distraction made Iyaloja doubtful about the determination of the horseman to achieve his duty, she warns him saying:

IYALOJA: the living must eat and drink, when the moment comes, don't turn the food to rodent's dropping in their mouth. Don't let them taste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew.

ELESIN: this doubt is unworthy of you Iyaloja.<sup>14</sup>

If we consider what Elesin replies to Iyaloja, his intention is clear, to achieve the ritual and help the king's soul in his transition to the next world. Yet, his attraction to the goods of the living and his pride lead him to the wrong path; his desire for the last wedding night with his bride enable the district officer, Pilkings to arrest him considering suicide illegal. Elesin's failure to fulfil his mission brings shame to his son Olunde who is a loyal and respectful to his traditions. Consequently, Olunde achieves the ritual in his father's place. Elesin commits suicide not to fulfil his duty but because of the loss of his son, and his dignity at the same time.

In this regard, Miller claims,

I think that the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need to be, to secure one thing his sense of personal dignity[...] but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is a wound of indignity, and its dominant force is indignation<sup>15</sup>

Elesin's wound of indignation is doubled, On the one hand, he fails to perform the task that the community expects him to complete, thus his people considers him as a betrayer " you have betrayed us "<sup>16</sup> said Iyaloja addressing Elesin. On the other hand, he loses his only

son who passes away because of his unforgivable mistake. In his work "*Leaders and Left-Overs*": *A Reading of Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman*", Mark Ralph Bowman claims that "Elesin Oba is a victim of his own strengths"<sup>17</sup>. Elesin supposes that everything is allowed to him, that fact causes his dishonourable death.

Both fathers are complex characters who are subject to daily pressure. On the one hand, Tennessee Williams describes Big Daddy as a modern rich man who refuses to accept his inescapable death, indeed, his tragedy takes place in his denial that of death of cancer, and in the fact that his entire life is built around mendacity and hypocrisy. His fear of death changes his perception of life. Miller declares that "it is the common man who knows fear best"<sup>18</sup> Big Daddy is an example of that man who is terrified by death. On the other hand, Soyinka portrays the king's horseman as a responsible and respectful man who apparently accepts his fate at the beginning, and then his confrontation with the reality about death made him realize the dilemma in which he is. That fact reinforces his desire to get more and more from life, he even deprives an engaged woman to marry the one she is destined to. His egoistic nature gains the upper hand. Thus, we can consider that Elesin is a weak character who failed to assure his role. In fact, the one who accomplishes the ritual is his son. Furthermore, Elesin puts an end to his life yet it is too late, he is distressed and his dignity is lost even in the other side. In this regard Miller affirms that the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character that is ready to sacrifice himself to secure his sense of dignity<sup>19</sup>. However, Elesin death does not save his sense of personal dignity.

## **b. Big Daddy and the king's Horseman's Sense of Duty and Failure**

Big Daddy and Elesin are two characters that enjoy having authority and taking control over people. Their selfishness and love of power cause their failure both in leading a natural life and performing their duty.

First, as mentioned before, Big Daddy is portrayed as an egocentric man who adores to have power over his entourage, his expressions and behavior show his attachment to the position of the leader "I'm the boss here"<sup>20</sup>. But he neglects the fact that the great position requires from him great responsibilities, especially in the way he manages his own family. Big Daddy succeeded in his business as a cotton planter and built a good estate but failed at leading his own family; especially when he tries to approach his son Brick as a loving father. Tennessee Williams displays the lack of communication between the members of the family which lead to their loneliness and isolation. In act two, when Big Daddy tries to approach Brick in order to get the truth about his excessive drinking; the communication between the two characters is almost impossible "why it is so damn hard for people to talk?".<sup>21</sup> Since brick does not care about what his father is saying, he says;

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<sup>22</sup>

In his plays, Arthur Miller depicts the problems facing a common man in the modern world especially in America, among them isolation, family relationships, lack of communication and search for wealth." Miller's work remains important and is often produced because of its strong, transcultural human resonance and breadth of subject. As Ben Brantley points out, Miller "makes us look and listen, and feel the problems and pain of others as if they were our own."<sup>23</sup>

Like Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, deals with these themes that are the major troubles of a modern man in his play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and the character of Big Daddy represents that man who is troubled by possession and wealth which make him distant and isolated from his family.

He builds his own empire, and he is proud to have succeeded in becoming rich after being poor "I made this place! I was overseer on it ...I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields"<sup>24</sup>, it seems like Big Daddy achieved the American dream; he succeeds to possess all that he wants. Yet, in the way to his personal success he loses the unity of his family and their love. Even if Big Daddy owns the richest land of the south, he is going to die with cancer, surrounded by a family that somehow doesn't care about him; the only thing that they expect from him is his legacy "This is the sacrifice he made on the way to success, in order to earn money and build his empire; he gave up on his family life"<sup>25</sup>

Big Daddy fails in performing his duty as a family leader, he fails as a father and as a husband. His family is divided and no one is satisfied in his life. he thought that money will procure him happiness and prosperity; however the contrary happens. In fact, wealth creates distance between him and the other members of his family. The old man doesn't understand the lesson, when he believes that he is cured, and he is not affected by cancer, the only thing that preoccupies him is to recover his status of a boss and have fun with women, neglecting the feelings of his wife and the situation of his sons. His life is a tragedy since his richness will not fix his past mistake and save his life at the same time.

Second, we have Elesin, the king's horseman. Soyinka makes of his character a mysterious man, Elesin is as venerated and respected man, as Big Daddy, his power blinds him and influences his choices and his attitude towards the members of the community.

When the king died, the rest of the community knew that one month later, Elesin, the horseman should follow the king to the afterlife according to the Yoruba traditions in order to keep the world from calamity. Elesin is conscious about the importance of the ritual and the necessity to accomplish the ceremony, thus he gains confidence and starts to act inappropriately, demanding improbable things like an engaged woman. His imminent death strengthens his desire for life and leads to his failure to achieve his duty. Consequently, he loses his dignity and his son at the same time.

Mark Ralph Bowman states;

Soyinka has made Elesin's failure both individual and representative since, as well as being a finely delineated individual character, Elesin Oba is also, as was suggested earlier, the embodiment of the culture of his people and as such he has an awful responsibility<sup>26</sup>.

This statement asserts that Elesin is an individualistic character who fails both as a person and as a leader; his failure is perceived from his people as betrayal for them and the Yoruba values. Elesin tries to justify his failure to achieve the ritual primarily by the intervention of the District Officer, he says: " ...already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled"<sup>27</sup>. But then he confesses a more realistic reason and blames the young bride for having distracted him, arousing in him the desire to live and have the last wedding night with her.

ELESIN: my young bride [...] first I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will[...] I have taken countless woman in my life but you were more than a desire of the flesh[...] and perhaps your warmth and youth brought new insight of this world to me[...]<sup>28</sup>.

This confession of Elesin to his bride shows his weakness in front of death. The Yoruba community is harsh regarding their customs and traditions; the fact that Elesin doesn't achieve the ritual makes of him a traitor and he will surely be discarded by his people and lose his honour. This indicates his failure as a leader. Moreover, like Big Daddy, Elesin

fails as an individual and as a father. He loves his son even if he disowns him because of Olunde's decision to quit Nigeria to England in order to pursue his studies. Soyinka depicts the conflict existing within a family and their different philosophy. If we analyse the primary situation, we will find that Elesin is attached to the Yoruba traditions more than his son who leaves his community for another country. However, at the end of the fifth act, we conclude the opposite; Elesin admits the integrity of his son, saying

ELESIN: [...] the contemn of my own son rescued something of my shame at your hands, you may have stopped me in my duty but I know now that I did give birth to a son. Once I mistrusted him for seeking the companionship of those my spirit knew as enemies, now I understand [...] <sup>29</sup>

Olunde achieves the ritual instead of his father who hesitates. The king's horseman fails in his duty as a father from the beginning, he misjudges his son's devotion to their customs, and then he brings him shame that leads finally to Olunde's suicide. Miller in his essay explores the impact of the environment and society on the individual, he affirms: "from the total examination of the "unchangeable" environment comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy"<sup>30</sup>. Elesin is subjected to the Yoruba rules, he cannot make his own decision, and death is imposed on him without any other outlet.

Elesin tries to satisfy his community with performing the ritual of suicide, but he fails. Consequently, he lost his honour and his only son at the same time, he could have been a hero had he achieved his duty, but his greed prevented him to do so. He finally commits the suicide that is demanded from him but, it is too late.

Both Big Daddy and Elesin are portrayed as anti-heroes; each one of them has a duty to perform, but they both fail. They share a lot of circumstances that lead to their final decline and failure; they love to have power and control over others, they share the

same weakness and desire for women. They love their sons but fail to be good fathers and, finally, they both are condemned to a near death.

Arthur Miller shed light on the direction that a modern literature took; He argues "our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological"<sup>31</sup>. By relating to what Miller says, we conclude that modern tragedy deals especially with problems encountered within a society and the state of mind of the modern man. Thus, we can say that Tennessee Williams and Soyinka depict through *Big Daddy* and *Elesin* the challenges that face a modern man and family, and the impact of their decisions and choices on others. The two fathers have the potential to be heroes, but they fail at performing their duty.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Tennessee, Williams." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*". In Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955, edited by Poirier Richard, 873-1005. 14 East 60<sup>th</sup> street, New York: Literary classics of the United States, 2000. P: 938

<sup>2</sup>Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*". 1949 .p 2

<sup>3</sup>Tennessee, Williams." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*". 1955. P 923

<sup>4</sup>ibid,p941

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p941

<sup>6</sup>Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949. P 1

<sup>7</sup>Tennessee, Williams." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*". 1955.P 973

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, p977

<sup>9</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *.Death and King's Horseman*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd Fetter Lane.1975. p: 18

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, P16

<sup>11</sup>Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949. P: 1

<sup>12</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*.1975. P:14

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, P14

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, P22

<sup>15</sup>Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949. P: 1

<sup>16</sup>Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*.1975. P:68

<sup>17</sup>Bowman, Ralph-Mark. " *Leaders and Left-Overs*": A Reading of Soyinka's " *Death and the King's Horseman*". [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3818752?read-now=1&seq=9#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3818752?read-now=1&seq=9#page_scan_tab_contents) p 89

<sup>18</sup>Miller, Arthur. *Tragedy and the Common Man*. 1949. P 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p1

<sup>20</sup>Tennessee, Williams." *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*".1955.P 938

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p928

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p938

<sup>23</sup>Abbotson.c.w, Susane “*The Influence of Arthur Miller on American Theater and Culture and the Global Implications of His Plays*”. *The OXFORD RESEARCH ENCYCLOPEDIA*. Oxford University USA. 06 nov 2019. P:14

<sup>24</sup>Tennessee, Williams.”*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*”.1955.P923

<sup>25</sup> “*To What Extent is Cat On A Hot Tin Roof a representative of the Shortcomings of the American Dream?*”.*StudyMoose*, Oct 27, 2017. Accessed November 7, 2019  
[.https://studymoose.com/to-what-extent-is-cat-on-a-hot-tin-roof-a-representative-of-the-shortcomings-of-the-american-dream-essay](https://studymoose.com/to-what-extent-is-cat-on-a-hot-tin-roof-a-representative-of-the-shortcomings-of-the-american-dream-essay)

<sup>26</sup>Bowman, Ralph-Mark. “*Leaders and Left-Overs*”: A Reading of Soyinka's "*Death and the King's Horseman*". [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3818752?read-now=1&seq=9#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3818752?read-now=1&seq=9#page_scan_tab_contents) P89

<sup>27</sup>Soyinka, Wole.*Death and King's Horseman*.1975. P 65

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, P65

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, P62

<sup>30</sup>Miller, Arthur.*Tragedy and the Common Man*.1949. P1

<sup>31</sup>Ibid ,P2

### **Chapter three: Society's Dominance and the Hero's Final Fall**

In this Chapter, we will explore the social dominance over the characters of both play **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and **Death and the Kings' Horseman**. Miller's '**Tragedy and the Common Man**' evokes the social oppression on the individual which is the major reason of the tragic hero destruction. In the process of man's self affirmation, and saving his dignity, society is always presented as stronger, what makes the protagonist weak and passive, and this is associated to tragedy. As it is mention in **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, Brick live an emotional and psychological death;

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.<sup>1</sup>

Social dominance is apparent in **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and **Death and The king's Horseman**. Reading the two plays makes us understand that society has a strong impact on characters' personal lives. Dominant social members play an important role on the individual perceptions, for example, it is society that decides which ideological orientation that one may belong to, then, unconsciously influenced by his environment where he lives, practicing a particular norms and traditions, therefore, the characters are in obligation to remain loyal to their country culture, and it is an enduring for the ones who do not chose their difference than the ones who accept with all their will like Olunde approval of his cultural conventions ;

Olunde: all these things are part of it. And anyway, my father has been dead in my mind for nearly a month. Ever since I learnt of the King's death. I've lived with my bereavement so long now that I cannot think of him alive. On that journey on the boat, I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform the rites over his body. I went through it all again and again in my mind as he himself had taught me. I didn't want to do anything wrong, something which might jeopardise the welfare of my people.<sup>2</sup>

### a. **Social Dominance on Olunde and Brick politt**

Society's dominance is very clear in **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, the protagonist Brick Politt is the best example. He is portrayed as a victim of his society who leads a battle that cannot be reached. For Arthur Miller, "tragedy is driven by 'Man's total compunction to evaluate himself justly'. In the process of doing this and attaining his dignity the tragic hero often loses his life. Society destroys him"<sup>3</sup>. Brick's environment is really hard to bear; he passes by depression and turns in to alcohol. For him it is a way to relieve his unavoidable pain, in his renouncement lays the sense of tragedy. Brick suffers from sexual issues, he is not attracted to his wife, but rather he is attracted to his departed friend Skipper, during a period when homosexuals are treated as outsiders;

MARGARET: Why I remember when we double-dated at college, Gladys Fitzgerald and I and you and Skipper, it was more like a date between you and Skipper. Gladys and I were just sort of tagging along as if it was necessary to chaperone you!--to make a good public impression—<sup>4</sup>

Golden Age, despite of its name America's Fifties faced many issues; we cite alcoholism, homophobia, and the unequal rights that impoverished the African American. Besides, Black and other minorities like homosexuals undergo through severe segregation. As far as America's Homosexuality is concerned, it is considered to be controversial in time male-female relationship, and reproductions are presented to be the norm, so in order to be accepted, men and women had to conform to traditional behaviours. In addition people in this era follow the strict conventions of the Bible which made homosexuality something hard to be approved by society, it was even considered as a threat. Eric Swank explains in his Article;

"Most people view homosexuality as a violation of traditional gender roles, those who cherish conventional prescription tend to abhor homosexuality."<sup>5</sup>

Tennessee Williams one of the best figures who wrote about the social issues facing America in 1950's including the taboo ones, he found difficulties publishing his works and they were rejected by many directors, because of their inappropriate subjects in audience perceptions, but in 1955 Elia Kazan accepted to direct **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, despite the fact that the play had broken the heteronormative gender of the American families' life map.

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** mirrored mostly homosexual issue, it is even symbolical, the room where the play was performed belongs to a homosexual couple by the names of Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. Social pressure on Brick is obvious, the view of his identity is irreconcilable, he demands desperately to his father "--Don't you know how people feel about things like that? How, how disgusted they are by things like that?"<sup>6</sup> His friend skipper had an influence on him, they built an honest and old friendship, they were very close and always present for one another, for Brick, Skipper is the only one who saw past with his image. Despite of Brick love of his friend, when Skipper made his homosexual love confession in phone, Brick does not react, he just hung up on him. Here we deduce the social control over him. Brick is stuck between being homophobic or hiding his homosexuality, in both cases, he suffers struggling because of society. Social pressure is also identified in his marriage to Maggie though he is not attracted to her, it was just justification to hide his sexual orientation and prove that he is not homo even to himself. Every time when anyone makes a reference to an abnormal relationship between him and skipper, Brick becomes aggressive and defends himself with most vulnerability, as it is shown in the play;

BRICK: I had to give you a reason to get a drink!

BIG DADDY: You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died. [Silence for five beats. Then Brick makes a startled movement, reaching for his crutch.]

BRICK: What are you suggesting?

BIG DADDY: I'm suggesting nothing. [The shuffle and clop of Brick's rapid hobble away from his father's steady, grave attention.] --But Gooper an' Mae suggested that there was something not right exactly in your—  
BRICK [stopping short downstage as if backed to a wall]: 'Not right'?  
BIG DADDY: Not, well, exactly normal in your friendship with—  
BRICK: They suggested that, too? I thought that was Maggie's suggestion.  
[Brick's detachment is at last broken through. His heart is accelerated; his forehead sweat-beaded; his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse...].<sup>7</sup>

Relaying on Miller's theory, we conclude that it is society which is responsible of Brick's tragedy, it is clear that Brick is unable to stand in front of society's conventional moral patterns. He fails to stick to the right position of society's expectations. He isolates himself from the rest of the world. Through liquor he searches to attain an inebriated peace he refers to as a 'click'. The death of his friend Skipper causes him an emotional and physical exhaustion which leads him to drop in to infinite depression, what allows him to commit slow suicide by alcohol.

Like Brick, Olunde is also considered as victim of his social tradition. However, Olunde's victimhood is different from that of Brick; he does not struggle to hide, but rather he accepts the duty that his society dictates. He is proud of his society and remains faithful for its beliefs. Although Olunde is inducted into the English culture since he has been sent there to study medicine, he never changes towards his community's beliefs. Here it is clear that just like Brick, society dominance influences deeply on the character of Olunde, as it is shown in the play, when his father comes to comply the suicidal ceremony, Olunde does not seem offended, he completely agree for the sacrifice;

OLUNDE: All these things are part of it. And anyway, my father has been dead in my mind for nearly a month. Ever since I learnt of the King's death. I've lived with my bereavement so long now that I cannot think of him alive. On that journey on the boat, I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform the rites over his body. I went through it all again and again in my mind as he himself had taught me. I didn't want to do anything wrong, something which jeopardise the welfare of my people.<sup>8</sup>

Olunde was raised among Yoruba culture in Nigeria, which is formed of diverse traditions, in **Death and the King's Horseman**, we are concerned with the customary ritual suicide that bases on the sacrifice for the horseman to join the king's death, this tradition is considered as crucial dignity in Yoruba land, and it is a responsibility in which the peace, stability, and prosperity of the people is kept. Yoruba is a communal society rather than individual, for them community asserts the security and harmony of its people. Hence, Olunde is considered as custodian of the culture, for him tradition is important, he has to preserve it. According to Remi Akujobi;

The metaphysical power behind the community is seen in Olunde; the Zeal to enforce that which is pertinent is what critics find outstanding. He arrives with western education but is not ready to give up his indigenous culture. He is eager to show off his knowledge of his culture and equally shows that there is nothing barbaric about it<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Olunde has his education in England, we expect his rejection of his culture, but contrarily he find that whites though of primitivism about African should be though on them as well, because of their conduct in war for instance, he find that there is no a big difference in the two cultures, even he has a certain admiration on them, like the captain who blows up himself to save other people and other ships since the ship was a threat to them. Jane explains the captain action to Olunde in the play;

JANE: ...The ship had to be blown up because it had become dangerous to the other ships, even to the city itself. Hundreds of the coastal population would have died.<sup>10</sup>

It is similarly of the sacrifice that his society dictates. To act against the tradition will definitely have a negative impact on his society. So just like the captain, Olunde knows that the sacrifice will help the society's stability.

As we have already said, Miller's theory states that it is the society's fault that leads the hero to his tragic ending. Olunde is obviously controlled by the convention of Yoruba socio-cultural beliefs. They believe in the adage: "Iku ya ju esin lo" which means "It is better to commit suicide than to live and be put to shame"<sup>11</sup>, Olunde

believes deeply in that so he is ready to do everything in his power to preserve it. We see that when he learns that his father is still alive and holds back by the white English officer, he immediately returns home from England in order to achieve the duty of suicide in his place so as to protect his family's dignity from the shame that it endures among his community. The social oppression is epitomized in the play, for instance in the condemnation of Iyalojia, the 'mother' of the market, toward Elesin;

IYALOJA: How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon when it was the eagle itself he promised us he would confront.<sup>12</sup>

IYALOJA: there are sights in this world which say different Elesin. There are some who choose to reverse this cycle of our being...what the gods have claimed of you?  
13

As we are dealing with society dominance in Arthur Miller's theory, **Tragedy and the Common Man**, and how it affects on the Character of Olunde, it becomes clear that Yoruba culture controls the perspective of Olunde, since even he had a life experience among people of England, he does not become indifferent toward his culture. Therefore we can conclude that Olunde's tragedy is without doubt the fault of his society's cultural convention that pushes him to commit such a sacrifice, a suicidal act to save the family's pride and honour in his community, because his father forfeits that role and he sees the sacrifice for the sake of one's people is something worth it

## **b. Social Dominance on Elesin and Big Daddy Politt**

Elesin Oba in **Death and king horseman** is considered as the anti-hero, since he is expected to perform a ritual of self sacrifice, but unlike his son he hesitates to die. Elesin faces social pressure in his community, because he had to fortify himself not to fall in hesitation of accomplishing his duty, and he has to keep his will against the forces that restrain him, but he disappoints the expectation of his community which leads him to

became ridicule among them. In addition, he is covered with shame to not committing suicide and failing to represent his society value system as he is deemed to. As a result, the whole people perceive him as worthless. As it is represented in the play;

IYALLOJA: Oh Elesin, see what you've become. Once you had no need to open your mouth in explanation because evil-smelling goats, itchy of hand and foot had lost their senses....Now look at the spectacle of your life. I grieve for you.<sup>14</sup>

Social dominance on Elesin resides in his role as a horseman which has a great importance to the community. Furthermore, Elesin is told that his dignity is in his hand, they keep reminding him of the ritual suicide that he has to perform in order to join the king's death as the tradition demands, and this will assure the communal continuity among Yoruba people.

Social pressure is presented in the play through the two characters, Iyalloja and the Praise-singer whose role is to maintain Elesin capable toward his duty and prepare him for his death, the market women also contributed to this, for instance, when they tell him "the world is in your hand"<sup>15</sup>, "We know you for a man of honour"<sup>16</sup>, and they also say repeatedly "for a while we truly feared. Our hands had wrenched the world adrift in emptiness"<sup>17</sup>. That is, we deduce that Elesin decision is dictated by the convention which his society believes in, like the Praise-singer when he focuses on the ritual performance and its importance for the safety of their race, he says;

There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter?<sup>18</sup>

This pressure makes Elesin such an awful responsibility to bear, like the Praise-singer refers it to as "gourd". He says: "The gourd you bear is not for shirking. The gourd is not for setting down"<sup>19</sup>. Elesin faces difficulties to sacrifice himself, he feels sad to leave the world, he is someone who holds onto life. Since he is king's horseman that means Elesin

has all advantages of the King, a high status, wealth, and women too. That is revealed in the play when Elesin believes that he has the right to get all he wants, so he demands a beautiful bride, which is the fiancé of Iyaloja's son, for the night before his ritual. This results in a doubtful reaction of the people toward Elesin, they think that he is weakened by the desire of life. Desperately, Iyaloja tries to dissuade him and beg him to give up on this request. Elesin insists on it. Then Iyaloja expresses her discontent, telling him;

The best is yours. We know you for a man of honour. You are not one who eat and leaves nothing on his plate for children. Did you not say it yourself? Not one how blights the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure<sup>20</sup>

Elesin is already late for the ritual because of the young bride. In Yoruba tradition, everything had to be done in its time, and because of this costly mistake, he is suspected of reluctance. It makes Elesin aware of a bad decision that ends up to be seen as he is not ready to die yet. In order to redeem himself from his mistake, the whole community expects whether he will be brave enough to pull off the ritual suicide, but, the British officer Pilkings arrives in time to interrupt what he considers a murder. Pilkings could not really understand the importance of self-sacrifice in the Yoruba culture; he puts Elesin behind bars with chains;

A wide iron-barred gate stretches the whole width of the cell in which Elesin is imprisoned. His wrists are encased in thick iron bracelets, chained together; he stands against the bars, looking out...<sup>21</sup>

As a result, Elesin blames the officer of preventing him from his duty toward the whole community, Iyaloja, like the others, condemn the fact that he is not strong enough to deter this situation. For them, he profits from this privilege to escape his responsibility and duty. Iyaloja informs him that his son has saved the honour by sacrificing his life. Elesin, unable to carry the shock and humiliation, he admits his unwillingness and weakness to commit suicide, then without hesitation he strangles himself with the chain around his wrist and dies.

The tragic ending of Elesin is obviously a result of his community laws and customs; he is torn between his desires for life and public duty, the whole community depends on him to fulfil his role as the king's horseman in good faith. Although unintentionally he has a moment feeling of liberation from death when the officer jails him, he is gravely humiliated and disgraced by his town people, because it is revealed that the son who proved the father, Elesin's son dies at his place to save the honour. Elesin has been trapped between two choices which led to his tragedy, whether to accomplish his duty or not. "The most important elements that brings the two character to a real tragedy ... when he encounters two alternatives, choosing one of them at the risk of abandoning the better proposition".<sup>22</sup> If Elesin chooses to fulfil his duty, he will lose his life; and if he chooses to abandon his duty, he will live in shame among his society.

We can conclude that in the two cases Elesin faces the social pressure that will eventually led him to a tragic ending.

In Tennessee Williams **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**, Big daddy presents the image of the all American successful man in time where materialistic life dominates everyone's mind. Money and wealth are the key of happiness and well being, this is the American dream. Big daddy is affected with this social concept; this explains his success in maintaining a very wealthy cotton plantation of twenty-eight thousand acres in the richest land. Big daddy's social status has always been a high standing, he has money and is well respected throughout the community. However, this wealth allows him to better control, it makes him a rude person who neglects his family. As result, no one care about his fatal disease, and his eldest son Gooper with his wife rush to get a hold of the property. Big daddy realises that despite his prosperity, he failed in his family life that was based on hypocrisy and mendacity, as it is mention in the play;

BIG DADDY: You I do like for some reason, did always have some kind of real feeling for--affection-- respect--yes, always.... You and being a success as a planter is all I ever had any devotion to in my whole life!--and that's the truth.... I don't know why, but it is! I've lived with mendacity!--Why can't you live with it? Hell, you got to live with it, there's nothing else to live with except mendacity, is there?<sup>23</sup>

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** epitomizes the American materialism and consumerism. During the late twentieth century America knew a big increase in material consumption. People in America became obsessed with wealth, having lot of money was considered as major element in American society for the well-being that it procured; they believed in the importance of possessing quality social values as good education, popularity and respect, beside the material consumption and good looking; for them, money will provide career satisfaction; to feel successful doing the work they enjoyed. So, people were ready to run after money since it is the key of happiness, this explains how people achieved richness quickly,

this such symptom is called “ sudden-wealth syndrome”, also called “influenza”, was labelled by two American psychologist (Stephen Goldbart and Joan Di Furia) in 1997. At least two definitions for “Affluenza” have been offered. According to wealth consultant Dr. Ronit Lami defines affluenza as “an unbalanced relationship with money/wealth, or the pursuit of it”. More formally, affluenza, as defined by American’s primary independent news media station, PBS( public Broadcasting Service) is: **Af-flu-en-za** n. 1. The bloated. Sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the joneses. 2. An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by dogged pursuit of the American Dream. 3. An unsustainable addiction to economic growth.<sup>24</sup>

Big Daddy illustrate this American man who is eager about martial and wealth, he spends his entire life working for Jack Straw and Peter Ochello until he became overseer of the cotton plantation, he does all his possible to attain wealth “...and went to work like a nigger in the fields”<sup>25</sup>. Maggie like Big Daddy believes that life cannot be lived without wealth, as she spends her life in poor family; Maggie has always admired Big Daddy for his fortune, and his ability to run out his life, as she says in the play;

MARGARET: I've always sort of admired him in spite of his coarseness, his four-letter words and so forth. Because Big Daddy is what he is, and he makes no

bones about it. He hasn't turned gentleman farmer, he's still a Mississippi red neck, as much of a red neck as he must have been when he was just overseer here on the old Jack Straw and Peter Ochello place. But he got hold of it an' built it into th' biggest an' finest plantation in the Delta.--I've always liked Big Daddy....<sup>26</sup>

Big Daddy has no attachment for his family; they, on the other hand, do not share sympathy for him, because he treats them with rudeness, mostly his wife Ida. He even dislikes her “All I ask of that woman is that she leave me alone. But she can't admit to herself that she makes me sick”<sup>27</sup> and he accuses her of wanting to take over all the wealth he made after his death. The only thing that interests Big Daddy is wealth that gives him power to control and be over everybody including his family. Like the life style of an American man in a time where money provided absolute happiness and respect, Big Daddy reaches his objectives in life and gets the high place he wants in society. As it is shown in the play, big Daddy addresses to his Wife;

[...]Because for three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made! I made this place! I was overseer on it! I was the overseer on the old Straw and Ochello plantation. I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! I did all that myself with no goddam help from you, and now you think you're just about to take over. Well, I am just about to tell you that you are not just about to take over, you are not just about to take over a God damn thing. Is that clear to you, Ida? Is that very plain to you, now? Is that understood completely? [...]<sup>28</sup>

American social values were embodied in material goods, it provides power and mightiness, Big Daddy struggles hard to gain that image of the wealthy. Basing on the concept of social dominance in Arthur Miller's theory, Big Daddy adheres to his society's values; he lives in function of American life style. We understand that American society dominates Big Daddy perspective about life. As a result, greed and money have separated him from his family life and have made him a coarse person. Big Daddy has just realised his failure, when he discovers that he will die with cancer, “...But man can't buy his life

with it (money)... when his life has been spent"<sup>29</sup>, and he sees his wealth as worthless in face of his family. This is shown when he attempts to reconcile his relationship with his son, in order to help him straighten;

BIG DADDY: Naw, it won't. You're my son, and I'm going to straighten you out; now that I'm straightened out, I'm going to straighten you out!

BRICK: Yeah? <sup>30</sup>

Big Daddy tragic fall is the lack of love of his family, he realizes that all his life was a big lie surrounded with hypocrisies, he feels that nobody loves him for real; they just act to get his property. With the knowledge of his fatal illness, Big daddy perceives his life differently. During all his life he has believed that all he needed was just money, but now everything has no sense, in front of having a warm family surrounding him with love, a family that will care for him for real. He has neglected them first, especially his son Brick who has led a life without affection from his father. In fact, Big Daddy has always love his son. Unfortunately, he has never shown it, until the moment he feels death coming. He attempts to help his son from his psychological crisis. Wealthy life has blinded Big Daddy's eyes from approaching his family and giving them affection and then to receive it as well. Instead, he was egoistic, arrogant, and rude in his treatments with others.

To conclude, both plays clearly depict social dominance and oppression over each of Brick politt, Olunde, Elesin and Big Daddy, whom personal life is messed up by social conventions and traditions. As we have said Brick Pollit ends up with moral paralysis, because of society's intolerance concerning homosexuality. Olunde on the other hand, accepts the traditions that Yoruba community imposes on him. As a result, he sacrifices himself in step of that customs. In addition to Olunde, Elesin is also considered as a victim of his society's beliefs; he clearly suffers from severe oppression. Finally, Big Daddy as well is taken by American society's idea about wealth, which eventually brings him to be

abandoned by his family. So, we can say that all the characters mentioned above are subject for the imposed social conventions.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Tennessee, Williams. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof". In *Tennessee Williams Plays 1937-1955*, edited by Poirier Richard, 873-1005. 14 East 60<sup>th</sup> street, New York: Literary classics of the United States, 2000.p 953.

<sup>2</sup> Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd Fetter Lane.1975. p 57.

<sup>3</sup> Koch,E. *A short summary of Arthur Miller's tragedy and the common man*. Interestingliterature. <https://interestingliterature.com/2017/10/03/a-short-summary-of-arthur-millers-tragedy-and-the-common-man/> Accessed on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2019 .

<sup>4</sup> Tennessee, Williams."Cat on a Hot Tin Roof".1955. P910.

<sup>5</sup> Vicki Lea Eldridge BS, Lisa Mack BS and Eric Swank PhD (2006) Explaining comfort with Homosexuality in Rural America, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51:2, 39-56. P 42.

<sup>6</sup>Tennessee, Williams."Cat on a Hot Tin Roof".1955. p 948.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p: 944-945.

<sup>8</sup> Soyinka, Wole.*Death and King's Horseman*.1975.p 57 .

<sup>9</sup>*Heroism in Death and the King's Horseman*.  
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<sup>10</sup> Soyinka, Wole.*Death and King's Horseman*. 1975.p 51

<sup>11</sup> *Heroism in Death and the King's Horseman*.  
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<sup>12</sup> Soyinka, Wole. *Death and King's Horseman*. 1975. p 67.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p 70.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p 70.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p 18 .

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p 17 .

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p 20 .

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p 61.

<sup>22</sup> Chergui, Kh. *Wole Soyinka's "Retributive Regenerative" Model of African Tragic Heroism: Insights from Death and the King's Horseman*. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. Vol.12, No.2, September 2018. p 34.

<sup>23</sup> Tennessee, Williams. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof". 1955. P 941-942.

<sup>24</sup> Ragusa, T, Angel. " American Materialism, Consumerism and social values: A Sociological Analysis of Social Issues and Value priorities." In *Proceeding of Women in Research (WIR) Women doing research "2005 Conference*. Charles Sturt University, 24-25 November 2005. P 4 – 5.

<sup>25</sup> Tennessee, Williams. "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof". 1955. P 923.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p 906.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p 934.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p 923.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p 929.

## V. Conclusion

This piece of research is a comparative study between Tennessee's **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** (1955) and Soyinka's **Death and Kings Horseman** (1975) as modern tragedies. We have relied on Arthur Miller's theoretical approach, in this "Tragedy and the Common Man". Miller asserts that every common person could live a tragedy; it is not restrained to a high rank man, therefore, the two cited plays are good examples on which Miller's theory can be applied. This theory allowed us to study and show the characters that endure social pressure and psychological torments during modern times that lead to their tragic ending.

Through our research, we have demonstrated how Williams and Soyinka portray the modern ordinary man in their plays, and how both plays depict modern life experience; people whether in America or Nigeria live a social tragedy. In the discussion, we have studied the characters that represent the figures of tragic heroes and the anti-heroes. Then we have analysed their personalities and reactions in front of their duties and responsibilities. In Addition we have evoked social dominance over the characters of both plays, and we have come to the conclusion that society's conventions push the individual to have certain beliefs which cost them their lives.

Our dissertation sheds light on two countries, which are America and Nigeria. In their plays, Tennessee and Soyinka share the same representation of tragedy, both plays' characters suffer because of society's beliefs and conventions, and struggle for their dignity to gain the right place in society.

Our use of Miller's theory Tragedy and the Common Man has given us the chance to discover a tragedy that is different from the traditional one, and to open on the new modern tragedy.

The scope of this memoire did not allow us to deal with all the issues, though both **Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** and **Death and the King's Horseman** are still rich grounds for new perspective research. Coming students can for example deal with the representation of women in the two plays.

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