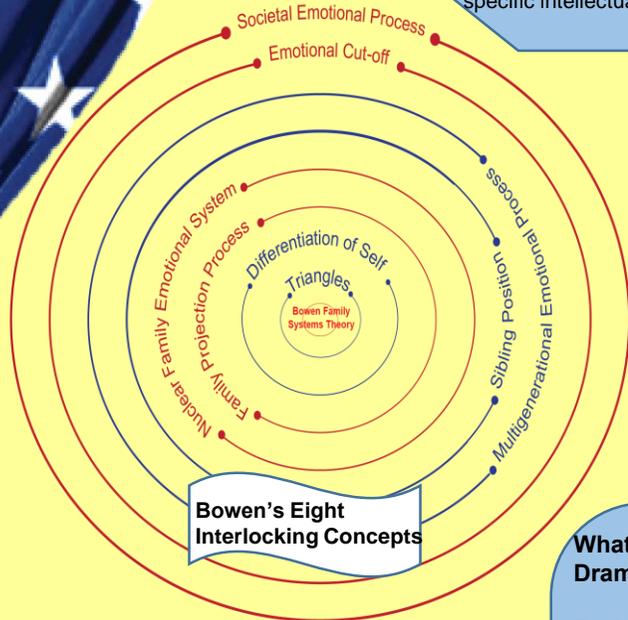


# Psychiatry in Drama: Bowen Family Systems Theory and Family Disintegration in Tennessee Williams's Drama

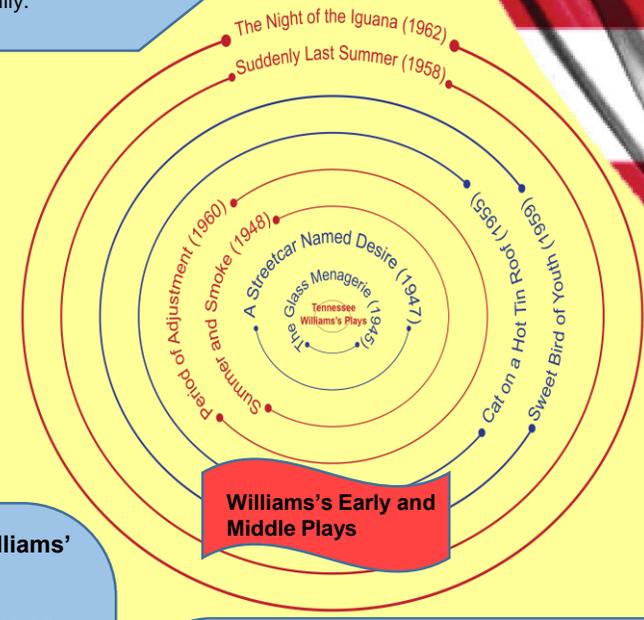
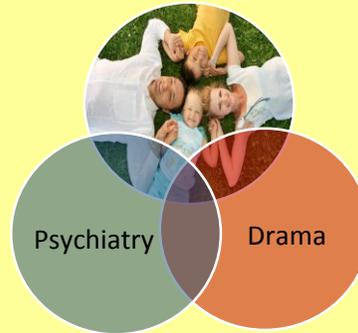
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## Drama and Psychiatry – My Research Aims

The main purpose of this research is to establish Murray Bowen's psychiatric framework, Bowen Family Systems Theory, as a literary critical tool within the field of American literature to interrogate the theme of family disintegration in the dramatist Tennessee Williams's early and middle plays. Both Williams and Bowen were writing in the aftermath of the World War II in a specific intellectual and cultural context in terms of attitudes to the family.



**Bowen's Eight Interlocking Concepts**



**Williams's Early and Middle Plays**

## What is Bowen Theory?

Murray Bowen is an American psychiatric therapist, who developed his theory named Bowen family systems theory in 1957. Bowen theory, in its eight interlocking concepts, understands family as an emotional interrelated system: a change in the functioning of one part of the system is directly followed by changes in the whole system. Members of the family do not function or behave separately, but within the circle and atmosphere of the system that shapes their feelings, thoughts, values, and functions. According to Bowen, family emotional system has metaphorically the same function as the solar system. In the solar system the sun gravity plays an important role in the circulation of the planets around the sun, and the emotional system also play a significant role among the family members.

## What is the Relationship between Tennessee Williams' Drama and Murray Bowen's Psychiatric Theory?

- ❑ Tennessee Williams (1911-83) and Murray Bowen (1913-90) are both American contemporaries who contributed to understand the dynamics of the American family, and both were born in Tennessee.
- ❑ Both of them explore the prominence of, and problems emerging within, the American family in the period immediately following World War II
- ❑ Williams, as a dramatist, explores the human psyche through artistic and literary means, focusing particularly on interpersonal spaces.
- ❑ Bowen, as a psychiatrist, analyses the family in its actual conditions and culture without any limitation of what should and should not be.
- ❑ Bowen depicts the family as a play system in that each actor has a role to perform, through which he analyses the family conflicts and dilemmas in a scientific style.

## Conclusion: Is Bowen Family Systems Theory Effective as a literary Critical Tool?

Murray Bowen's psychiatric theory is a useful tool for literary critical analysis (alongside better-known psychoanalytical theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan), and it can be extended beyond the context of Williams's plays, stimulating other research projects on authors and texts. The research considers what Bowen offers to literary studies and what his shortcomings might be, especially as Williams's plays can be read as a kind of psychodrama that depicts real family situations from a mid-twentieth century perspective.