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**Illusion in Tennessee Williams' Play,
" The Glass Menagerie
A B S T R A C T**

"The Glass Menagerie" is the most excellent play written by the American playwright, Tennessee Williams. It somehow distorted Williams' life style immediately. Throughout the questioning -about everything in life specially about the human relations, Williams gets the shock of life and puts on view the wavering shift from illusion to reality and vice versa, in a very impressive style via his dramas. Williams shows the audience that the world has a dark side which is represented by the one-dimensional society of the contemporary culture. It stands in the middle of development, abuse of ethical regulations of behaviour, dehumanized keenness to have control and close relations. This paper attempts to shed light on the theme of illusion and reality by following the character analysis approach .It starts with an introduction followed by the discussion of the play. It ends with a conclusion that sums up the findings.

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الخيال في مسرحية "معرض الوحوش الزجاجي" للكاتب تنسي ويليامز

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الخلاصة

معرض الوحوش الزجاجي" هي من افضل مسرحيات الكاتب المسرحي الامريكي تنسي وليامز. الى حد ما فان المسرحية تستعيد اسلوب حياة ويليامز نفسه وبشكل مباشر. عن طريق طرح الاسئلة عن كل شيء في الحياة وخاصة العلاقات فان ويليامز تلقى الصدمة حول كل الاشياء في الحياة ومن بينها التحول في وجهة النظر بين الحقيقة والخيال والعكس و طرح ذلك من خلال الدراما التي يقدمها. لقد بين ويليامز للجمهور بان هنالك جانب مظلم والمتمثل بالمجتمع الاحادي البعد في الحضارة الحديثة.انه يقف وسطا بين التطور و الاستعمال الخاطئ للنظم الاخلاقية للسلوك، ولا انسانية الشغف للسيطرة على العلاقات الحميمة. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على موضوع الحقيقة والخيال كما يظهر في المسرحية عن طريق اتباع منهجية تحليل الشخصيات . يبدأ البحث بمقدمة وبعدها يأتي التحليل وتنتهي

Introduction

It is said that "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one" (Einstein, N. P). In this sense, to talk about reality is a very difficult matter. To define the term illusion is to say that it is a misinterpretation of the understood reality which is seen throughout the eyes of the individual practice it. "Illusion versus reality" is a matter that has relative view in all the times throughout history. This matter is well-portrayed via literary works. The conflict between these two important concepts inside the mind of the human being is the issue that many writers have deep concern with. The function of illusion differs from one text to another according to the view that the writer has. This paper hypothesizes that Tennessee Williams is a playwright that has his own view regarding the use of illusions throughout his play, *The Glass Menagerie*. Searching for the meaning of life as well as reality was the aim of the American playwright, Tennessee Williams. He was trying to comprehend how can the soul of human be transparent when realize the real core of the life. Of course, it is evident that all that he was writing about is a reflection of his own experience(Williams, ١٩٨٣: ٧٢).

Sterility is obvious and reflected throughout his writings which shows clearly the amount of tragic events from which he has suffered in his early life. What he cares about as a dramatist who concerns with detecting people's issues, was the human relationships and all the complexities that revolved around them.

The playwright, throughout his play, helps the audience understand that these experienced situations of the spoiled humanity forces the rebels, the radicals or the escapee types to guide lives of despair, estrangement and miserable insanity. It comes about due to their breakdown of change with the sophisticated standards. They build make-believe inner worlds around themselves via fictitious delusions to sense a kind of feeling of liberty. The writer through his spontaneous inspired action gives the audience a vital

hypothesis to comprehend the kindness and strength such persons intent in their own dilemma. Thus, all of these factors helps in making the paper present the theme of illusion in Tennessee Williams' play, *The Glass Menagerie*.

In early stage of his life, Williams once moved to New Year in his youth to meet Audrey Wood. Wood later on twisted to him as a literary agent for more than two decades throughout his work. Subsequently, he detested his career as a playwright of screenplays. He was working for MGM Studios. He was unlucky enough to propose his own screenplay which entitled *The Gentlemen Caller*. It was discarded by MGM, but, opportunely, it turns out later on to be the most admirable American play, *The Glass Menagerie*(Hughes, 1978: 23).

Many literary names among them were Anton Chekov, Henrick Ibsen, Eugene O' Neill, D.H. Lawrence, August Strindberg and Hart Crane have great influence on Williams as a writer in general and as a playwright in particular. Williams' concept of illusion verses reality is highly impacted by Neil, Lawrence as well as the American poet, Hart Crane. Both Crane and Williams had the same ventures regarding this theme which frequently appears in their works(Ibid.:30).

Methodology

This paper is concerned with the theme of illusions versus reality that Tennessee Williams tries to portray in a very clear style throughout his play, *The Glass Menagerie*. The paper follows the character-analysis approach in analyzing the text and the main characters to identify all the aspects that clarify the being tackled theme.

1. Discussion

In *The Glass Menagerie*, all the characters have a touch of illusion in which they live that contradicts realities. Illusion can be regarded as a frail protection against the cruelty of real life. Almost all people try to get shelter in the illusion which represents a kind of deception and diversion which act as if to save them temporarily from the harshness of their lives. In this sense, illusion focuses on the Wing field family members' eagerness, their misery, problems and breakdowns. Illusion and reality are just like two poles between them all the

characters in the play swaying.

Throughout his plays, Tennessee Williams, who is considered as an American famous playwright during the twentieth century tries to survey the sides of human nature which have not been enlightened. The sides that people usually hide and try not to talk about. Moreover, he discovers the weakness of the individuals with all their illusions and sympathy. He clarifies the brutality of modern man who senses a dissimilarity or estrangement in the world of the other who cannot accept or understand him/her.

What Williams attempts to do is to show the irony in how modern man wants greatly to correspond in a society whose taboos guarantee a vicious clash for authority. Williams is a merciless psychoanalyst. He tackles the current concerns of his age which are difficult to be discussed openly by the ordinary people who are suffering from them like the woman's social merit, the acceptance of homosexuality as an existed matter, and the dilemma of tattered wives(Ibid.:εε).

In this sense, his plays bring social crises out of the obscurity of communal tyranny into the light of communal fury and judgment. Williams exposes to the audience the gloomy life they live in. He shows that the society of the modern culture continues to exist in the middle of mistreatment, destruction of moral regulations of manner, dishonesty, dehumanized obsession of supremacy and close relations.

What he is trying to do is helping the audience understand that such worldly situations of the spoiled humanity obliges the nonconformists, the radicals or the escapees to guide lives of sadness, estrangement and miserable psychosis. Their breakdown in achieving change that fits the sophisticated norms around them causes them create make-believe worlds that surround them by using fictitious illusions to believe a sense of unconditioned independence. Williams through his impetuous imaginative activity gives the audience an essential foundation to comprehend the gentleness and strength such characters fascinated in their own dilemma.

The Glass Menagerie tackles a very crucial issue that is the phenomena of the

mal-accustomed female. The female in this play is portrayed as a token of a saga or legend of hospitable living as the society likes to portray. Her dilemma is caused by her being overwhelmed by the striking realities that she confronts via her life. This play has a strong autobiographical hints, the matter that Williams himself admits. There are a great resemblance between the family members in the play and Williams' family. Williams seems to think and tries to convince the audience with the idea that the factual idealistic can find living enjoyable simply throughout the belief in optimism, daydreams and illusions. Williams gives the impression to view the figments of the imagination of the individuals that he portrays throughout his plays as feeble protections against the ruin of their own lives. He frequently questions which is true – obvious exertion of places such as houses, streets or the internal world of the self, hopes, dreams, fears, and memories(Bloom, N.D.)

This question is very crucial to be answered by the audience for they understand the core of life by finding the correct answer and apply it throughout their lives. Laura, for example, lives in a world of delusion shaped by glass menagerie. She is unsuccessful to connect herself to the external world, i.e. in her school, and afterward in her Business College. She has inhibited into her own world. Her bodily disputed state is representative of her segregation. Her brother, Jim, encourages her to consider love and marriage. However, the exposure of the fact about Jim sends her back to the world of delusion that is wrecked – the unicorn is emblematic of that situation.

Tom, in his turn, lives in a world of false impression created by clubs, movies, and luxuries. His current career in the Continental Shoemakers is so annoying. Shows and movies turn out to be the lone channel for him. This, of course, gives him the chance to question the established thought of the American Dream. His yearning to be poet is not acknowledged. finally when he finds out that his life at home is no more tolerable. The moderate man calls for his sister turn to immoral men. Unhappy Tom leaves home to join the Merchant Marine and seek adventure on the high seas and new cities. Nevertheless, this event becomes a fantasy when he moves from one city to another to end living in his

old place, in St. Louis because of his suffering *from homesickness*. Tom once said:

"To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, where the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy"(Williams, 2008: 1, 1).

Like all the members of Wingfield family, Tom has withdrawn away from reality. Therefore, he has ignored all that happens around him.

In her turn, Amanda is trapped with her false impressions as well as the illusion of the well-mannered old southern upbringing she got early in her life. According to that sort of bringing up she thought that a man will hold a woman up and that there are definite perfect rules for difficulties in life. However, she has experienced the contrary throughout her life particularly as her husband escape from her and his family. Later on, Laura's nervousness exposes her to abnormal socialization. Nevertheless, Amanda continues her suppose that a male will shortly propose to her, and her life will be all right. She fails to understand the real things around her: "She treats him as if he making jokes"(Williams, 2008: 1-8).

What is worth mentioning is that she imposes these delusions on her children. She insists that if, Tom gets a husband for his sister, Laura, their problems will be solved. This is, of course, an elusive idea because Tom cannot solve all their problems. Quickly, this idea is eliminated when he gets a suitor for his sister, Laura. Both Laura as well as her mother repudiate facing their life reality, each by her own way. Amanda withdraws to her precious past. While Laura gets withdrawal to herself. Her withdrawal is painkilling more than her mothers'. Amanda has her own thought regarding keeping the her family members together. She tries her best to save the family economically as well as spiritually. Amanda hopes that her daughter has a normal life. Consequently, she sent Laura to Business College to study there. Even when she wants Laura

to get married, she tries to presents her daughter a suitable world for living and for having normal sort of life. Being a crippled girl is the cause behind Laura's retreating to her inner world and escaping from the real life. She supposed that she is unlovable because she is a handicap girl. This is, of course, because of the social view towards her. Her reaction for being unattractive is frightening for her because she cannot coop with the idea that she cannot entertain a man and be his wife. This situation is regarded as a challenge for her as being an unattractive girl. Laura is unable to understand that what all is around her does not represent her because she used to be self centered. Laura cannot involve herself in social relations so that she continues being discontented in her life. The playwright, Williams, in this sense, throughout the play, clarifies that the range of delusions that all characters have, are their tools for dealing with the miseries they face in their lives. However frolicsome and stupid their illusions may appear, all these characters would undergo, conceivably even be wrecked, if they are dispossessed them. (Baym, ۲۰۱۲, P. ۳۳۶).

Pretence in addition to self cheating are Amanda's weapons in her fight to gain self-reliance and having optimistic view towards the future. Jim, in his turn, would not have looked forward to his future after his disappointment to reach the top of achievement that community supposed he would have. Laura would shrivel and pass away because of her disability to recognize herself with anything, nor have good looks, fragility, and authenticity in small, delicate even usual things like her albums of her glass figures.

Tom wouldn't get away for he does not believe in his ability to gain change. No doubt, illusions offer a shelter to all these characters that might otherwise be packed down or damned. Williams portrays a landscape for a life as being a mix of facts and illusions. Illusions, in this sense, works as comfort supplier that makes life easier to be lived by doomed people.

It is a fact that not all illusions are comfortable, some illusions are very painful. Taking Amanda's illusions as examples; they are very hurting to Tom. Laura's and Tom's illusions are throbbing to Amanda too. All the characters endeavor to make an atmosphere that is full of illusions to either stop thinking about the

horrible reality he/she lives in or to stay away from definite incidents of his/her past. On the other hand, occasionally they are tired of the materialistic living and the sophisticated shrewd people that reside it. Williams, ۲۰۰۸. In (<http://www.latw.org/EDU-latw/aliveandaloud/images/glass.pdf>).

Illusions, in this regard, provide the individuals with a kind of escape that permit them to stay masquerading in an elusive world. A female character is offered a moment of frustration that had shown the way to a disaster. She has no choices other than facing reality or retreating into illusion. The important inquiry is whether she will confront the disaster and live in reality, free of incapacitating illusions and competent of consideration for others. (Tharpe Jac.L, ۱۹۹۷: ۶۸)

Worth mentioning that Williams as a dramatist dares to be the first who stirs the conscience of the American nation. What is significant about his play is that it is not merely about communal concerns, rather, it is about philosophy and mysticism as well. What Williams focus on is society's regrettable oddity as well as the conformists.

Conclusion

To conclude, Williams puts forward to the contemporary humankind through his portrayal of characters in this play that nobody can break away from reality by plainly taking off in the journey of illusion. He speaks to the audience about the innate solitude of contemporary life, the fondness of individuals to move toward deadly estrangement, the departure from final questions, and the appeal of ill-considered standards. The paper has achieved its aim at showing how Williams has deeply engaged in making the audience think this way by adapt this theme for the stage and portraying vividly the conflict between reality and illusion and showing the consequences of that conflict on the life of the represented characters.

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