

The world of illusion in Tennessee William's “The Glass Menagerie”

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Abstract: The glass Menagerie is considered by many critics to be Williams' best play. This play when it staged in 1944 immediately established Williams' reputation as a dramatist. Earlier, he had written a short story 'Portrait of a Girl in Glass'. Also he had composed a film script 'Gentleman Caller'. The Glass Menagerie derives from these two pieces as well as from his experience of his own family and their life in St. Louis which is the drama's locale. This is the play of gentle aristocratic tradition of the warm South at bay in the soulless materialistic society of the North. The individual crushed by a mechanical society is forced to seek relief from pain in memory fantasy and flight.

I.INTRODUCTION

William has been an advocate and practitioner of the poet-symbolist-realist technique. He does not believe in the photographic presentation of life. He maintains that “Truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest in essence only through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.” Thus Williams contributed towards a new plastic theatre and thus revitalized the American stage.

Everyone lives partly in a world of illusion. To escape from the harsh reality of life, we indulge ever now and then in dreaming fond dreams. In the modern world the stress and strain, the fret and fury, is so intense and frequent that the individual is tempted more and more to find psychological compensation in an illusory world fabricated by himself. But reality cannot be wished away. It breaks upon the cosiness of the imagined world and the result is neurosis and all-round unhappiness.

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II. ILLUSION

The three wingfields in *The Glass Menagerie* are all denizens of separate illusory worlds. Cut off from their natural moorings in the Aristocratic South, they suffer from dire economic and mental depression. The head of the household has affected his own escape by deserting the family and going abroad beyond reach. The mother Amanda tries to escape the present by living in the past and in the future. She recalls nostalgically her days as the belle of Blue Mountain having as many as seventeen gentleman callers on a single Sunday. She greets Jim in a girlish frock aptly named 'Gay Deceivers'. Her hope is in the future. Unfortunately her daughter fails to become a businesswoman and her son, Tom, wants to chuck off even the 65-dollar job in the shoe factory. He frequents movies, drinks and dopes. She considers him a selfish escapist not realizing that it is case of man to be a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and an adventurer. In the shoe factory there is no scope for all this urges. So he takes to drink, chain-smokes and watch movies every day. He is real enough to understand that it is his duty to see Laura settled in life. He brings Jim to the apartment but the balloon does not take off. So he calls it a day and quits, joining the Merchant Marine, which takes him round the world. The memory of Laura, however, haunts him. He has the illusion of meeting her in the most unexpected places—in the lighted window of a perfume shop containing pieces of coloured glass. His final exhortation is symbolic. He asks Laura to blow out the candles, the candles that produce the make-believe scenario. He declares that the world is nowadays lit not by candles but by lightening. The harsh reality must be faced.

The most pathetic illusory world, of course, is that of Laura. Slightly crippled in one of her legs and suffering from an inferiority complex, she withdraws into her shell. She creates a small artificial wall of her own in her collection of glass figurines of animals. She has completely identified herself with these translucent and fragile entities. The glass menagerie is a beautiful world of illusion that cannot stand the impact of the outer world. Twice the glass gets shattered- once when during his heated quarrel with his mother, Tom throws his coat across the room, and the next, when Laura and Jim in the course of their dance, bump into the table on which the unicorn is placed. The unicorn with

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its single horn protecting from the forehead is distinct from the forehead is distinct from the other horse in the collection.

The breaking of its horn is in a sense a good augury. It suggest that Laura too has shed her abnormality, thanks to the enthusiasm and confidence pumped into her by Jim. But when Jim reveals that he is already engaged to another girl, her temporary excursion into the world of reality meets with a road-block. She retreats once again, not to be removed from the shell.

Jim is a practical man from the world of reality who enters the trap of the wingfield universe of illusion accidentally. But he recognizes the trap in time and makes a quick exit back to the world of reality. He can only let those who are fond of illusions to continue to hug them.

III.CONCLUSION

Williams has been persistently occupied with the pathos of human failure. He has centered his attention upon inner life, the psychology of adjustment necessitated by the impingement of harsh reality upon a tender, inner vision of glory. This irrational flight of characters from the outward pressures towards the myth nurtured in complacent seclusion leads them to frustration or insanity. There is considerable justification in the view that Williams' outlook on life is morbid and it does have a continuous precaution with psychological deviation.

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