

An Analysis of Escapism in Tennessee Williams’ “The Glass Menagerie”

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Abstract

This study deals with Tennessee Williams’ work, *The Glass Menagerie* based on psychological analysis. The characters in the play are intentionally made to identify the attitudes and behaviors of each character in order to give up clear description of the characters. In the Glass Menagerie there are three characters who try to escape from reality but they have different psychological problem in life. Living in illusion is Amanda’s way to escape, playing the glass figure is the way of Laura to escape from reality, while the way of Tom to escape is going to the movies. The purpose of analyzing the literary work is to display clearly about the psychological element in the play and also moral lesson clearly.

Keywords: Escapism, psychological, The portrait of Tennessee Williams

1. Background

Literature is broadly divided into fiction and non fiction. Literary works which can be classified into fiction are short story, novel, poetry, and play. While biography, autobiography, history and essay are classified as non fiction. Plays are fundamentally different from other literary form such as poetry or novel. Unlike novels and poem, most play are designed to be performed and they can be enjoyed in written form too.

Harry Shaws in *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, says that play is “ a narrative composition in prose or verse presenting in pantomime and dialogues, narrative involving conflict and usually designed for presenting on stage.” (1972:49). The researcher choose this play because of the biography of the playwright reflects Williams’ life. Williams at the age of fourteen has discovered writing as an escape from his reality. Another reason is because she found that the characters try to escape from reality.

2. Characters Portrayal

On this occasion, the researcher would like to introduce character and also limit only three characters that hold more important roles in the play. There are three characters who try to escape from reality. They are Amanda Wingfield, Tom Wingfield and Laura Wingfield. This play is consist of seven scenes, we can see that Wingfield is a family that live with broken dreams. Character is of literary work, there is no play or short story without the presentation of characters. According to M.H. Abraham, in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* says:

“Characters are the persons presented in a dramatic as narrative work who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with moral disposition qualities that are expressed in what they say, the dialogue by what they do, the action, the grounds in a characters’ temperament and moral nature.” (1981:20)

Amanda Wingfield

Amanda is Tom and Laura's mother. Physically, she is a beautiful woman in her youth. She wishes the best for her children because she is a single parents. Amanda believes her life would turn out well, but it does not. Her way of escaping real life is to think about and tell the stories from he life as a young girl, When she lives in a Blue mountain, she is suspicious because she feels disappointed of her life, her husband leave her with a disgruntled son and crippled daughter.

Tom : Coming, Mother. *(He bows slightly and withdraws, reappearing a few moments later in his place at the table)*

Amanda : (To her son) Honey, don't push with your fingers. If you have to push with something, the things to push with something, the things to push with is a crust of bread. And chew-chew! Animals have sections in their stomachs which enable them to digest food without mastication, but human beings are supposed to chew their food before they swallow it down...*(Tom deliberately lays his imaginary fork down and pushes his chair back from the table)*

Tom : I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's ok that make me rush through meals with your hawk-like attention to every bite I take. Sickening-spoils my appetite-all this discussion of animal's secretion-salivary glands-mastication!

Amanda : *(lightly)* Temperament like a metropolitan start! *(He rises and crosses downstage)* you're not excused from the table.

Tom : I'm getting a cigarette

Amanda : You've never said anything of the kind I suspect you would never give it a though (Lauter,1994:2295-2314)

From the quotation above, Amanda expects her children to have the same genteel manners. She wants her children to understand how to survive and to change their lives to be better. In fact, the reality is not going on as she expects and wants to. Tom doesn't care for being genteel while Laura's handicap and weakness, shyness prevent her from desire. After being left by her husband, she has a great expectation that her children will be successful in the future. Amanda expects more from Tom, she hopes Tom to behave like a Southern gentleman. Now they are in the lower class and live in slum area where the people dont respect the civilization.

Tom Wingfield

Tom is a character who is disappointed with his life because he feels trapped. There are things he longs to do in life but he cannot fulfill his desire to be a writer. In fact, Tom sacrifices his dream and work in warehouse because he must support his mother and his sister Laura. Amanda accuses that he acts selfishly and jeopardizes their security by going to the movies until late evry night and then going to work the next day. His sacrifices to support them is overshadowed by Amanda's belief that he is selfish.

Amanda : Let me tell you---

- Tom : I dont want to hear anymore! (*he teas portieres open. The upstage area is lit with a turgid smoky red glow*)
- Amanda : You will hear more, you
- Tom : No, I dont want hear more, I'm going out!
- Amanda : You come right back in
- Tom : Out, out out! Because I'm----
- Amanda : Come back here, Tom Wingfield! I'm not through talking to you!
- Tom : (*desperately*) Tom!
- Amanda : You're going to listen, and more insolence from you! I'm at the end of my patience (*He comes back toward her*)
- Tom : What do you think I'm at? Aren't I supposed to have any patience to reach the end of, Mother? I know. I know it seems unimportant to you, what I'm doing--- what I want to do---having little differences between them! You dont think that---
- Amanda : you think you have been doing things that you're ashamed of that's why you act like this. I dont believe that you go ever night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies after night.

The quotation above show that Tom frequently goes to the movie to escape for the drab life he leads as a warehouseworker. He hates his life and feels trapped the reason why he likes going to the movies every night becscuse he is frustated. Tom's escape is obviously described in scene four as follows:

- Tom : Of course, And oh! I forgot! There was a big stage how! The headliner on this stage sow was Malvolio the Magician. He performed wonderful tricks, many of them such as pouring water back and forth between pitchers. First it turnedto beer and then it turn to whisky. I knew it was whisky it finally turned into because he needed somebody to come up out of the audience to help him, and I came up--- both shows! It was kentucky straight bourbon. A very generous fellow, he gave souvenir.

(He pulls from his back pocket a shimmering rainbow-colored scarf) (Flops on to a bed and starts removing shoes) (Lauter,1994:2304)

Based on the dialoque above, Tom wants to be a magician because he want magic to run his life. Tom tells this after seeing Malvolio, The Magician escapes from a coffin without removing a nail. Thom is very impressed and he believes its parallel with his situation at home. He must find some ways to escape without destroying his family, the way as his father did sixteen years ago. Since his father leaves, he has been forced to provide for his mother is and sister is needs. Tom cannot escape from the coffin without removing a nail, until there is someone takes his place. Thus, he is also interested in finding a suitor for Laura, although he is more realistic than his mother.

- Tom : I didn't go to the moon, I went much further--- for time is the longest distance between two places—not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoebox. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire-escape footsteps, attempting to find it motion

what was lost in space. I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about the like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped, but it was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me together by surprises. (Lauter, 1994: 2337)

The quotation above described that Tom Wingfield is an escapist like his mother, Amanda and his sister Laura. Tom tries to escape from the drab life he leads as a warehouse worker by going to the movies everyday to seek for adventures. He gets no appreciation from his mother Amanda, although he has sacrificed much to support his family.

Laura Wingfield

Laura is a young girl who has a physical defect. She is older about 2 years than Tom, her age is twenty four but she is crippled, one leg is slightly shorter than the other. In her mind, this handicap is a serious imperfection. As a result, she is painfully shy, she realizes that she disappoints of a gentleman caller for her. In fact she withdrawn from society and finds comfort, safety and companionship among the glass animal figurines that she collects. Laura's habit is to become on her own world.

Tom : Mother, you mustn't expect too much of Laura
Amanda : what do you mean ?
Tom : Laura seems all those things to you and me because she's ours and we love her. We don't even notice she's crippled anymore.
Amanda : Don't say crippled. You know that I never allow that word to be used!
Tom : but face facts mom, she is and---that's not all
Amanda : what do you mean not all?
Tom : Laura is very different from other girls
Amanda : I think the difference is all to her advantage
Tom : Not quite all, in the eyes of others---strangers she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.
Amanda : don't say peculiar
Tom : in what way is she peculiar---may I ask?
(gently) she lives in a world her own---a world of little glass ornaments. Mother---(gets up Amanda remains holding brush, looking at him troubled) she plays old phonograph records and---that's about all.
(Lauter, 1994:2314)

Based on the dialogue above, the fragility belongs to Laura's character, she is unable to face her problems but escape from it. This scene also shows that Laura is very different from other girls at her age. She is shy, crippled, reclusive and she seems to be happy to live in her imaginary world with her glass menagerie. The dialogue portrays that Tom calls his mother's attention that it is not normal for a girl to live wrapped up in a world of glass ornaments without being in human interaction. The glass menagerie is Laura's way to

escape from the harshness of reality. Her disability and lack of confidence has led her to an intense shyness. Her escapes isolate her further from society. She dotes over the glass ornaments to avoid interaction with others.

3. Analysis of Escapism in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

Psychological analysis is one of the approaches in literary criticism. According to Sigmund Freud “ *Psychological is the name for both a theory and practice, psychoanalysis enables us to understand the subject as fundamentally divided and this division is features of any use of language.*” (Freud, 1954:4) The researcher also find out the meaning of analysis, according to Victoria Newfede

“Analysis is a method of studying the nature of something on determining its essential features and their relation, or breaking up any whole into its parts with an examination of these parts to find their nature, proportion, function, interrelationship, or in other words is the separating of any materials or abstract entity into its constituents elements” (Newfede, 1986:49)

4. Conclusion

Based on the result of the study, the conclusion of this research can be present as the following below:

1. All the character is a symbol universal of life.
2. The Wingfield is escapist because they cannot accept their condition, they live in their own world of imagination. But they have different psychology. Their life also is colored by terrible arguments which always happen, they are a broken family that live without a father.
3. Tennessee Williams' in his play gives us a moral teaching that we must face the reality, because it may disturb our soul.

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