

Existentialism in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*

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Abstract

One of the most important literary critical movements of the 20th century is Existentialism, which is European philosophy, distinguished by its emphasis on human existence. The existentialist's main focus lies on the individual's freedom and choice. One of the pioneers of this school is Jean Paul Sartre who asserts that "Man is free; but this freedom makes him responsible for the conditions he has put himself in as a result of his choice. So he becomes what he makes of himself; either he remains a common individual or finds himself a place among the stars." The existentialists' major concern is the 'self'; they believe that it is essential to understand it "in terms of possibilities, dread and decision." Many existentialists were pessimistic in their general view of the human position and destiny. They believe that the human beings can never understand why they are created and that the human situation is ambiguous and absurd. The existentialists have insisted that personal experiences and acting on one's own convictions are essential in reaching truth. So the understanding of a situation by someone involved in it is superior to that of a detached and objective observer.

Existential themes are reflected in many of Williams' plays, especially those which concern issues as freedom, choice, dread, anxiety and the ambiguity of the human situation. His characters finally recognize that they could not conceal their great need to assert their complete freedom before themselves and others. Tom, the protagonist of the play, is a good representative of Sartre's statement. "Those who hide their complete freedom from themselves out of spirit of seriousness or by means of deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards." Williams began to realize his identity when his family moved to St Louis where he and his sister "were teased and snubbed for their southern manners and speech" by the children in the neighborhood. This rejection forced Williams to escape into reading literary works by great writers as Poe, Chekhov and Faulkner. A major existential theme in Williams' plays is self-assertion; his characters try to

assert their identity as they strive for freedom, challenge others and experience alienation.

This paper deals with Williams' characters' struggle in order to force others to admit and accept their existence. His characters' struggle will take certain forms and will differ from one to another according to their desire and ability to continue their confrontation with others. There are some who are stronger than others. Those who have the courage to face society would try to assert their existence first by giving themselves credit to act freely and strongly in order to fulfill their spiritual and physical needs and second, by defying and rebelling against their society. The characters that choose solitude as a means of self-assertion either lack the courage to face society or do not have any interest in dealing and socializing with others.

The characteristics that Williams' protagonists have in common are discussed; as their sensitivity, their submission under their past and their great need for a savior. In regard to the existential movement the relevance of these three characteristics to self assertion lies in their importance in showing the kind of characters that are concerned with proving their existence on one hand, in showing the group of circumstances and factors that may affect those individuals through their struggle for self- assertion and survival. On the other hand, those characters find themselves forced to go through a severe confrontation not only with others, but also with themselves to overcome their own past experience which stand as a huge barrier among them and obtain their existential needs. "The reality of every one's existence proceeds thus from the *inwardness* of man, not from anything that the mind codify" (Sartre :1965,6).

The role of the hero in Williams' plays gains its importance from the individuals' desperate need for salvation since this hero has great influence to intensify in such characters a deep sense of liberty and rebellion.

Through reading about Williams' personal life we find that his main goal was to assert his identity in a cruel society which has no place for sensitive and emotional individuals. We find that most of the protagonists in Williams' plays reflect him or members of his family. In *The Glass Menagerie*, for example we find that Laura resembles Williams crippled sister, and Tom resembles Williams himself, since both of them Tom and Williams were unsatisfied with their careers and were eager to find their real position in this world.

Most of the writers of the twentieth century refused to join the crowd and rejected many social values that did not agree with their personal beliefs and ideals. The writers were not satisfied with their societies. Therefore, those writers created characters that lived in absolute alienation because they cannot accommodate themselves with the changes of the social and political system. They separated themselves from reality and start to construct their own world of fantasy which increases their estrangement more and more: "The existentialists' emphasis upon the passion, anxiety, and the decision of individual man, and had a similar sense of the tragic predicament of humanity in modern civilization" (Sartre:1965, 9).

Some writers give a negative impression of such alienated and estranged characters since they present them as being defeated damaged and ignored people who do not have any value in this life. Kafka's character in *The Fasting Showman* for Example reflects the image of the outsider character that loses interest in life and is completely neglected by others. Albert Camus's *Outsider* is another character which does not care for its existence nor does it give any regard to the events around it; for example Tom does not feel sad for his mother's death nor does he take a crucial stance in defending himself when he is accused of committing a murder and

sentenced to death. There are other writers who give their characters some importance and show them as characters who realize their existence and strive so hard to gain their basic rights as respectable human beings. In fact these writers believe that their importance exist in distinguishing themselves from others. They believe that they will lose their value if they are joined to the rest of the crowd.

Williams belongs to the other group of writers who present their characters as being estranged, demanding the right to have their complete freedom and to feel that they are superior in one way or another even in the most dreadful circumstances at their peak of despair, Williams' protagonist do not lose their courage and do not give up; they realize that it is very necessary for them to strive for and achieve their basic rights to live as respectable human beings. Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* asserts his freedom and seeks for adventure by abandoning his mother and his crippled sister. Most of the critics and writers who had studied Williams' plays dealt with these three aspects; freedom, challenge and alienation as major characteristics of Williams' characters. These three characteristics are closely related to the existential themes.

In *The Glass Menagerie* the characters try to assert their "self" through freedom, challenge and self-alienation. Williams' presents the characters' furious struggle and the circumstances they were forced to go through in order to prove to themselves and to others that they exist and that they have true value. One of the main existential themes is self-alienation which will be tackled in regard to Williams *The Glass Menagerie*.

In St Louis, where Williams lived, realized that there are two kinds of people, the rich and the poor. His family belongs to the latter class. Williams' poverty intensifies in him a deep sense of rebellion and a

detestation of the society for its economic differences, and this of course has affected many themes of his plays. Williams spends his whole life trying to prove his identity in a world full of brutality. He has been obliged since he was a child to work in various jobs: a worker in a shoe factory, an elevator man and a porter. His dissatisfaction with his social and professional position made him search for his identity through writing. He has challenged his circumstances and made for himself a place so honorable and respectable among the American playwrights.

A very important theme in Williams' plays is the sensitivity and vulnerability of the major characters. Williams insists on showing this quality as a disadvantage for the characters, since it does not qualify them to survive under the harsh circumstances of any materialistic society. Of course, sensitivity does not necessarily mean weakness. In most cases, it implies the individual's realization of her or his own spiritual and physical needs. Naturally, those who give great importance to the issue of self-assertion are likely to be the sensitive people because they are more sensitive to existential matters as freedom and self-esteem, than others: "The apprehension of environmental insecurity and the searching analysis of its causes are closely related to the existential motive" (Sartre:1965, 11). The way those characters try to assert their existence makes the society assail them, and this is what makes the sensitive characters fragile and puts them in great danger.

Amanda Wingfield, in *The Glass Menagerie*, tries hard to control her children's lives. She has preconceived ideas for her son, Tom, and daughter Laura, and tries to make her dreams for them come true. She expects her children to have the same genteel manners she grew up with, to always behave formally and politely, even in their own home. She expects her children to live up to her only definition of success. In the process of

her dreaming and scheming, she totally ignores the needs of her children, never really understanding them. When they fail to live up to her expectations, Amanda nags and criticizes them unmercifully to the extent that her wishes sometimes leave her blind to reality. Tom escapes from his mother's nagging and criticism to the movies and makes his final escape from home to achieve his own dreams, but his escape is incomplete for he remains haunted by the memories of his sister who is only able to escape to the illusionary world of her glass menagerie. Tom "is the fugitive kind, an outsider, a perpetual wanderer in space and time" (Adam: 1991, 113). He fled his responsibility of catering for his family and traveled around a great deal in pursuit of something that was much more fulfilling to his desire. Tom is completely an unstable character, swaying between the past and the present time:

Tom chooses to be an outsider to external reality and to reenter the past or the present at will. His total control of the developing action sets him apart from Williams' other fugitive kind and enables him..., to overcome self-absorption.

The intense desire to flee from dangerous people or uncomfortable situations is presented in some of Williams' outcasts who are so fugitive that they never appear as characters, yet their absence strongly influences the behaviour of the characters he places on stage. Williams establishes his absent fugitives as the agents of his memory play, as the symbols of other character's mistakes, and as the cause of their progress through the memory play structure. As Sausan Koprince puts it:

Worshipped like deities, Williams's unseen characters initially bring happiness and love into the lives of his protagonists ... but when that transcendent love is lost, as it inevitably is, the same unseen characters produce pain and confusion, driving Williams's protagonists to irrational behavior and even to the brink of insanity... It

is the tragic sense of loss ... comparable to the loss of one's religious faith... which Williams often movingly portrays. (1994, 94)

Koprince says that "Williams develops his absent fugitives primarily through direct dialogue, accented by spectacle and melody"(1994,88). Because they are not physically present, the absent fugitives are revealed by Williams through other strategies. There are examples to include the large-than-life photograph of Mr. Wingfield, which establishes him as a fifth character in the play. Mr. Wingfield, the absent father, whose son, Tom, calls " a telephone man who fell in love with long distances" he is " the fifth character in the play" (1.1.235). Indulging in a wander-lust that his son intends to imitate, Mr.Wingfield "skipped the light fantastic out of town" abandoning his wife, Amanda, and his two children. His last message to his family, on a postcard contains only two words: "Hello—goodbye! And no address" (1.1.235).

All the fugitives who are discussed in the paper are confused or lost characters . they are unable to understand the world they live in and unwilling to comply to its dullness or cruelty in which they find themselves perhaps because nobody tries to understand them. The fugitive's quest for the meaning of his existence is epitomized by his fundamental but simple question "Why?" to answer the question is " like if you ask a question you wait for someone to answer, but you ask the wrong question or you ask the wrong person and the answer doesn't come" (Williams , Orpheus Descending 2.1.284). The questions above are closely related to the existential dogma and beliefs in terms that every human being is questioning his existence in this life.

It seems that the fugitive does no longer feel that belongs to himself or to a well-defined community, he acts out of his passion: he is what he is,

but he also what he strives to become. In fact the fugitive characters resemble children who are somehow outside their society i.e. outsiders as named by the existentialists. They have not yet been pressed into accepting reality which their elders seek to force upon them. However, every character though weak and fugitive, tries to assert its essence as described by Sartre:

When I constitute myself as the comprehension of the possible as *my possible*, I must recognize its existence at the end of my project and apprehend it as myself, awaiting me down there in the future and separated from me by nothingness. In this sense I apprehend myself as the original source of my possibility, and it is this which ordinarily we call the consciousness of freedom. It is this structure of consciousness and this alone that the proponents of free-will have in mind when they speak of the intuition of the inner sense. (1957,41)

Williams saw growing up as a process of losing innocence and joy, and he could not believe that the loss of innocence was a result of sin, rather it was the fault of the society, which refused to allow the child to remain free of fitters"(Roundane:1997,160). In Williams' opinion, the child represents, then, a useful symbol for that insistence in man which forces him to continue applying their unique crimes. Through these outcasts characters Williams argues that his fugitives are torn between their desire to express their true natures and their human social drives. C. W. E. Bigsby's comments on *The Glass Menagerie* apply as well to Williams' other works as notes:

All the key words of Williams's work are to be found in these introductory notes [of *The Glass Menagerie*]: paranoia, tenderness, illusion, fragile, delicate, poetic, transformation, emotion, nostalgia, desperation, and trap. These defining elements are to be projected not merely through character and dialogue. He [Williams] envisages a production in which all elements will serve his central concern with those who are the victims of social circumstances, of impervious national myth, of

fate and time as the agent of that fate. He envisages the projection of magic-lantern slides which will amplify elements of a scene. He calls for music to give "emotional emphasis" music which is to be "the lightest, most delicate music in the world" emphasizing "emotion, nostalgia, which is the first condition of the play." ("Entering *The Glass Menagerie*"33)

Bigsby's assessment of Williams' notes defines the character of his as being lonely, oppressed, nonconformist fugitives. Senseless brutality is the source of Williams' alienation from conventional morality, that which forces his isolation while underscoring his *angst*. In choosing to resist the brutality of conventional moralists, he acknowledges that life became "something similar to the defense of a stockade against a band of savages" (where I live :1984, viii). Like his fugitive characters, Williams felt both isolation from conventional persons and the freedom that nonconformity can bring; however, he sensed that his isolation had removed something important from his life. The same force drives his fugitives from polite society and compels those characters to notice that something is missing in their lives – an added cruelty. As Williams puts it:

I've always regarded myself as an incomplete person, and consequently I've always been more interested in my own kind of people, you know, people that have problems, people that have to fight for their reason, people for whom the impact of life and experience from day to day, night to night, is difficult, people who come close to cracking. That's my world, those are my people. And I must write about the people I know. Perhaps that limits me, I'm sure it must limit me as an artist, but nevertheless I couldn't create believable characters if I moved outside of that world. (Terkel:, 1986,83)

F. M. O. Hitchcock notes that Williams' "search for that wholeness is what actually defines his work" (1993,164). She adds that Williams' fugitives "are wounded halves, desperately seeking an end to their fragmentation, their alienation, their existential angst." Out of this conflict, this driving need for acceptance and understanding,

Williams' characters experience a compulsion to hurt themselves, to pay for something they enjoy but feel to be wrong.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of those characters is that they all sense that something important is missing in their lives. They try to imagine what that something could be, and wander about in search of it because "there is nothing beyond man himself that can solve the problem of man's existence" (Sartre, 12,1965) in this sense it is only the human who can determine his existence not anyone else instead. Through his artistic imagination –Williams' creation of these characters and his placement of them in dramatic juxtaposition with conventional morality- it is logical to conclude that the playwright, like his outcast characters, feels that something is missing in his life.

Amanda, in *The Glass Menagerie*, controls her children's life in a similar poisonous way that emerges from her distorted psychology. Amanda's interaction with her children, especially Tom, reveals a fractured personality manipulatively defending itself from abandonment and fear. Her dependence on Tom is evident. Her constant reminders to him of his obligations to her and Laura point to this chronic dependency. Amanda's saying to Tom, "I've had to put up a solitary battle all these years. But you are my right- hand bower! Don't fall down, don't fail"(scene 4,258), is a transparently manipulative statement_urging Tom to support her. Perhaps the most startling direct line Amanda makes to this effect is her rhetorical question in scene two, "what is there left but dependency in all our lives?"(scene2, 245). Her most blatant dependency communication is found in her last retort, "Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go to the movies!" (scene 7,312).

Amanda's manipulation of Tom are visibly demonstrated in his actions. The most notable actions he performs in the play are his daily work which he loathes, his provision of a gentleman caller at his mother's request, his nightly movie going and finally his abandonment of Laura and Amanda at the end of the play. Of these actions, the one that most prominently demonstrated his supplication to Amanda is his daily, begrudged, work attendance. The fact that he does not like to go to work at all evidences that some other motivation is at play. The play makes it explicit that his real motivation is guilt and obligation: "You think am crazy about that warehouse? Every time you come in yelling that God damn 'rise and shine'.... I say to my self 'how lucky dead people are!... but I get up . I go!" (scene3,252)

On a communicative level Amanda also manipulates Tom into feeling guilty. While he is apologizing after their fight in scene 3, she does not graciously accept his apology but rather says "My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children" (scene 4, 259). She not only induces his guilt by calling him to task for his failures but also directly communicates that she dotes on and cares deeply for her children. She says, "No, I don't have secrets. I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon. Success and happiness for my precious children" (scene 5,272)

Through the guilt Amanda induces in Tom, she forces him into compliance with her wishes. As the play moves on, however, it becomes increasingly apparent that his compliance is not heartfelt. His commenting, "I'll rise-but I won't shine" (scene 4,256) is a thinly veiled statement to this effect. Amanda is aware that Tom is becoming exhausted by her demands on him, as he himself says such things as, "Look!- I 've got no thing, no single thing.... In my life here that I can call my own!" (scene2,241)

Unfortunately, fate and Laura's crippling lack of confidence conspire to ensure that this is a failure as well. Laura has been used in her mother's dependency for so long that she is utterly introverted and reliant on others. She even asks Amanda, "what shall I wish for, mother" (scene 2, 242) when Amanda encourages her to wish upon the stars. Such compliance inevitably has the consequence that Laura cannot authoritatively cope with Jim's visit and shies away from it, "there was a Jim O'Connor we both knew in high school! {then, with effort} if that is the one that Tom is bringing to the dinner- you'll have to excuse me, I won't come to the table"(scene6,282). To compound this problem, Jim is already engaged_ a fact he only reveals shortly before his departure. Despite an extraordinarily successful interplay with Jim following dinner, ultimately Laura cannot compete with this fact. She is too shy and reclusive girl, too reliant on others, to be sufficiently attractive to win Jim's romantic affections ultimately. Isolation is another significant theme within the existential framework; the isolated and alienated protagonists find that nothing is happening to them in this life. They are waiting for some power and support to help them out of their plight and hopeless present situations. They are pending hopes that someone may come and change their lives to a better one, somebody like Jim, however they find themselves chasing an allusion and a dream may never come true.

When this last effort on Amanda's and Tom's part is unsuccessful, Amanda again tries to apply guilt on Tom by pointing out what failure his efforts turned out to be, " that's right , now that you've made us make such fools of ourselves. The effort, the preparation, all the expense! The new floor lamp, the rug, the clothes for Laura! All for what? To entertain some other girl's fiancé!" (scene 7, 311) In the play it is not only Laura who escapes the reality but also her mother, Amanda , and her brother, Tom.

Amanda, who fears that Tom will imitate his father, is driven to recollections of a past that was without the pain of financial hardship. In the following synopsis of her words to Tom, Amanda makes this clear:

see the nose in front of my face! It's terrifying ! more and more you remind me of your father! He was out all hours without explanation! Then left! Goodbye! and me with the bag to hold. I saw that letter you got from the Merchant Marine. I know what you are dreaming of. I am not standing here blindfolded. [she pauses] very well, then. Then do it! But not till there's somebody to take your place. (Scene 4, 2590)

The image of Amanda revealed in this passage is at variance with Signi Lenea Falk's description of her as "insensitive" (1978,74), "a nagging mother"(1978,72) who represents "the conflict between normal emotions and the repressive ideals of the puritan tradition" (1978,70). Also, Eric Levy agrees with Falk's assessment, claiming that "Amanda holds her children in a prison of self-consciousness" (1993,529) adding the above dialogue to the rest of the plot, however, we see an entirely different Amanda. She is a woman paralyzed by the prospect of being abandoned for a second time; her fear exacerbated by the presence of an unemployable, crippled daughter. At the root of this fear is her absent husband; her verbal harassment of Tom and pathetic encouragement of Laura stem from a desire to provide, emotionally and financially, for her dysfunctional family.

Amanda's upbringing, as an attractive southern belle, must be taken into account when assessing her state of mind in the play. Reduced to poverty by a wayward husband, it is no surprise that she finds, in his abandonment, a motive to fantasize and even exaggerate about her popular, pampered youth. It is also unsurprising that Tom, forced into a paternal role by his family's financial distress, idolizes and covets the freedom his father represents. From the existential point of view, the characters mentioned above are suffering from "self-deception"; every single character lives in an

imaginative realm away from the others and they can not embrace reality as it is. Therefore the characters are completely alienated from their fellow-men being left alone with nowhere to go. As a result they cut themselves off from reality and lived in their imaginary world since they were unable to accept reality as is.

The only hope for man lies in his full realization and acceptance of the truth. And although his personal fate is simply to perish, he can triumph over it by inventing *purposes* and *projects* which will themselves confer meaning both upon himself and the world of objects- all meaningless otherwise and in themselves. (Sartre, 15)

Existentialists wanted human beings to be active in their thinking and to use their mind so as to be responsible for what they choose. Contrary to what is mentioned above, the characters in the play are suffering from their reality and they create desperately another world which they live in, and which is an imaginary one. All the characters are aimless pursuing no goals in their lives, empty minded and crippled. If Amanda and Tom are driven into this situation by the actions of Mr. Wingfield, the absent father, can we apply the same to Laura? Although she is shy and dreadful she is also intelligent, her consolation to Tom in Scene 5, attempting to hold her family together, reveals her concern about them. Laura's condition forces us to consider that the impact her father's abandonment must have had a terrible effect on her self-esteem. It is Mr. Wingfield, not Amanda, who is ultimately to blame for Laura's seclusion from the world of physically ordinary people. The playwright wants to give credit to his characters to be in charge of their lives, to be independent ones and determine their destiny; however they evade their responsibility even for their own lives. "Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only insofar as he realizes himself, he is therefore

nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is" (Sartre:1965 41).

Like Amanda, Laura is forced by the actions of her father into a world where she is as fragile as her menagerie of glass animals. Amanda, through her escape to the past and the gracious mansion of her girlhood, invokes a flood of memories of rebirth and rejuvenation for she "has lost her springtime innocence and bitterly mourns the transitory nature of youth, beauty, and love" (Thompson: 2002, 18). Amanda's memory-stories of her southern girlhood, especially of her courtship by numerous "gentlemen callers" (Scene1, 237), transport the play's events beyond the common place to evoke "the idyllic world" of romance. But her failure to recapture a romantic past for Laura coincides with Tom's futile efforts to escape an inescapable reality, circumstances to which all three Wingfields respond with a mixture of bitterness, compassion, and everlasting regret. Usually, people pursue their happiness in real life situations by hard work, perseverance, and patience because happiness and pleasure in our life should be attained "Pleasure must not disappear behind its own self-consciousness; it is not a representation, it is a concrete event, full and absolute" (Sartre:1957,IV). However Amanda, Tom and Laura above fail every time to embrace their fate and live happily.

Ironically, just as the fire escape that looms in front of the audience in the play provides no escape at all for the Wingfields, the "blown-up photograph" (Scene1,234) of the absent father that hangs in their living room forecasts the inevitability of Tom's departure at the end of it. It also, serves as a visual reminder of the Wingfield's inability to escape their crippling past. Although Tom tries to inoculate himself from his physically and psychologically oppressive surroundings by drinking alcohol, smoking

cigarettes, writing poetry, and watching endless hours of matinees and double-features, he cannot prevent his destiny. The harder he tries to distinguish himself from his father and his "legacy of abandonment" the closer he aligns himself to his fate. Life is absurd for the characters and thus man's life has no sense or meaning at all, for them the universe is meaningless, purposeless and pointless in other words they are suffering from nausea as named by Sartre which means being tired of their life. "The self deception is evidently a falsehood, because it is a dissimulation of man's complete liberty of commitment" (Sartre:1965 51) in this regard truly the characters try to escape their sense of commitment to every thing in their life.

By reading literature and watching movies, Tom retreats into the fantasies realm and the stupor provided by drunkenness to escape from his responsibility for his mother and sister. He finally escapes and joins the Merchant Marines, but he breaks and sacrifices his family to liberate himself. But even his escape does not save him from his burdens for he remains haunted by his betrayal of Laura and memories of the past from which he is perpetually trying to escape. His final speech in the play suggests that he never finds what he is seeking:

I traveled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from branches. I would have stopped but I was pursued by something. I am walking along the street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfumes were sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bites of shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! (Scene7, 313).

According to the lines above, we need only look at playwright's own life. Pity, in that context, would have forced Tom to remain with Amanda

and Laura, abandoning his desire for freedom. Yet, like Williams, Tom is "not remorseless" the guilt generated by his abandonment of his mother and sister circumscribes his freedom. He gets his freedom but cannot use it, and cannot free himself from the haunting memory of his missing family. According to Sartre only man himself can determine his life through his strong will or else he might be destroyed easily in this life. In this regard, it is quite clear that the characters are unable to determine their existence; on the contrary they prefer to escape to another world created by their imagination at the expense of facing their own problems.

Judith Thompson uses Jungian psychoanalytic theory to argue that the photograph of Mr. Wingfield is the objective correlative to Tom's wander-lust. Levy agrees, writing that the photograph of Mr. Wingfield is "Tom's mirror" of self-image and self-esteem (1993,530). According to Thompson, "Williams' belief in a 'great vocabulary of images' that derives from the unconscious closely resembles the fundamental assumption of Jungian psychology of a collective unconscious" (1993,8)

Williams demonstrates, through Tom's recollections, how powerful memories revolve around the characters whose actions reflect the inner turmoil of the person doing the remembering. These individuals form the constituency of Tom's consciousness; the suffering in each of them is a reflection of Tom's pain. Although Tom imitates his God-like father, by absenting himself from the family, images of his suffering mother and sister haunt him because his abandonment of Laura and Amanda is a sin against them.

Julie Adam points out that Tom's "long and arduous process of remembrance is motivated partly by the desire to return to a time of innocence, a time before choice" (Adam:1991, 100), but "this escape into the past often has disastrous consequences because it implies a potentially

fatal confrontation with guilt" that is why Tom is simultaneously drawn to the past and repelled by it. Tom along with his sister and mother are looking for reasons for their existence, however they find no answer. We see characters pending hope of finding a secure life. Unfortunately they end up suffering from the lack of love and freedom as well.

Indeed the Wingfields are as much victims of social and economic injustice as they are of the illusions they create to survive the harsh realities of their lives. By the same token, except for physically and emotionally fragile Laura, they are not helpless individuals who sacrifice reality for the world of illusion. As a matter of fact, Amanda is presented ultimately as a survivor. Consequently, Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* transcends the plight of the Wingfield family and captures the essence of a common humanity. The loss of physical and psychological space is indeed a human dilemma and a major concern of the existentialists. They spend their time and efforts analyzing human existence and the main problems that may face any person in modern and postmodern times. Judith Thompson in her book, *Tennessee Williams's plays: Memory, Myth, and Symbol*, says:

Because of the traumatic nature of the memory, Williams' protagonists appear transfixed or frozen in the act of looking backward in ecstasy or fear, their emotional growth asserted, as their psychological state thus rendered abnormal, neurotic, or otherwise disturbed. Each is marked by a single obsession: to recapture or escape from the one significant experience in his or her past. (2)

Tom's realization that he can not escape his guilt, Amanda's forays into mythical Blue Mountain and Laura's physical and emotional fragility resonate with diverse audiences from the whole world. Although Tom's memory drives the play, Amanda has the greatest burden to bear. She has been abandoned by her husband, and she must care for fragile Laura. Amanda's digressions into her past allow her to forget the misery of her present situation. However, she manages to do menial jobs to care for her

family. On top of that, she perseveres and makes valiant attempts to deal with the realities of the present. In contrast, Tom refuses to accept reality and abandons his mother and sister. Ironically, a genuine connection is achieved by mother and daughter in the silent final scene, whereas Tom is unable to make any connection because of the weight of his guilt. In short, each character is shown to be encased psychologically in the world of his or her own. Seeking escape, refuge, or rejuvenation, each imagines a different version of transcendent reality. They transform their lives with nothing more than a fantasy born out of need. However, the irony is that the imagination which sustains them also isolates them. So, these three characters live in an unrealistic world where the "inner child" leads them to reject the status quo.

On the other hand, it puts everyone in a position to understand that reality alone is reliable; that dreams, expectations, and hopes serve to define a man only as deceptive dreams, abortive hopes, expectations unfulfilled that is to say they define him negatively, not positively. (Sartre:1965, 42)

Like Tom, Williams was haunted by familial memories. His plays are shaped by those memories. In this sense he can not help but write, again and again, about his cruel father, his sad and disturbed sister, his consuming and controlling mother. He discovers what Tom realizes-- that physically removing one's self from a painful situation is not enough to escape it. As long as the memory of pain exists, the situation that caused the pain can be remembered; in the mind, it is as if the memory had caused the situation to recur. The security of escape is only illusion. C. W. E. Bigsby asserts:

On the face of it [Williams's] insistence that security can be equated with death would seem a curious observation when applied to *The Glass Menagerie*, a play set during the Depression. What Amanda needs more than anything else, both for herself and her daughter, is, arguably, precisely security. It was what the

Depression had destroyed. His [Williams'] own sense of self-disgust, however, leads him to celebrate the insecurity which had characterized his own earlier life. Yet in a sense if Tom, his alter ego in the play, had settled for what he had got, if he had offered his mother and sister the security they needed, he would have destroyed himself as a poet. *The Glass Menagerie*, then, is concerned with insecurity which on the one hand drives some to a lonely depression, redeemed only by hermitic fantasies and myths, and on the other creates poets scarred by guilt but elevated by their avocation. (Critical Introduction 33)

Williams' external dramatization of the image of childhood in his different plays renders his theatre psychologically complex and highly dramatic: "Williams' characters have always been self-dramatizing. They see themselves as playing roles: Southern belle, fragile soul, determined woman. They seek protection from reality in theatricality, which is the denial of causality and time" (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 99). Through many images in the play, Williams presents disappointment, disillusion, and failure of the American dream which the playwright portrays in characters like Laura with her glass animals and Amanda's blue Mountain memories. "His main characters became tortured loners who have been bypassed by the great American dream of public acclaim and bourgeois material success, often because of some sexual crime or indiscretion that alienated them from more respectable others" (Roudane:1997, 207).

Conclusion

The literature of the 20th century is full of existential and psychological themes. The main ideas and some of the major ones have been touched upon in this paper. The disillusionment and the unrest that characterized the plight of the Wingfields in *The Glass Menagerie* were indeed a reflection of the radical, social, and economic changes of the 1940s brought about by the Depression and the Second World War. As interest in Sigmund Freud's psychology emerged and America faced social,

moral, and religious crises, Williams responded to the nation's growing anxieties and tensions in his works. He employs innovative dramatic techniques such as onstage screens, two-level stage, music, and creative lighting to blend text and performance, illusion and reality, past and present to punctuate the psychological loss suffered by Tom Wingfield as the result of abandoning his mother and beloved sister.

The suffering of Williams' fugitive characters, who are the central messages bearers in his plays, brings out his claim that "the only one major theme for my work that is the destructive impact of society on the sensitive non-conformist individual" (Letter, 1939, to Audrey Wood). Tom's wander-lust is painful because his family is poor, abandoning his mother and sister will leave them destitute. Amanda creates a fantastic illusion of her family as solidly middle-class. Had the Wingfields truly been middle-class family, however, Tom's disappearance would not have created such misery. Williams imagery presents the shocking disappointments of his contemporary literary scene as well as his own disillusionment in the American Dream. Obviously Williams was familiar with the various themes and aspects of Existentialism, and he remained overwhelmed by the main dogmas discussed above i.e. self-assertion, self-deception, alienation, and estrangement.

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الوجودية في مسرح تينيسي ويليامز

يعتبر نشوء الحركة الادبيه الوجوديه في بداية القرن العشرين عاملا مهما وفعالا في الدراسات الادبيه، الأمر الذي أدى إلى تطور العديد من الدراسات التحليلية للنصوص الادبيه. ان النظرية الوجوديه تهتم بدراسه الوجود الانساني بشكل عام ووجود الانسان وارادته الحره في تقرير حياته ومصيره بشكل خاص. في هذه الدراسه تم تطبيق النظرية وبعض مصطلحاتها لتوضيح الاسباب التي تقف وراء ازمه الهزيه والوجود لدى الشخص ، تحديدا في مسرحيه (المعرض الزجاجي) حيث تعرض المسرحيه ازمه الوجود لدى الشخصيات الرئيسيه ورفضهم للواقع الملموس في فتره الحداثه وما بعدها.