

The longing Self In Selected Plays By Tennessee Williams

Assistant instructor Zainab Lateef Abbass

Abstract

The 20th century generation, especially the one, which finds itself drowned in the oozy ocean of the Second World War trauma, is reluctant to show any kinds of belonging to the existing perturbed world. It finds its soul and mind fettered and shackled in the dark dungeon of alienation. This sense of alienation creates nothing more than nostalgia and a longing for the days, which are no more. This study is an attempt to have deep journey into the disturbed and longing selves of the characters of Tennessee William's The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire". Thus, the study is divided into three sections. The first section is introductory note about of Williams's life and works.

The second section deals with the first of William's successful play The Glass Menagerie. It tells the story of a family that is deserted by the father and left the mother and sister under the responsibility of the son who is dissatisfied with his life and longing to escape to live an adventure.

The third section tries to display the tragic plight by presenting a contrast in Blanche's life. Earlier in her life, she had been a gentlewoman, whereas the action of the play shows her gradual disintegration into an aging destitute, who has become alcoholic and nymphomaniac. The study ends with a Conclusion, which sums up the main findings of the study, followed by notes and a Bibliography.

The life and works of Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983) is one of the most representative and productive American dramatists of post war period. Post-war drama retained a concern with the common man and the realities of his life. It was the common man and for him/her that the playwright was directing his work, as Miller puts it: "we write plays for the people and not for the professors."¹ Williams places his characters in a recognizable social framework, as he is more interested in the effect of family and social environment on the individual."He is the observer of frustrated lives, of the constant clash of new societies with the old."² As in his *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), the play that established him as one of the most important playwrights of his time, Williams tells the story of the decline and fall of Blanche Duboi. Blanche is often regarded as a symbol of decaying tradition, beauty, and refinement in a battle against the crude vitality of the progressive mainstream symbolized by Stanley Kowalisky.

His plays, like those of Chekhov (1860–1904), a nineteenth-century Russian dramatist, have social and political meaning, but it is presented indirectly by suggestion, or symbolism. It is never brought to the audience directly but by implication. Williams presents the eccentric in his characters, which are mostly in an intense psychological distress; most of his creations are society's outcasts, losers, and lonely hearts that brought new sympathy to the stage:"Williams's characters are failed typists, dismissed teachers, ex-athletes, unrecognized poets, unsuccessful actors, disqualified doctors, defrocked priests; in short the neurotic, the betrayed, the discarded, the marginalized."³

Williams is a Southern writer. His childhood was spent in the South, a region with a history and peculiar culture which had developed a literary tradition in the early years of the twentieth century. Prior to the success of Williams, the South had not been a regular part of the theatrical scene, and Southern writers rarely wrote plays that would appeal to New York audiences⁴. He was keen to present the tradition, the habits, and the people of the South in his work. He wanted to capture the

natural lyricism, a lyricism he felt he had inherited from his famous kinsman, Sydney Lanier (1842–1881), the nineteenth-century poet⁵. He tried to reveal the color of the Southern speech, the comic imagery, the exaggeration, and the delightful rhythms in an effort to immortalize the distinctive language of his region⁶. This blends his portrayal of the South with a sense of sensitivity and complexity, because he presented the South in a more subjective way than any other Southern dramatist⁷.

Williams is also a subjective writer, as he borrowed from his own experiences which provided material for his plays from *The Glass Menagerie*(1944)) to *Vieux Carre*(1977). He himself admits that although his plays are not autobiographical, they reflect the particular psychological turmoil he was going through when he wrote them.⁸No characters were more important to him than the members of his own family, whom he immortalized in his plays. His mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, became the model of his Southern belles and over-protective mothers. She is Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* and Alma Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke*⁹. He depicts the qualities of her personality, her wit, and the manner of her voice and gesture. His father Cornilius Coffin Williams, inspired the characters of Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and the absent father in *The Glass Menagerie*¹⁰.

The last but not the least of his family members is the unfortunate sister, Rose, whom he immortalized in *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams adored his sister and had a unique relationship with her as he never had a friend. His sister suffered from a certain mental disorder which forced their parents to institutionalize her and then in 1943 she had a frontal lobotomy that disabled her permanently.¹¹In writing her story, he had his first success. Her was fall closely tied to his rise.

Williams had been interested in realism as the norm for his writing, but he was not merely interested in the exterior depiction of life. His interest was in the inner realism of his characters. He invited the audience for an insight into the inner self of the character, where inner sensations struggled to take their external shape of

behavior. This endeavor to bring about the psychological state of the character called for a theater of an experimental nature. Williams, on his part, employed the stage effects to serve his expressionistic inclinations, as in the case of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where the stage effects are used to represent Blanche's descent into madness; the use of polka music and jungle sound effects with the strange shadows helped to represent the world as Blanche experienced it¹². Realism remained the norm of writing for him. He treated the characterization and the general argument realistically but he enriched his stories with expressionistic intensifications.

Tennessee Williams wrote some short fiction and poetry, he is best known for his plays from the late 1940s through the 1960s, which include Pulitzer Prize winners *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Tony award winner, *The Rose Tattoo*. Today, his plays are heralded as classic examples of contemporary American literature, and they are still some of the most produced in the world.

Williams adapted much of his writing to screenplays for films, including *The Glass Menagerie* in 1950, *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1951, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* and, his most recent adaptation, *The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond*, which is a film that came out in 2009, based on his 1957 screenplay

The Glass Menagerie

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play that premiered in 1944 and was Williams' first successful play. The play has strong autobiographical elements, featuring characters based on its author, his histrionic mother, and his mentally fragile sister Laura. In writing the play, Williams drew on an earlier short story, as well as a screenplay he had written under the title of *The Gentleman Caller*¹⁴.

The play is introduced to the audience by Tom, the narrator and protagonist, as a memory play based on his recollection of his mother Amanda and his sister Laura. Because the play is based on memory, Tom cautions the audience that what they see may not be precisely what happened. *The Glass Menagerie* is set in St. Louis

in 1937. He is an aspiring poet who toils in a shoe warehouse to support his mother, [Amanda](#), and sister, [Laura](#). Mr. Wingfield, Tom and Laura's father, ran off years ago and, except for one postcard, has not been heard from since.

Amanda, originally from a genteel Southern family, regales her children frequently with tales of her idyllic youth and the scores of suitors who once pursued her. She is disappointed that Laura, who wears a brace on her leg and is painfully shy, does not attract any gentlemen callers.

She enrolls Laura in a business college, hoping that she will make her own and the family's fortune through a business career. Weeks later, however, Amanda discovers that Laura's crippling shyness has led her to drop out of the class secretly and spend her days wandering the city alone. Amanda then decides that Laura's last hope must lie in marriage and begins selling magazine subscriptions to earn the extra money she believes will help to attract suitors for Laura. Meanwhile, Tom, who loathes his warehouse job, finds escape in liquor, movies, and literature. Amanda and Tom discuss Laura's prospects, and Amanda asks Tom to look for potential suitors at the warehouse. Tom selects Jim O'Connor, a casual friend, and invites him to dinner.

Laura learns the name of her caller; as it turns out, she had a devastating crush on Jim in high school. When Jim arrives, Laura answers the door, on Amanda's orders, and Laura refuses to eat dinner with the others, feigning illness. Amanda, wearing an ostentatious dress from her glamorous youth, talks vivaciously with Jim throughout the meal. The lights go out as a consequence of the unpaid electric bill. The characters light candles, and Amanda encourages Jim to entertain Laura in the living room while she and Tom clean up. Laura is at first paralyzed by Jim's presence, but his warm and open behavior soon draws

her out of her shell. She confesses that she knew and liked him in high school but was too shy to approach him. They continue talking, and Laura reminds him of the nickname he had given her: "Blue Roses," Laura then ventures to show him her

favorite glass animal, a unicorn. Jim dances with her, but in the process, he accidentally knocks over the unicorn, breaking off its horn. Laura is forgiving, noting that now the unicorn is a normal horse. Jim then kisses her, but he quickly draws back and apologizes, explaining that he was carried away by the moment and that he actually has a serious girlfriend. Resigned, Laura offers him the broken unicorn as a souvenir. Tom watches the two women and explains that, not long after Jim's visit, he gets fired from his job and leaves Amanda and Laura behind. Years later, though he travels far, he finds that he is unable to leave behind guilty memories of Laura.

Williams's aim has not been on building his drama upon the plot of illusion and frustration in the lives of little people. He has given the play further dramatic significance by deepening the losses of individual and pointing to social and even spiritual catastrophe. The time of the play is 1939 and America is still in the depression and on the brink of war. Most of Amanda's anxieties are economic. Even when Tom complains about the grimness of life in the factory, she urges him to try and he will succeed. This is the illusion of the American dream which she shared with most American people. The longing for success and the illusion of the American dream is smothered by the Depression and the Second World war

Williams tries to put into focus the dilemma and the desperate longings of his characters by emphasizing on the inner reality of the characters rather than the surface one. He is more concerned with the inner realism of his characters than with outer realism. Tom says it is a memory play. He does not say it is my memory. In a sense he says it is our memory, it is a collective memory. The power of the play depends on the inner, imaginative life of the audience.¹⁵ Williams believes that the inner reality of the characters offers truth and transcends the limits of surface reality by suggesting a reality that is interior. Everything in the play is employed to bring into focus the inner reality of the characters, their dilemma, plight and longings.

The characters in this play are having difficulty in communicating with each other and expressing their feelings and longings and in accepting and relating to reality.

Tome: TOM: No. You say there's so much in your heart that you can't describe to me. That's true of me, too. There's so much in my heart that I can't describe to you! So let's respect each other's (p.30)

Each member of the Wingfield family is unable to overcome this difficulty, and each, as a result, withdraws into a private world of illusion where he or she finds the comfort and meaning that the real world does not seem to offer.

The wingfield lack a meaningful contact with the world outside.They are cut off from society. Isolated in their apartment. Living in a world of their own.

Williams in presenting the Wingfields plight, is in fact presenting the modern man's plight. Man is caught by two opposing worlds. The world of materialism science and technology on the one hand, and the world of imagination , art and spirituality one the other. This the main conflict that is imaged throughout the play. The conflict is imaged in the electric lights,the typewriter, the telephone. These images shows the Wingfields' inability to adapt to the modern world. For Laura the typewriter is a source of nervous indigestion and frustration. The telephone which is Amanda's only link with the outside world, always fails her, her customers always hang up on her. When the electric lights fail the replace them with candles. This is another symbol of the Wingfield's failure to live in the modern world. Each member of the Wingfield is longing for a world that is different from the world of reality. Let's take Amnda, the mother, first. She is as Nancy M. Tischler describes her as a disillushioned romantic realist who tries to steer her children into more practical paths than those she had followed.¹⁶But her problem is that she approaches her life unrealistically. Her plans for her children and her understanding of their shortcomings are grimly realistic. She refuses to admit her daughter is crippled and she speaks of "little defect" and refuses the fact that she will never marry. Amanda's problem is her yearning her past life. She believes in the cavalier's traditions and

the fantasy world of romances of horsy set and long islands. She has a kind of nostalgic backward glance to the lost Eden.¹⁷ So she escapes her reality in imagination and memory. She remember her childhood house and the gentlemen callers she had.

Amanda: My callers were gentleman –all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta – planters and sons of planters! (p. 5)

Tom, the narrator, is the dreamer and the poet in the play. Jim, his friend or the gentleman caller, calls him Shakespeare. He feels he is trapped in his warehouse job and also by his responsibilities to his mother and sister. As a narrator he describes the American as going their blind way. He is always in conflict with his mother. He feels that his mother is smothering him by her continuous criticism. She criticizes his eating habits, his smoking and his going to the movies.

AMANDA: I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of. That's why you act like this. I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right mind goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two a.m. Come in stumbling. Muttering to yourself like a maniac! You get three hours' sleep and then go to work. Oh, I can picture the way you're doing down there. Moping, doping, because you're in no condition.

TOM [wildly]: No, I'm in no condition !

AMANDA: What right have you got to jeopardize your job – jeopardize the security of us all? How do you think we'd manage if you were –

TOM: Listen ! You think I'm crazy about the warehouse? [He bonds fiercely toward her slight figure.] You think I'm in love with the Continental Shoemakers? You think I want to spend fifty– five years down there in that – celotex interior! with – fluorescent – tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains – than go back mornings! I go ! Every time you come in yelling.....

that God damn 'Rise and Shine!'– 'Rise and Shine!' I say to myself, 'How lucky dead people are ! 'But I get up. I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! And you say self – selfs' all I ever think of. Why, listen, if self is what I thought of, Mother, I'd be where he is –G O N E ! [Pointing to fathers picture.] As far as the system of transportation reaches ! [He starts past her. She grabs his arm.] Don't grab at me, Mother ! (p. 20)

Amanda and Laura are looking for a savior who comes to save them and give their lives a meaning. Tom is unable to play this role himself. He tries to explain to his mother that man is by instinct a fighter, a hunter, and a lover.

TOM: Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse !

AMANDA: Man is by instinct! Don't quote instinct to me! Instinct is something that people have got away from ! It belongs to animals ! Christian adults don't want it !

TOM: , What do Christian adults want, then, Mother?

AMANDA: Superior things! Things of the mind and the spirit ! Only animals have to satisfy instincts ! Surely your aims are somewhat higher than theirs ! Than monkeys – pigs (p.31)

He is longing to escape from home and the warehouse but his mother wouldn't let him. His desire creates a conflict between him and his mother. Tom resists the outside world he lives in. He rejects the confinement of the wingfield home by going to the movies and by planning to leave the house and work. He does not escape his world through imagination. He realizes that his escape must be external rather than internal like that of his mother and sister.

He rejects his mother's tendency to live in the past. He represents the modern man who is caught between two poles and struggles to find his place in the world. He feels that his sense of self is lost and only in leaving home can it be recovered. He is tired of going to the movies and imagining what it would be like to have an adventure.

His longing for leaving house is manifested in the story of the magician Malvolio. He tells his sister Laura about a trick the magician has performed. The trick is a metaphor for what he needs to do.

wonderfullest trick of all was the coffin trick. We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail, [He has come inside.] There is a trick that would come in handy for me – get me out of this 2 by 4 situation ! [Flops on to a bed and starts removing shoes.]

LAURA: Tom ? Shhh'!

TOM: What're you shushing me for?

LAURA: You'll wake up mother.

TOM: Goody, goody ! Pay 'er back for all those 'Rise an' Shines'. [Lies down, groaning.] You know it don't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed-up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail? [As if in answer, the father's grinning photograph lights up.] (p. 27)

The irony is that the break from home remains external only. The inner break with home never really happens. He is haunted by Laura's presence.

Tom: left Saint Louis. I descended the step of this fire-escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space – I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but tom away from the branches.

I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something.

It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow.

Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes ...

Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be !

Tom could not play the role of the savior . His mother realizes this fact so she asks him to find a gentleman caller for his sister. Jim O'Connor or the gentleman caller is the substitute savior. His arrival is marked by the coming of rain but the hopes of fertility and renewal which this might suggest are soon dashed. Tom describes Jim as the emissary of the world of reality. He is a symbol of the world that Laura cannot enter. He represents the world of materialism and technology. Their views show a complete diversity. He sympathises with Laura's world of glass and candlelight but his real interests is in the mechanical world of self-improvement. While Laura is the opposite . She is crippled and out of this imperfection there comes a need that generates the illusion with which she fills her world. She is as fragile as her glass animals. The glass unicorn in Laura's collection ,significantly, her favorite figure represents her peculiarity. As Jim points out, unicorns are "extinct" in modern times and are lonesome as a result of being different from other horses. Laura too is unusual, lonely, and ill-adapted to existence in the world in which she lives. The fate of the unicorn is also a smaller-scale version of Laura's fate in Scene Seven. When Jim dances with and then kisses Laura, the unicorn's horn breaks off, and it becomes just another horse. Jim's advances endow Laura with a new normalcy, making her seem more like just another girl, but the violence with which this normalcy is thrust upon her means that Laura

cannot become normal without somehow shattering. Eventually, Laura gives Jim the unicorn as a "souvenir." Without its horn, the unicorn is more appropriate for him than for her, and the broken figurine represents all that he has taken from her and destroyed in her.

Jim belongs to the world of reality. He does not belong to world of the wingfield's world of dreams and fears and unexpressed desires.¹⁸

Jim to Amanda, more than Lauea, represents everything she longs for. But Jim breaks up their dreams and shows the fact that the real world shatters their unrealistic hopes .

A Streetcar Named Desire

Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire was first performed in December 1947, two years after the grand success of his earlier play The Glass Menagerie. The play ran for 855 performances and won Williams another Drama Critics' Circle Award along with the Pulitzer Prize¹⁹. Blanche DuBois, a schoolteacher from Laurel, Mississippi, arrives at the New Orleans apartment of her sister, Stella Kowalski. Blanche tells Stella that she lost Belle Reve, their ancestral home, following the death of all their remaining relatives. She also mentions that she has been given a leave of absence from her teaching position because of her bad nerves.

Though Blanche does not seem to have enough money to afford a hotel, she is disdainful of the cramped quarters of the Kowalskis' two-room apartment and of the apartment's location in a noisy, diverse, working-class neighborhood. Blanche's social condescension wins her the instant dislike of Stella's husband, an auto-parts supply man of Polish descent named Stanley Kowalski. It is clear that Stella was happy to leave behind her the social pretensions of her background in exchange for the sexual gratification she gets from her husband; she even is pregnant with his baby. Stanley immediately distrusts Blanche to the extent that he suspects her of having cheated Stella out of her share of the family inheritance. In the process of defending herself to Stanley, Blanche reveals that Belle Reve was lost due to a foreclosed mortgage, a disclosure that signifies the dire nature of Blanche's financial circumstances. Blanche's heavy drinking, which she attempts to conceal from her sister and brother-in-law, is another sign that all is not well with Blanche

The unhappiness that accompanies the animal magnetism of Stella and Stanley's marriage reveals itself when Stanley hosts a drunken poker game with his male friends at the apartment. Blanche gets under Stanley's skin, especially when she starts to win the affections of his close friend Mitch. After Mitch has been absent for a while, speaking with Blanche in the bedroom, Stanley erupts, storms into the bedroom, and throws the radio out of the window. When Stella yells at Stanley and defends Blanche, Stanley beats her. The men pull him off, the poker game breaks up, and Blanche and Stella escape to their upstairs neighbor Eunice's apartment. A short while later, Stanley is remorseful and cries up to Stella to forgive him. To Blanche's alarm, Stella returns to Stanley and embraces him passionately. Mitch meets Blanche outside of the Kowalski flat and comforts her in her distress

The next day, Blanche tries to convince Stella to leave Stanley for a better man whose social status equals Stella's. Blanche suggests that she and Stella contact a millionaire named Shep Huntleigh for help escaping from New Orleans; when Stella laughs at her, Blanche reveals that she is completely broke. Stanley walks in as Blanche is making fun of him and secretly overhears Blanche and Stella's conversation. Later, he threatens Blanche with hints that he has heard rumors of her disreputable past. She is visibly dismayed

While Blanche is alone in the apartment one evening, waiting for Mitch to pick her up for a date, a teenage boy comes by to collect money for the newspaper. Blanche doesn't have any money for him, but she hits on him and gives him a lustful kiss. Soon after the boy departs, Mitch arrives, and they go on their date. When Blanche returns, she is exhausted and clearly has been uneasy for the entire night about the rumors Stanley mentioned earlier. In a surprisingly sincere heart-to-heart discussion with Mitch, Blanche reveals the greatest tragedy of her past. Years ago, her young husband committed suicide after she discovered and chastised him for his homosexuality. Mitch describes his own loss of a former love, and he tells Blanche that they need each other.

When the next scene begins, about one month has passed. It is the afternoon of Blanche's birthday. Stella is preparing a dinner for Blanche, Mitch, Stanley, and herself, when Stanley comes in to tell her that he has learned news of Blanche's sordid past. He says that after losing the DuBois mansion, Blanche moved into a fleabag motel from which she was eventually evicted because of her numerous sexual liaisons. Also, she was fired from her job as a schoolteacher because the principal discovered that she was having an affair with a teenage student. Stella is horrified to learn that Stanley has told Mitch these stories about Blanche.

The birthday dinner comes and goes, but Mitch never arrives. Stanley indicates to Blanche that he is aware of her past. For a birthday present, he gives her a one-way bus ticket back to Laurel. Stanley's cruelty so disturbs Stella that it appears the Kowalski household is about to break up, but the onset of Stella's labor prevents the imminent fight.

Several hours later, Blanche, drunk, sits alone in the apartment. Mitch, also drunk, arrives and repeats all he's learned from Stanley. Eventually Blanche confesses that the stories are true, but she also reveals the need for human affection she felt after her husband's death. Mitch tells Blanche that he can never marry her, saying she isn't fit to live in

the same house as his mother. Having learned that Blanche is not the chaste lady she pretended to be, Mitch tries to have sex with Blanche, but she forces him to leave by yelling "Fire!" to attract the attention of passersby outside.

Later, Stanley returns from the hospital to find Blanche even more drunk. She tells him that she will soon be leaving New Orleans with her former suitor Shep Huntleigh, who is now a millionaire. Stanley knows that Blanche's story is entirely in

her imagination, but he is so happy about his baby that he proposes they each celebrate their good fortune. Blanche spurns Stanley, and things grow contentious. When she tries to step past him, he refuses to move out of her way. Blanche becomes terrified to the point that she smashes a bottle on the table and threatens to smash Stanley in the face. Stanley grabs her arm and says that it's time for the "date" they've had set up since Blanche's arrival. Blanche resists, but Stanley uses his physical strength to overcome her, and he carries her to bed. The pulsing music indicates that Stanley rapes Blanche.

The next scene takes place weeks later, as Stella and her neighbor Eunice pack Blanche's bags. Blanche is in the bath, and Stanley plays poker with his buddies in the front room. A doctor will arrive soon to take Blanche to an insane asylum, but Blanche believes she is leaving to join her millionaire. Stella confesses to Eunice that she simply cannot allow herself to believe Blanche's assertion that Stanley raped her. When Blanche emerges from the bathroom, her deluded talk makes it clear that she has lost her grip on reality. The doctor arrives with a nurse, and Blanche initially panics and struggles against them when they try to take her away. Stanley and his friends fight to subdue Blanche, while Eunice holds Stella back to keep her from interfering. Mitch begins to cry. Finally, the doctor approaches Blanche in a gentle manner and convinces her to leave with him. She allows him to lead her away and does not look back or say goodbye as she goes. Stella sobs with her child in her arms, and Stanley comforts her with loving words and caresses.

The entire play revolves round Blanche's efforts to adjust to her surroundings. Her crisis arises out of her failure to live in a realistic world with realistic notions of life. Blanche is constantly haunted by the distressing memories of her patriarchal home, Belle Reve, which literally means Beautiful Dream. Her origin at Belle Reve is aristocratic, but her present belongs to New Orleans slum. Thus one of the several

personality problems of Blanche is her inability to drown the doubly lost aristocratic past; her family estate had been lost by the male members of her family in their “epic fornication.”

(Browne 1959, p.126).

The decline of Blanche is essentially patriarchal family also represents the collapse of the Old South, which perpetrated sexual immorality and violence under the protection of the Cavalier myth²⁰.

Blanche's selection of the poetic Allan Gray as a husband is based on her preference for delicacy and refinement. However, to her horror, she discovers that her artistic husband, Allan, is, in fact, a homosexual. Unable to tolerate this shock, she behaves with Allan in an insulting manner, which has a profound psychological effect on him and leads to his suicide. While Blanche is still struggling with her unrealistic notions of life, she incurs the additional burden of guilt for having been responsible for the suicide of her husband.

Blanche is engaged in a subtle game of power with her brother-in-law Stanley, who perceives her to be an intruder into his comfortably settled male-dominated conjugal world. Stanley's perception of Blanche as a disruptive force, which could destroy his power over his wife, leads to a serious consequence for Blanche. Her false pride is demolished by Stanley, partly out of revenge and partly as a measure to arouse her from an illusory life.

A Streetcar Named Desire is Williams' dramatic statement on the American life in a wider sense. Through this play the playwright makes visible the power of human instincts, which affect the everyday life of people. It is not a play about passions and desires remote from the common everyday reality. Instead it depicts what every American and in a larger sense, every human being might experience. The tragic plight of Blanche Du Bois in the play becomes representative of American social life

more than any epigrammatic slogan.

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Blanche belongs to the kind of women who are the relics of the moribund traditional of gentility in which Williams himself was reared, women who are unable to accept the twentieth century and who prefer living in the illusive and legendary world of something that never really was – the mythically cavalier Old South.

Blanche is too afraid to accept reality as it is. This is revealed when she says, “I can't stand a naked light bulb, any more than I can a rude remark or a vulgar action.

”(p.150)Blanche's efforts at New Orleans are devoted to adapting the place to her “ideal”. This is because the world of New Orleans is a gross travesty of her romantic ideals. She has a complaint to Stella that the living conditions of the Kowalski family are not appropriate. The animal like “nakedness” of Stella's home is revealed when Mitch finds her self-conscious of not being “properly dressed” and reassures her, saying, “that don't make no difference in the Quarter.” (p.155) Mitch's response highlights the contrast between Blanche's perceptions and the reality of Stella's home. Instead of adjusting to

the new reality, Blanche makes a desperate and futile attempt to reform the household of Stella to suit her dreams. This is symbolically reflected in her acts of placing a paper lantern over the harsh light and putting new covers on the furniture, thereby trying to modify the environment according to her own needs.

Blanche lives in a world of shades of Chinese lanterns and romantic melodies that conjure up a dream world. She is driven by guilt over the very indulgencies that give Stanley's life a vital intensity. She is full of desires ,yet she and her desires are heading towards the cemetery. Joseph N. Riddel Describes Blanche's life by saying"Her life is a living division of two warring principles desire and decorum and vshe is the victim of the civilization's attempts to reconcile the two into morality."²²

Her past is a mixture of sin and romance and so reality and illusion. And so the excess of self and the restraints of society. Her state represents man's irreconcilable split between animal reality and moral appearances.

Blanche's illusion can be seen a way of evasion. she drinks to induce illusion and escape her sense of guilt and even her losses. She has suffered a lot in her life. She has lost Belle Reve and her husband turned out to be homosexual and then committed suicide. She feels guilty of her husband's suicide. All these cruel facts forces Blanche to turn away from misery of reality to her romantic evasion. When Mitch accuses her of deception she replies that she didn't lie in her heart. Her reality exist by ignoring certain portion of reality by creating a world of soft illusion to cover herself and have what she is longing for. She refuses to face up to certain acts of her past and her present sexual drives which she covers over with words like "Flirting." It is also interesting to observe that the men Blanche seeks are approximately of the age of her husband at the time of his committing suicide. As has been said earlier, in these counters, there is more an element of nostalgia than an absolute lust²³. For example, in the last scene, Blanche envisions a romantic death at sea while she is under the care of a very young doctor on the ship. Similarly, to her the embarrassed paper boy is "like a young prince out of The Arabian Nights" whereas she looks at soldiers gathered up "like daisies from the lawn at Belle Reve". But above all, they are "young, young, young". This implies that Blanche's romantic involvement with young men constitutes her efforts to recapture her lost innocence and purity and also her power of empathizing with others, a capacity she lacked while dealing with the disclosure of her first husband's homosexuality. This explanation could present another side of Blanche, eclipsed by her first impression on others as a seductress. In seeking the seventeen year old boy after her "intimacies" with men at Hotel Flamingo, Blanche exhibits a quest for innocence and purity, which she cannot regain. Her act of

allowing the young man leave the apartment with his innocence intact, except for a kiss, depicts a kind of vicarious experience of innocence which Blanche has already

lost. It is thus clear that Blanche's superficial nymphomania has a deeper subtext of returning to the ideal, innocent and pure past of her life.

She finds herself to be fixed to an ideal world of the past, which has been lost and which can never be a reality again. In other words there is wide gulf between the ideal and reality. In every encounter with a new man, she seeks the "company of love" which she can never get. This is because while entering into a relationship with a new man, she has an ideal image of her lover, which is defeated in reality. In a sense, she continues to seek new men because she finds too many Allans. Blanche Du Bois is not merely an individual character, she transforms into an American legend. She represents the last remnant of a decadent agrarian aristocratic order on the verge of extinction.²⁴ This decaying world was somehow able to balance its metaphysical and religious pretensions with the demands of the flesh. Blanche represents the obsolete ideal past of a society, which cannot co-exist with the present, whose reality is in sharp contrast with the ideal. She mentally belongs to a highly idealistic world of the past, as a result of which she is unable to adjust to the Naturalistic order of the post World-War II years, represented by the urban New Orleans. Blanche's tragedy is due to her incompatible self in relation to the society around. She desperately tries to sustain a dying dream, which cannot survive in a pragmatic and animalistic world of twentieth century. Blanche's life in the play shows an actual dislocation from one world to another. These two worlds are represented by her parental home at Belle Reve and her sister's home at New Orleans.

Williams has used the city of New Orleans as a powerful symbol in the play. It represents the world of sins of the flesh and hence a powerful influence of Naturalistic forces. Although there is similarity in Belle Reve and New Orleans, as far as the Naturalistic forces are concerned, the symbolism associated with New Orleans is far more complex than it appears to be. New Orleans differs from the world of death and destruction at Belle Reve in appending the denial of death to the

drama of Desire and Romance. The “Ideal world” of Belle Reve falls a prey to lust and death, thereby generating the thesis that in a biological universe, Romance, if at all possible, is only of a limited duration. From this point of view, Blanche’s escape from the world of Belle Reve can be seen as an attempt to seek permanence of her romantic ideals. It is also interesting to observe that both at Belle Reve and New Orleans, Blanche’s one-point program is to protect her illusions, because the absence of illusions is a threat to herself, which is constructed on unrealistic notions about life in its various manifestations.

There are several layers of illusion depicted in the play. For instance Blanche’s loss of Belle Reve depicts the multiple illusions involved in her experience of loss. On the one hand, she loses her romantic dream of life in losing Belle Reve, on the other, the loss of Belle Reve is double, in the sense that Blanche has lost not the Belle Reve as it was, but a version of her fantasy involving the Mississippi plantation. Thus the loss of Belle Reve is significant to Blanche more at a symbolic level rather than merely at a physical level. Her struggle at Belle Reve is dedicated not so much to a concrete reality of the place as it is to her dream for which she “stayed and fought”, “bled” and “almost died.” (p.126) The decay and disintegration visible at Belle Reve is agonizing to Blanche because this decadence for her symbolizes the death of her dreams. Thus she dedicates her life to protecting not the real Belle Reve, but an “ideal” version of it which represents an aristocratic glory to Blanche and thereby becomes a defining parameter of her self. From this point of view, Blanche’s loss of Belle Reve can be seen as a loss of her self. When she comes to New Orleans, she makes attempts to recover her lost self. She does so not in the contemporary context of New Orleans, but in terms of the illusory world of Belle Reve. Stanley who is the representative of the modern reality. His appearance in his masculine vigor carrying a blood stained package from the butcher's defines the world he represents. While Blanche appears in her fragile dress looks out of place. She has come from another world. She arrives by a car named

"Desire" and transferring to another called "Cemetry", symbolically Blanch incarnated a civilization that is decaying.

This romantic illusion is pitilessly cut by Stanley. So throughout the play, the action is moving towards stripping away all these pretensions and culminates in the scene where Stanley rapes her. The way Stanley terrorizes Blanche by shattering her self-delusions parallels and foreshadows his physical defeat of her. Increasingly, Blanche's most visceral experiences are the delusions and repressed memories that torment her, so that her physical rape seems an almost inevitable consequence of her psychological pain. The rape also symbolizes the final destruction of the Old South's genteel fantasy world, symbolized by Blanche, by the cruel but vibrant present, symbolized by Stanley. In the New South, animal instinct and common sense win out over lofty ideals and romantic notions. The rape scene shows that reality has forced itself on her and she has no way left for her except madness

Conclusion

Williams is one of the most representative and productive American dramatists of post war period. Post-war drama retained a concern with the common man and the realities of his life. But he is more concerned with the inner realism of his characters than with outer realism. He invited the audience for an insight into the inner self of the character, where inner sensations struggled to take their external shape of behavior.

He tries to put into focus the delima and the desperate longings of his characters by emphasizing on the inner reality of the characters rather than the surface one. In the two plays in this study Williams brings into focus the truth of his characters who are striving to live in a world that is at odd with their nature and personality. These characters are struggling to live the new world as the world they used to live in is decaying and disappearing . The world of romanticism and chivalric

traditions is replaced by a the world of technology and materialism. So neither the romantic nor the poet can live in such a world.

The fact that shows the impossibility of the two worlds to coexist has forced the characters to create a world of soft illusion . The inability to live in the outer world forces the characters to create an illusory world of dreams and romanticism. They deny certain facts of their lives to cope with life. Amanda for instance, the mother in *The Glass Menagerie* refuses to admit her daughter's defect and her extreme shyness and forces her to enroll in the society. Amanda lives in her past world of southern magic.

As for Blanch Dubois, The protagonist of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, She mentally belongs to a highly idealistic world of the past, as a result of which she is unable to adjust to the Naturalistic order of the post World–War II years, represented by the urban New Orleans. Blanche's tragedy is due to her incompatible self in relation to the society around. She desperately tries to sustain a dying dream, which cannot survive in a pragmatic and animalistic world of twentieth century. Blanche's life in the play shows an actual dislocation from one world to another. These two worlds are represented by her parental home at Belle Reve and her sister's home at New Orleans. So the character's inability to reach what they long for and their decline into a world of illusion cause their catastrophic end and become their fatal error. The new reality has forced itself on them like a lightning as it is put through the words of Tom at the end of *The Glass Menagerie*: "blow your candles out !for nowadays the world is lit by lightning ! Blow out your candles, Laura – and so good–bye."(p.1116).

Notes

¹ Arthur Miller, " on Social Plays" in John D. Hurrell, *Two Modern American Tragedies*,
(New York: Charles Scribner's sons 1961) p. 44

²C.W.E. Bigsby, *Modern American Drama , 1945–2000*, (Cambridge University Press 2004) p. 69

³Ibid p. 71

⁴Nancy M. Tschler, *Student Companion to Tennessee Williams*,(Westport,CT.: Greenwood press,2000), p. 16.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Felicia Hardison Londre, *Tennessee Williams*, (New York: Fredric UngarPublishing Co.1971) p. 30

⁹Ibid. p.33

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹Ibid.

¹² John Gassner , ed., *Best American Plays : Third Series 1945– 1951* (New York:Crown Publisher Inc.), 1952 p. 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Harold Bloom, . *Modern Critical interpretations: Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie*. New York: Chelsea House,1988.p.21.

¹⁵ Mary Beth Dakoske, Archetypal images of the Family in Selected Modern Plays: Master Thesis, University of Notre Dame. London: Bell and Howell Company, 1996.p.126

¹⁶ Bloom, p. 32

¹⁷ Ibid. p.13.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 37

¹⁹ Hooti Noorbakhsh, Quest for Identity in Tennessee Williams' Astreetcar named Desire, Razi University 2016. P. 3

²⁰ Ibid. p. 4

²¹ Ibid. p. 7

²² Bloom, p. 17

²³ Noorbakhsh, p. 7

²⁴ Ibid. p. 8

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النفس التواقفة في مسرحيات مختارة لتينيسي ويليامز

الملخص

ان جيل القرن العشرين في الولايات المتحدة الامريكية والذي وجد نفسه غارقاً في محيط الحرب العالمية الدامي لا يبدي أي نوع من روح الانتماء لهذا العالم الضائع . فقد وجد هذا الجيل روحه وعقله مقيدان بالأغلال في زنزانة مظلمة تسمى الاغتراب . هذا الاحساس بالغربة ساهم في خلق نوع من الحنين والشوق لزمن لم يعود .

تحاول هذه الدراسة الغوص عميقاً في رحلة لكشف توق النفس لشخصيات مسرحيتين لتينيسي ويليامز وهما (معرض الحيوانات الزجاجية) و (سيارة اسمها الرغبة)

تقسم هذه الدراسة الى ثلاثة اجزاء. يعد القسم الأول منها مقدمة لها تعرض هذه المقدمة حياة الكاتب واهم أعماله. اما الجزء الثاني فيتناول مسرحية (معرض الحيوانات الزجاجية) والتي تعد أول مسرحية ناجحة لويليامز. تدور المسرحية حول قصة عائلة هجرها الأب تاركاً الأم والأبنة تحت مسؤولية الابن الذي بدوره لا يشعر بالرضا عن حياته ويتوق للهرب لكي يحضى بحيات ملؤها المغامرة.

اما الجزء الثالث فيعرض مأساة بلانش دوبوا من خلال طرح المقارنة بين حياتها السابقة كأمرأة من المجتمع المخملي وحياتها الحالية والتي تبني احداث المسرحية تدرجها نحو التسافل الى امرأة محرومة مدمنة على الكحول والشهوانية تنتهي الدراسة بخاتمة تلخص ما وجد فيها.