

EXPRESSIONISTIC TECHNIQUE IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS' THE GLASS MENAGERIE

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Abstract : *This research paper focus on the expressionistic technique as expressed by Tennessee Williams in his famous play The Glass Menagerie. Expressionism is a technique in which the artist attempt to express his own subjective emotional stage. The play explores the internal truth, a world of private need beneath the daily social performance of Americans who chased the idea of progress sold to them. Amanda's affliction due to the loss of glorious past, fear of financial insecurity, thwarted ambitions for her children, Laura's insecurities, physical and emotional isolation, and so on. This is a modern drama that engages with psychological motivation beneath the surface of external human characteristics. This drama is about 'conflict' and it proves that human actions themselves become a staged play.*

Key Words: Expressionism, Self-revelation, Illusion

Introduction :

Tennessee William was born on March 26, 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi, of old and genteel Southern heritage. The second of three children, his family life was full of tension. His parents, a shoe salesman and the daughter of a minister, often engaged in violent arguments that frightened his sister Rose. In 192, Williams got his first taste of literary fame when he took third place in a national essay contest sponsored by The Smart Set magazine. He grew up in a strongly Southern atmosphere, even though the family were much of the time in St. Louis, Missouri. Williams wrote of this move: It was a tragic move. Neither my sister nor I could adjust ourselves to life in a Mid-Western city". The family lived in such an apartment as is pictured in The Glass Menagerie.

There are some of the plays of Williams which won Pulitzer Prize as The Streetcar Named Desire, The Rose Tatoo, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More and so on. He had written several full-length but un-noticed plays before The Glass Menagerie, which finally brought him to prominence as it had successive run on the Broadway. He is highly individualistic in his choice of theme and techniques.

William says in the production notes of The Glass Menagerie: Expressionism and all other conventional techniques in drama have only one valid aim, and that is a closer approach to truth. When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, , or certainly shouldn't be,

trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a close approach, a more penetrating and valid expression of things as they are. The straight realistic play with its genuine frigid air and authentic ice-cubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks, corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of a photographic likeness. Everyone should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art : that truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent, or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance.

The Glass Menagerie indicates William's interest in the plight of ill adjusted woman, often middle-aged who remembers a myth of gracious living but is defeated by the stark realities of the present. This play has strong autobiographical overtones. Three characters of the family resemble Williams, his mother and his sister. Williams has called it a memory play, and it is dominated by the background of decadent Southern culture. The characters unfold from within a pathetic self-revelation as Williams avoids the straight realistic play. Williams reminds us that 'when you look at piece of delicately spun glass you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken'.

The play can be presented with unusual freedom of convention.. As regards expressionistic techniques in The Glass Menagerie there is use of non-realistic devices e.g. memory, Tom as narrator, the screen device, the recurring melody and the lighting. They are all used to dramatize past merging into present.

In this play, Tom Wingfield, a dreary youth is bound to his sister and mother because his father had deserted them. He desires to escape from them. He had to act without pity. His mother Amanda is torn between the two worlds of dream and reality. She is a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place. Tom is a poet with a job in the warehouse. His sister Laura has withdrawn to a world of glass figurines which cannot be moved from the shaft. Submerged in a world of imagination, she is helpless and lost. She needs a husband who can provide for her. Tom brings her a match, who works with him in the shoe-corporation. Jim O' Connor, the gentleman caller and a nice ordinary young man doesn't make any progress in this relationship with Laura. She herself is like a figurine in the glass shelf.

Amanda is not able to turn the illusions of her daughter into realistic events. Feeling anachronistic in the world, she suffers from inferiority complex and mental unbalance. She is like a glass touched by light and her radiance is momentary. Jim arouses emotions in Laura, and they share some parts of American dream. Amanda is horribly dazed in her mannerisms and dressing. She has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwillingly cruel at times, here is tenderness in her slight fragile person.

Tom Wingfield is the narrator of the play. He walks out of the darkness toward the challenging situation. His nature is not remorseless, but to escape from a trap he has to act without pity. He sometimes managed to escape to movies. Amanda knows he will disappear

one day like his father in quest for his own paradise. The Glass Menagerie is the most emotionally restrained of Williams three masterpieces (the other two being *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*). Each achieved enormously long runs in New York-561, 855 and 694 performances respectively. In *The Glass Menagerie*, the subject, rather than the story is concerned with the over-riding importance of charm, illusion and superficial appearance. Like O'Neil plays this one is also in the highly successful expressionistic style.

The expressionistic movement was marked by certain characteristics: a rejection of realism in favor of dream like states ; non-linear, often disjointed place of naturalism; a focus on abstract concepts and ideas. Expressionism conveys angst in the knowledge that our spiritual needs will not be met through modern societal constructs. William makes sure to emphasis' the lightning, which is not realistic. In order to boost the atmosphere of memory, the stage is dim and "shafts of light are focused on the selected areas or actors, something in contradistinction to what is apparent center" (P.231). The light upon Laura is different from the others, carrying an immaculate aura, similar to the ones' used in every religious portraits"(P.231). For instance, in scene one, when Amanda is talking about the gentlemen callers, the spotlight focuses on her face (P.238), in the same scene, when Laura avoids her mother's comments about gentlemen callers: "A shaft of very clear light is thrown on her face against the faded tapestry of the curtains".(p.239) In scene 7, as the curtain rises, the audience can see Laura huddled on the sofa and light plays the role of the narrator, setting the mood for Laura's character: "The new floor lamp with its shade of rose coloured silk gives a soft, becoming light to her face, bringing out the fragile, unearthly pettiness which usually escapes attention"(P.288).

The Glass Menagerie is a play about regret. In a sense, it is Tom's self justification for the decision that he had made in the past. By telling the story, he tries to purify himself from the leaving his dependent mother and sister behind. Tom works in a warehouse but dreams of being a writer. He leads painful life because he is not able to fulfill his dreams due to the responsibility he has towards his mother and sister. He works the whole day, when he is not writing, he goes to the movies in order to search for adventure. Some scholars relate Tom's search for adventure as a suggestive characteristic of his homosexuality. However, if this was William's intention, it is not clear in the play. The point which William patently tries to make is that Tom's life bores him. He is a creature who does not fit in the conventional society, a recurrent aspect in William's protagonist.

Conclusion :

The Glass Menagerie is an expressionistic piece of literature because it depicts the specific situation in using Tom's own emotions and opinions of it. At last, Tom compares his mother and his sister basically to a shadow play that will never cease to change. He characterizes Amanda and Laura, as well as Jim, as a part of the story of his life. It is through Tom's views and emotion that we can create an opinion of the rest of the characters. This is basically what makes The Glass Menagerie as an example of expressionism.



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