

'ILLUSION AS REALITY' IN THE MAJOR PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS**N. G. Jadhao**Dept. of English, S.S.S.K.R. Innani Mahavidyalaya, Karanja (Lad), Dist. Washim (M.S.), India
ngjadhao7777@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

By his vital nature and dramatic sensibility, Tennessee Williams is investigational realist who desires to explore not only the external but also the psychosomatic turbulence of his characters. In his playwriting he utilizes the external realities as a means to probe the profundity of his characters to bring the internal living pattern to illustrate the exterior with validity. Through his keen sensibility and thorough understanding, he came to know that the internal reality is shadowed with numbers of fantasies, impressions and illusions. Obviously in his playwriting he exploits the themes of illusion in contrast to reality to depict the complex reality that came on the wake of the materialism. Because of his inclination to depict the mental realities of the characters his plays are well known for their handling the themes of illusion and reality concurrently and recurrently. They exist side by side in close association without individual entities. Here illusion is not depicted something that goes against the reality; but at the other hand it emerges as the vital part of the new reality. He believes that to live in the world of illusion against the antagonistic environment is the new reality of the human lives. Here a critical analysis of his major plays has been made meticulously to investigate the determined and perceptible stratagem of exercising the illusion and reality alongside to demonstrate the use of illusion as a dramatic device to depict the inexpressible psychological reality of the traumatized lives of the modern age and manifestation of illusion as the reality.

Keywords: *illusion, reality, depression, expressionism, distorted vision, lost paradise, stratagem, escape, complex reality, puritan morality, womanly ego, southern ideals etc.*

Introduction

The paper is a conscious effort to make a meticulous study of the themes of illusion and reality that concurrently and recurrently exist in the dramatic work of art penned by Tennessee Williams. Here the five major plays are undertaken for critical appreciation with the purpose to assert and demonstrate how the thematic pattern of illusion employed by playwright in his plays ultimately emerges as the reality of the lives of his characters and how they materialize into single one being the important components of the complex reality of the modern age. In spite of the apparent dissociation between the concepts of illusion and reality, the playwright integrates them so diligently and dexterously that the illusion seems the reality and sometime reality comes with the garb of illusion. They exist side by side without the obvious demarcation. The recurrent and concurrent use of illusion often compels the reader to take it as a part of the new reality. The illusion of his characters is a reality of their lives as they use it as gadget to ensure survival and boost their moral in antagonist milieu. Thus the delineation of illusion does not lead the writing away from reality but fetches it close to it as the

playwright utilizes illusion as a device to depict the reality. It is a brief exploration of the thematic pattern of illusion and reality, and by that to acquaint with his pioneering thematic strategy of *illusion as a reality*.

Tennessee Williams has played a momentous role in making the American playwriting free from the clutches of the traditional realism by exploiting the innovative and explorative themes and experimental and investigational techniques. He has expanded the boundaries of playwriting with his substantial contribution to bring the American playwriting at the critical level. He utilizes it as a medium of expression, and by that transforming the stage for new utterance. His contribution in respect to deal the agonized souls and to come with their internal make up is unforgettable. Naturally his plays are known for their integrity to the new reality came on the wake of modernism.

Under the trendy dispose of expressionism, Williams sought to put across the distorted vision of American life struggling to regain the lost paradise. As a receptive playwright, he confines the very spirit of the times through his dramatic sensibility. His aspiration to articulate the prevailing vision strains him to record the profound contemporary consciousness to steer the presentation as a medium of expression of

the genuine reality. But while depicting the reality, he is more concerned with the internal consciousness of the individuals rather than the collective one. Through his personal experience and subsequent sensibility, he confirms that the internal reality is shadowed by the illusion in close association with the reality. Obviously, in his wide range of plays he has depicted the dire and naked realities of the contemporary American society. His major plays are very much rooted in the mental reality of the age. Here a critical analysis of his major plays such as *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, *The Rose Tattoo* and *Cat on Hot Tin Roof* has been made very meticulously to investigate the determined and perceptible stratagem of exercising the illusion and reality alongside to demonstrate the use of illusion as a dramatic device to depict the inexpressible psychological reality of the traumatized lives of the modern age and manifestation of illusion as the reality.

The Glass Menagerie

Written in the background of depression, the play *The Glass Menagerie* depicts the psychological reality of its characters dominated by the clash between illusion and reality. At this juncture, the playwright depicts the impact of the financial strain over the emotional lives of the members of the Wingfield family that lead them in the realm of loneliness, alienation and despair. The pressure of reality puts them at the strained relationship. Naturally, to ensure the survival they indulge in various fantasies to overcome the painful reality. They indulge in illusions only to get momentary relief from the strain of reality. But in spite of their obsession with illusion they do not disengage themselves from the confronting realities. They are all shown mindful about the reality as an indispensable truth. Their illusion results out of their realistic sense to see the life. Naturally, the illusion is found concurrently and recurrently in a close alliance with the reality. In spite of Tom's daydream of adventure, Amanda's indulgence in the past and Laura's relishing in the glass animals, it is unfeasible for them to neglect the dire monetary consequences. Their frequent indulgence in illusions in relation to reality

makes illusion as an main component of the reality of their lives. Their illusion seems the reality of their lives on the basis of their experience and attitude to see life. It seems integrated into the reality in an organic manner without a clear cut division. Its recurrent occurrence, the survival value and inevitability to cheer the lives make the illusion as the reality of their lives.

Since the beginning of the action, Tom, his mother Amanda and sister Laura are seen espousing the diplomacy of escape to penetrate in the world of illusion in search of the spirit of survival against their existing insolvency. Tom often tries to escape from the boredom job of warehouse and strained family responsibility into the realm of illusion to materialize his long treasured dream of sea adventure and writing poetry. But he is not seen as a naive dreamer. His sense to illusion results out of his perceptive of the reality. His engagement with the illusion is a reaction to the reality of his life in which he feels trapped and suffocated. The present hopeless condition leads him to conjure the fantasies to make it in some extent buoyant. The gloom at the work and cramping atmosphere of the home lead him to think for the better life. Amanda is often seen escaping from her aching reality into the realm of her past associated with the South. But she does not nurture the nostalgic sense deliberately. It results out of her realistic sense to her present that seems hopeless and helpless against the future of her children. She indulges in the fantasy to escape from her dilemma with an aim to ensure her survival. Her illusions come out of the reality of her life. For other, her frequent dabbling in her past seems a kind of illusion but for her it is a reality of her life, a strategy to cope against the anguish and renew the lost spirit of living. Hence, her persistent use of illusion in contrast to reality makes it as a part of reality. Being emotionally disturbed due to her physical fragility, shy nature and lack of confidence, Laura escapes in her own world of illusion dominated by her tiny glass animals. Her illusion comes in existence out of her consciousness of the reality as she often feels trapped in the cage. Her hopeless and helpless condition leaves no option in her life except to continue her existence with her illusion. She dreams not to fulfill her ambition

but to get relief from the painful present. Hence, it is stated that her illusion is an integrated part of the reality of her life, a strategy to face the reality. Jim also escapes from the painful realities in favour of the American dreams that are the dominating feature of the reality of the age. His illusion emerges as a vital component of the reality of the modern age in which getting professional success is unavoidable.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Written in the setting of the depression, the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* exercises the modus operandi to converse the mental reality of its characters. All the characters in some way or the others are found in the struggle to escape from the distressing reality into the world of illusion to ensure the survival. Although they live with so many fantasies but all are capable of making the segregation between illusion and reality. They indulge in illusion only to obtain release from the unkind reality of their lives. Their illusions are often seen in the close alliance of the reality, and ultimately merge into reality. Obviously, the entire action of the play is saturated with the core theme of illusion in contrast to reality as a special strategy to get purged from the harsh reality. Most of the characters are frequently seen captured in the conflict against reality and the action moves forward with their attempts to deal it with their special strategy of illusion. Their frequent shifting from the reality into illusion is a requisite part of their lives and this everyday happening gives it a touch of reality. They have been artistically incorporated in their lives by the playwright to show the illusion as a part of their everyday reality. On many occasions, illusion merges into reality and reality wraps illusion as a part of it. Hence, it is stated that to live with the illusion is a reality of their lives.

Blanche, an emotionally wounded and socially rejected woman is seen struggling to run away from her painful past in search of promising future. Being hopeless and helpless, she arrives at Elysian Field with her southern idealism and womanly vanities to revamp her life. She tries to create an aura of gentility by speaking so many lies and adopting deception. She uses her fantasy as a device to come out of the torturing

past linked with so many losses, her depravity and guilt being liable for her husband's suicide and defies the awful present full with brutality. The action bounces from her struggle not to go away from the reality but normalize it with her strategy of illusion. Naturally her illusion results out of the reality and exist in close rapport with it. Her recurrent fostering of illusion as a strategy of the survival brings it very much close to reality. Her lies have a survival value, an essential part of the reality of her life. Eventually she accepts her illusion as a tactic to leave the world. Hence, it is stated that her illusions are the reality of her life. Like Blanche, her sister Stella's also indulges in fantasies of her love for Stanley. But her fantasies also result out of the reality of her life. Being married with wild fellow and her financial dependency on him, she has no option except to adjust with the reality with her illusion. To live the life with illusion is the reality of her life.

Summer and Smoke

The play *Summer and Smoke* communicates the psychological realities of its characters lined by the clash between illusion and reality. The central characters Alma and John are seen detaching from the reality into their respective worlds of spiritualism and materialism. The thematic concern of escape plays a significant role amid body and soul and physical and spiritual to come with the illusions of the characters as the concern bring the proportion between the two opposite sides of their lives. The very mental status of escape is exploited by the writer as a technique to depict the psychological reality coloured with illusion. Since the beginning Alma is shown in a conflict between soul and body, spiritual and physical and puritan morality and sensual passion that often give a way to her illusions. Her Southern Puritan ideals lead her to uphold the morality and aspire for heavenly glory against the earthly need. They come in the form of so many illusions such as projecting herself being a preacher's daughter, dignity of an adult in her childhood, quality of extraordinary delicacy, spirituality, aversion the company of the boys, over concern, high idealism of medical profession, hysterical expression, exaggeration of morality etc. But

the deeper revision indicates that she indulges in various fantasies out of the desperate attempt to face the reality of her suppressed life. They result out of the reality of her life in which she feels entrapped. The early befallen responsibility, the family background, social decency and decorum, puritan morality and unfulfilled love affairs compel her to suppress her physical demands. Her life is a journey from illusion to reality as she begins it with celebration of spirituality and ends with the gratification of sensual pleasure. Illusion and reality coexist together, and the very co-existence in her life makes it difficult to split them from each other. They have been so skillful weaved by the playwright that illusion often merges into the reality of her life. The necessity of its survival value and frequent indulgence leads illusion to be a part of the reality of her life.

The Rose Tattoo

The indulgence in the territory of fantasy outlines the very structure of the play *The Rose Tattoo*. The device of escape is engaged as a medium to linger in the illusion related with the memories and appreciate the ideals of the Italian tradition against the reality. Serafina, the protagonist, tries to escape from the reality into the world of fantasies dined by conjugal love, cultural superiority, religious faith and womanly ego. Her complete disintegration with the reality leads her to live a life with so many fantasies. It is the illusion that makes her able to bear the unbearable reality. Her illusion and its collision with the reality is well suggested by the use of symbols. The excessive use of symbols in the play indicates the extreme depiction of the clash between illusion and reality. But it is evident from the close study that most of the fantasies come in existence out of the reality of her life. It is the reality that gives a way to illusion to come in the form of external action. She indulges in the fantasies of social decorum, religious faith, and ideal conjugal love to establish her identity in new culture and ensure survival in alien land. Through the illusion, she envisages the strategy to come out of the feelings of loneliness, alienation and despair after the death of her husband. The align life compels her to see her past and native culture as the ideal entities. Her

religious fantasies find its root in her catholic faith. She celebrates her married life because of her wish to survive. Hence, she indulges in past memories as a strategy to ensure her survival against oddity. For her, her illusion is the source of survival. Obviously, the survival values of illusion make the illusion as the reality of her life

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

The play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is more concerned with the psychological problems of the modern lives with its disgust, avarice and monotony. Obviously, the play is also drenched with the most common mode of escape. The decadent southern ideals and rise of materialism lead most of the characters to indulge in the realm of illusion. All the characters are captured in a precarious condition; and they struggle to come out of it with their own strategies of fantasies to ensure certainty and security. They often try to escape from the confronting state by fashioning a sheltering place. Brick escapes from the mundane life with the help of alcoholism and emotional detachment and take refuge in the realm of fantasy. Margaret also often tries to escape from the pressure of her poverty stricken past and dreams to get the control over the plantation. Big Mama escapes from the reality of her strained married life and adjusts herself by indulging in jokes and whole hearted laughing. Here the playwright employs the thematic pattern of escape as a strategy to depict the illusion of his characters.

As the play is placed more directly within the social milieu, it does not loss its contact to the reality. The southern ideals and emerging materialism comes together to depict the clash between illusion and reality. Naturally, the theme of illusion and reality exist side by side in the very structure of the action. It is the reality of the modern lives that compels the characters to get the assistance of illusion to face it and by that ensures the survival. It is the inability to face the naked truth leads them to get conjuring some fantasies based on the reality. Most of the fantasies of Margaret come in existence out of the reality of her past and present life. The reality of Brick's emotional indifference, his indulgence in alcoholism and the family fraud make her anxious and compels

her to conjure fantasies. Brick also does not detach completely from the reality of his life as he is aware with avarices of the family members. Big Daddy often conjures some fantasies as a strategy to face the cracking teeth of reality. His realistic attitude is seen in his philosophy to perceive the life in which he believes that man can't buy his life with his wealth and to see the modern Europe as a land of auction. Big Mama's conduct is also very much soaked with the sense to reality. She is not blind to see her elder son's greed and falsehood.

Conclusion

The discussion based on the analysis reveals the fact that in all these plays Williams is very much concerned to depict the psychological reality of his characters saturated with so many fantasies. The desire to go in the depth of their psyche opens a new vista for him to come with the details of their internal make up. The abundant depictions of the illusions result of the same strategy. His characters are seen preoccupied with their individual world of

illusion but do not detach completely from the nearby milieu. The intermingling of these two opposing entities creates some sort of uncertainty to determine the very nature of illusion and reality. The concurrent and recurrent use of illusion and reality comes with the difficulty to separate them as the individual entities. Further the study comes with the conclusion that they have been not utilized antagonistically to overcome each other but interfused so skillfully that they simulate each other to depict the psychological realities. In spite of their paradoxical nature the illusion and reality coexist simultaneously to come with the new reality. They are integrated so diligently that they exist side by side in organic unity. The concurrent use of illusion forces reality to encompass illusion as a part of its wider nature and the recurrent and habitual use of illusion make it as a part of reality. They merge in each other in a dexterous manner that they imbibe the idea to think *the illusion is a reality of the life*.

Bibliography

1. Williams, Tennessee. Summer and Smoke. 5. Williams, Tennessee. The Glass Menagerie. DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC, 1977, New York. Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt. Ltd., 2015, New Delhi.
2. Williams, Tennessee. A Streetcar Named Desire. The Penguin Group, 2009, London, England. 6. Roudane, Matthew C., editor. The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams. Cambridge University Press, 1997, New York, USA.
3. Williams, Tennessee. Cat on Hot Tin Roof. 7. Bigsby, C. W. E. A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama. Vol. Two, Cambridge University Press, 1984, U.K.
4. Williams, Tennessee. The Rose Tattoo. New Directions Publishing Corporation 2010, New York. 8. Griffin, Alice. Understanding Tennessee Williams. University of South Carolina Press, 2011, Carolina, U.S.A.