

Depiction of Women in Literature

Priyadarshni. S

I M.A. English Literature

**Avinashilingam Institute For Home Science And
Higher Education For Women**

Privakumarspring@Gmail.Com

9087136594

Abstract

Literature has always been ambivalent in its representation of women. The changing image of women in literature from past to present depicts the evolution of women. Resemblance of women in literature usually focus on a single issue with the female protagonist facing difficult situation like personal conflicts, family, parenting, friendship issues and work versus personal life conflicts. This serves as a source for writers like Tennessee Williams in shaping the ideal characters. In the memory play “*The Glass Menagerie*” portrays the protagonist Laura’s mental and emotional journey. The theme of illusions an impossible dreams offer an escape from reality. To be concluded the image of women in literature reflects the belief that feminists of both sexes can and will change the world.

Keywords: Ambivalent, Illusion, Personal conflicts, Stupor.

Introduction

Literature has witnessed the roles of women evolving through ages, but until recent times, most of the published writers were men and the portrayal of women in literature was undoubtedly biased. In the ancient world literacy was severely limited, and the majority of those who could write were male. Apart from all, there are some male writers who depict the intrinsic value of privations of women in society. One of among was Tennessee Williams a twentieth century American poet whose famous one act play, *The Glass Menagerie* exposes the hidden psychological complexity of protagonist Laura, who strived of inferiority complex, one of the major problems of today’s society and which made oneself to push in the room of alienation.

The dramatic world of Tennessee Williams, one of the most powerful of the twentieth century American dramatists, is filled up with the emotionally disturbed characters trapped in a world of repression and human frustration. The tension emanating out of psychological repression and attempts of sublimation that Williams experiences in his own life and it is clearly reflected in his creations. The study finds his plays revealing the creator's experimentation with the theme of repression with the retention to give his otherwise repressed world a more

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **20:3 March 2020**

**Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on
Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature -- VOLUME 2**

Priyadarshni. S., Depiction of Women in Literature

134

meaningful communication. His famous one act play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) in which he portrayed a declassed Southern family living in a tenement. The play is about the failure of a domineering mother, Amanda, and her cynical son, Tom, to secure a suitor for Tom's crippled and painfully shy sister, Laura, who lives in a fantasy world with a collection of glass animals. His works won four Drama Critics' awards and were widely translated and performed around the world. The writers he most admired in his early years are Hart Crane, Arthur Rimbaud, William Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, August Strindberg, William Faulkner, James Joyce, and Ernest Hemingway.

Defense Mechanism

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychology noted a number of ego defenses which he refers to throughout his written works. Many psychoanalysts have also added further types of ego defenses. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings.

Why Do We Need Ego defense?

We use defense mechanisms to protect ourselves from feelings of anxiety or guilt, which arise because we feel threatened, or because our superego becomes too demanding. Defense mechanisms operate at an unconscious level and help ward off unpleasant feelings such as anxiety or make good things feel better for the individual. Ego-defense mechanisms are natural and normal. When people get out of proportion, neuroses develop, such as anxiety states, phobias, obsessions, or hysteria.

FOR EXAMPLE,

Repression: Repression is an unconscious mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious.

Inferiority Complex: The counterpart of an inferiority complex, a "superiority complex", is a psychological defense mechanism in which a person's feelings of superiority counter or conceal their feelings of inferiority.

Selective memory: Modifying our memories or forgetting them entirely.

Projection: Ascribing our problem or fear to someone else in an attempt to deny that we did it ourselves.

Regression: Return to either to a pleasant or unpleasant past experience which is not just imagined but relived.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 20:3 March 2020

Prof. Dr. S. Chelliah, Editor: Select Papers of the International Conference on Human Praxis and Modern Configuration through Literature -- VOLUME 2

Priyadarshni. S., Depiction of Women in Literature

135

The Glass Menagerie: Psychological Play

Psychology is an academic and empirical discipline that involves the scientific study of mental functions and behaviors. Psychology is a science which illuminates our understanding of life and many things including literature. Sometimes works which are difficult and apparently confused can be seen more clearly in the light of the psychologist's demonstration of what is actually going on among characters. For this, some psychological thoughts have been applied in the play *The Glass Menagerie*, in which Williams uses defense mechanism in order to state the mind of characters especially in the character of Laura, the female protagonist. Williams gives detailed explanations of the thoughts and feelings of a disabled and how she is repressed? And how she suffers of her inferiority complex?

This story takes place in St. Louis. The story starts out with Tom looking back in the past. He talks about his dad and he left the family a long time ago. After him, it was just Tom, mother, Amanda and sister, Laura. Then the story goes back to before Tom left. Amanda starts to see that Tom and his father are similar. She notices that he hates his life, and all he does is slack off at work and go to movies. Laura is a disabled girl, who really doesn't do anything. All she does is sit at home and listen to records and play with her glass animals, the collection is called a "glass menagerie". Amanda asks Tom to bring home some guy from his work, so Laura can get married. So Tom brings a guy, named Jim O'Connor. Jim is a really nice guy. He acts like such a gentleman when he meets Laura. Laura remembers him from high school, and she used to have a big crush on him. They started talking to each other soon they become close. When one day they were engaged in dance, Jim accidentally breaks the horn of Laura's glass unicorn. Now that Laura has a new perspective on life (thanks to Jim) she's normal like other girls. Jim apologizes for breaking it but Laura doesn't get mad. Jim kisses Laura but realizes it was a mistake right away. Then she finds out that he isn't coming back because he is engaged to some other chick. Then her mom finds out and gets mad at Tom for bringing some engaged guy home to meet Laura. The mom yells at him and accuses him of trying to make her look stupid. Then Tom gets fed up with the whole house and leaves for the marines.

Inferiority Complex in Laura Wingfield

Tennessee Williams transformed his life into art, reshaping it in an attempt to come to terms with what he admitted to be the pressure of a life deformed by psychic confusion. His common characters are southern gentlewomen who complete with their characteristic. These female characters are far from real world, ignore the world around them, and they live in their own making world as their escape mechanism from the present world. His protagonist has difficulties to survive in the practical world of the present. In glass menagerie, Laura's desire for an escape from the world of reality into that of her own illusions symbolizes the defense

mechanism in psychology. For her, the world of illusion was more powerful than that of the reality. She tries to forget the bitterness of her life by playing with the animal figurines she had collected. Her attachment with them is absorbing because they all look like a picture of her own self. She is too fragile to move out of her narrow self. She can ill-afford to leave her own world. Her attachment to the glass pieces has been repeatedly emphasized in the play. It is actually about the shy of Laura who experiences a social anxiety, called an inferiority complex.

The inferiority complex is a form of a social anxiety or anxiety disorder. It was described as shy or peculiar. The inferiority complex is defined as a disorder characterized by serious anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in social things. While the term inferiority complex is used to describe a sense of inferiority, when a person feels inferior and think that other people are better than them. It revolves around social position, power, ego, and influence over others. This psychology has been applied in the behaviors of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie*, especially on the inferiority complex of Laura. She is presented as an abnormally sensitive and fragile person both physically and psychologically. She is a very shy and oversensitive girl. Her shyness and oversensitive nature are caused by her childhood illness, one of her legs is left shorter than the right one. It makes her describe herself as being crippled and it affects her deep personality. This condition makes her to experience on inferiority complex and this made her unable to face the reality. She has lack of self-confidence as a person and does not have faith in herself to stand on the world.

Laura: Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs I had that brace on my leg – it
Clumped so loud

Jim : I never heard any clumping.

Laura: To me it sounded like – thunder.

Jim : Well I never even noticed.

Laura: And everybody was seated before I came in. I had to walk in front of all those
people. My seat was in the back row. I had to go clumping all the way up the
aisle with everyone watching

She is so peculiar of who lives in her own world. She cannot overcome her feeling of being crippled. Laura suffers very much not only by her physical problem but also by her position in the family and her mother's expectation and hope on her. She withdraws herself to her own world, the world of the glass menagerie. She makes the glass menagerie as her escape mechanism from the real world that she cannot understand. Next to that glass menagerie she considers Jim as her escape mechanism from the inferiority but soon after the revealing story of Jim's engagement with another girl made her to left herself in the world of inferiority

complex. Her heart has been broken as like the horn of unicorn and she feels repressed throughout the end of the play.

Conclusion

Thoughts could leave deeper scars than almost anything else

Laura's self-confidence, self-consciousness, fear of embarrassment, and fear of being scrutinized has triggered her social anxiety that makes her experience an inferiority complex. The women role portrayed in this play had a lifetime suppression of inferiority. There are two barriers that made her to feel inferior one is her disability and another one is she was grown without the guidance of her father may be this was the reason she refuse to see the real world and stick into her own world. There are many she had been faced throughout the play. Tennessee Williams as a masculine he will clearly understood the inner sufferings of a women and he cleverly portrays the happenings of real world by using psychological aspects. By comparing to men women are facing larger amount of psychological problems. As like Laura there are many women in the society feels inferior out of their disability, race, alienation, wealth and personal problems to overcome from this the person may involve moving to a new city, being removed from a discouraging environment, or discovering a hobby or constant and consistent friendship. Through the character of protagonist author conveys the reader that women are not only the sufferers of social issues but also, they are suffering with the mental illness.

References

1. https://www.academia.edu/40034677/THE_INFERIORITY_COMPLEX_OF_LAURA_WINGFIELD_IN_TENNESSEE_WILLIAMS_THE_GLASS_MENAGERIE
2. <https://www.Simplepsychology.org/defense-mechanisms.html>
3. file:///C:/Users/Master%20Mobiles/Documents/06_chapter%201.pdf