

The Character-Portrayal in Tennessee Williams's Plays: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract—Tennessee Williams is perhaps the one of the greatest contemporary exponents of the varied forms taken by sexual desire. Almost all his characters are prey to the whims of this desire. In all his plays, the characters, who are regardless of their sexual intensity, expects love and careness as a relief from aloneness. But too often when these two aspirations fail at some point the expector wants for forgetfulness or very ordinary companionship in sexual activities which are dominated by desire. All these desires, which generally approach more psychological rather than a physical requirement, has nothing to do with the emotion in love, Yet, the appeal for love and ability to give and accept love from. Other would be considered to be major themes in his plays. The reason that love is somehow achieved from them gives to Williams's plays their pathetic and often tragic quality balance the loneliness that results from physical desire which almost inevitably leads to their own destruction. Many of his characters, because of their inability to love inhabit what the playwright in one of his plays calls " "dragons' country"

Keyword: Exponent, Desire, Whim, Psychological, Physical

I. INTRODUCTION

In Tennessee Williams's plays, the boundaries between male and female identities often feel blurred. We find ourselves questioning whether the men are entirely masculine and the women purely feminine. His characters frequently embody an ambivalence in their sexual roles, as Williams recognizes and explores the presence of both masculine traits in women and feminine traits in men. In Tennessee Williams's plays, the traditional portrayal of men as sexual aggressors is rare—one of the few exceptions being 'A Streetcar Named Desire.' More often, men are the ones pursued, becoming objects of desire for desperate and often predatory women. This reversal of standard sexual roles illustrates an important aspect of the sexual ambivalence of Williams's characters. Women tend to take the central place in his plays and attempt sexual dominance. 'Leona' for example, in "Small Craft Warnings" is strikingly aggressive – so much so that, despite Williams calling her a "fully integrated women." She is stronger than the many men in the play.

The leading male characters remain essentially similar in Williams's plays. However, they do fall in to several categories. Most of them are like 'Stanley Kowalski', outwardly and sometimes aggressively masculine. All seem to have had a certain animal vitality which makes them irresistible to both women and men, Williams describes male figures with a particular concern for their physical attributes. this concern is the more remarkable since his women are rarely Sex-Symbols. All these men, the desirable sex-objects, appears ready to let themselves be victimized.

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the strong elements in Williams's character portrayal.
2. To study the important aspect of the sexual ambivalence of Williams's characters.
3. To study the personalities of the male and female characters of Williams's plays.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. The present is based upon the secondary sources of data which was collected through the literature, books, research paper, website, research articles and various other publications.

IV. THE MUTILATED MALES

A group of male characters in Tennessee Williams's play might be classified as the mutilated ones, those who have been wounded either physically or psychologically by the society like 'Kirloy', 'Brick', 'Shannon' and 'Mark' of "In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel".

They are passive figures, often at the mercy of domineering women and expectations of the social world around them. These men exist in the plays primarily to fulfil, if they can the physical and emotional needs of women; and they are types about whom homosexuals dream. These men include athletes, truck drivers, manual workers, studs, sailors, hustlers etc. Williams expresses the homo-erotic longing that these men might harbour homo sexual or bi-sexual tendencies themselves.

V. WOMEN WITH BOTH MASCULINE AND FEMININE TRAITS

Tennessee Williams's portrayal of his male characters contrast sharply with the subtler characterizations of his women. However, the women, like the men, combine in their personalities both feminine and masculine traits. In Williams's early plays like, "Battle of Angels" "The Glass Menagerie", "A Streetcar Named Desire", and "Summer and Smoke", most of the heroines are aggressive, but they are defeated because they cannot resolve the conflict between their sexual tendencies and the demands of a genteel code which denies them sexual fulfilment outside marriage and thus makes them unable to differentiate between illusion and reality. The playwright sympathizes with them, because they too are of "the fugitive Kind", mutilated by life. But though mutilated victims, they are also predators.

VI. WOMEN BASICALLY STRONGER THAN MEN

In "The Rose Tattoo", "Orpheus Descending" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof", Williams portrays women with little sexual ambivalence although 'Maggie' the cat has some boyish qualities which might explain 'Brick's original attraction to her. Women of immigrant origin or representative of the New South, they are strong "modern" women who find Salvation, even when it is only temporary in their sexuality. Moreover, like the later heroines, they are basically stronger than the men, who generally direct the action of the plays. 'Alvaro', despite his masculine bearing, seems like an awkward adolescent when compared to 'Serafina'. 'Brick', one of the 'mutilated', has become an alcoholic and has lost his sexual drive and will-power though not this masculine attractiveness.

VII. WOMEN AS HUNTERS RATHER THAN HUNTED

The women in the later plays of Tennessee Williams are stronger and more dominant if often sexless or perhaps unisexual characters. These women are invariably trying to control the People around them, and many of them are real predators whose victims or captives are usually sensitive or artistic young and middle-aged men. Most of these women from 'Mrs. Venable' of "Suddenly Last Summer" and 'Flora Goforth' of "The Milk train Doesn't Stop for Here Anymore" are inhabitants of the "dragon country," where one goes one's way alone. With the exception of 'Hannah', in "The Night of Iguana" and also with the exception of 'Leona', the women in the later plays are the hunters rather than the hunted of the earlier plays, but through fear of loss of power or fear of death they ultimately become their own victims. These women, having achieved freedom of a sort financial and sexual - can indulge their whims and fantasies. Other characters, usually men but Sometimes women, have become dependent on them and hence, are their pawns.

VIII. WILLIAMS'S WORKS, A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

A central theme in Tennessee Williams's plays is the contrast between opposites—strength and weakness, dominance, and submission. His characters often long for love, protection, and understanding, leading them into relationships where one person holds power while the other either strives for control or willingly submits in exchange for security. These dynamics create an uneasy balance, where roles of tormentor and tormented are accepted, even if they lead to suffering.

Uncertainty in relationships fuels much of the anguish in Williams's characters. Boundaries of gender and sexuality are blurred, but individuality remains essential. When personal identity is ignored or disrespected, destruction follows. Despite the struggles and pain in his stories, Williams's works ultimately celebrate life. His characters, haunted by fears of death, decay, and impotence, throw themselves into fleeting pleasures, desperately seeking moments of joy—even when they know their desires will never be fully realized. His world is filled with unfulfilled longing, emotional turmoil, and violence, yet at its core, it reflects the deep, unrelenting human need to live and feel, no matter the consequences.

IX. THE HOMOSEXUAL CHARACTERS

Homosexuality is a recurrent theme in the plays of Williams. However, until the appearance of the 'Baron' in "Camino Real" and 'Brick' in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" the major, characters in the plays of the forties and fifties were presented as being heterosexual. The 'Baron' is an avowed homosexual and is rather effeminate. Effeminate homosexual characters, and there are not many in Williams's works, are openly condemned by the social group. In their portrayal Williams ironically shows less

compassion than he does for his other males, who, even though they may be homosexual, are at least masculine in appearance and action. Perhaps the most savage depiction of homosexuality in Williams's play is found in "Suddenly Last Summer",

X. CONCLUSION

Tennessee Williams's plays suggest that if society were not bound by rigid codes of sexual behavior, his characters might be able to find fulfillment without causing harm to themselves or others. At their core, his characters seek closeness—however fleeting—to escape their deep loneliness. More than gender, it is the ability to connect with another person that offers them a brief respite from the harsh realities of life.

In Williams's world, sexual boundaries are blurred, making gender less important than the emotional bond between individuals. His characters long for understanding and intimacy, showing that, in the end, human connection transcends societal norms and expectations.

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