

THE INFERIORITY COMPLEX OF LAURA WINGFIELD
IN TENNESSEE WILLIAM'S *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

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Abstract: This study analyzes the psychological factors that determine the behaviors of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie*, especially the character of Laura Wingfield. The study focuses on the inferiority complex of Laura Wingfield in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. The study analyzes factors and the effects of her inferiority complex seen through the psychological point of view. It analyzes how 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.

Keywords : inferiority complex, social anxiety, social phobia

Background

Drama is one of the literary works that reveals the human problem in their life. Russel gives a definition of drama as a composition which presents life and human activity by means of presenting various actions of and dialogues between a group of characters (Russel, 1996; 5). A drama is a vehicle of life presentation on the stage. When we read a drama we have to imagine how the actors and actresses act on the stage to present the material. That is the unique of a drama.

Tennessee Williams is one of the best American playwrights. He is sensuous, prone to immersion in romantic tragedy. He 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.

All of his characters are emotionally and spiritually crippled who cannot face the reality. They generate the illusion to fill their own world to set up against the reality.

Tennessee Williams defines southern gentlewomen as the ones who represent the conflict between the repressive ideals of the Puritan tradition (Triplett, 1988). Most of the characters of Tennessee Williams' works are the women who are unable to face the reality.

The Glass Menagerie is one of the dramas Tennessee Williams wrote. It is a memory play in which the dramatist tries to terms with his troubled youth and to understand his rebellion against his family. The setting of the drama is a small apartment behind a St. Louis tenement in 1944. It is about a family consists of three family members, Amanda Wingfield, Laura Wingfield and Tom Wingfield. It is told from Tom Wingfield's point of view. Amanda and Laura Wingfield are the examples of Tennessee Williams' southern gentlewomen. Amanda tends to escape from the reality and lives in her world of gentlemen callers when she was still young and beautiful, while Laura, her daughter remains in a world of the glass ornaments. *The Glass Menagerie* is actually about the shy 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.

People with the inferiority complex have a persistent, intense, and chronic worry of being examined in detail by others and of being humiliated by their own actions...anxiety levels in individuals with

phobia will become thus high that they start to avoid social things (<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/facts-about-social-phobia/>)

Adler mentions that the inferiority complex arises when a person finds himself in a situation where his abilities and attitudes are refused or rejected by other people (Adler, 1907). Inferiority complex is a magnification of natural feelings of inferiority and results when trying hard to defeat the feeling of inferiority are greatly delayed. While Murray states that the inferiority complex can be caused by anything in the individual that is below the average, that provokes unfavorable comment or gives him a feeling of impotency (Murray, 1938).

While the term inferiority complex is used to describe a sense of inferiority a person feels about oneself towards other people. It revolves around social position, power, ego, and influence over others. The inferiority complex appears on someone when he feels inferior and think that other people are better than him. (Uebergang, <http://www.earthlingcommunication.com>).

Young people who have inferiority complex will lead them to seek negative behaviors (Moritz, 2006).

The socially problematic outcomes that the inferiority complex take can be in the form of substance abuse, aggression and poor school achievement (Dawes, 1994). Frustration is one of the negative effects of the inferiority complex can lead to frustration. Frustration sometimes can lead to resigned behavior such as the elimination of needs, plans, future orientations, withdrawal from social contacts, isolation and lack of interest in the surrounding. Person with the severe frustration tends to escape from certain situation (Dixit, 1985).

Someone can have the inferiority complex when she or he experiences an imagined feeling of inferiority. For example, when he/she walks into a room full of high executives, she/he sees that they dress in expensive suits, she/he feels of being different to them. She feels that they are totally from different class, a class above her. This imagined feeling makes her feel below standard. On the other hands it can be said that someone will have an inferiority complex when she/he feels inferior and think that the other people are better than her/him.

Research Method

This study is to analyze the psychological factors that determine the behaviors of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie*,

especially on the inferiority complex of Laura Wingfield. To analyze this study, the writer uses library research by collecting some sources, interpreting and summarizing. The methodology used in this study is the descriptive method. It will give the readers some descriptions about the problem that are analyzed.

Since the focus of this study is the inferiority complex of Laura Wingfield's then the study also uses the theory of psychology, especially the theory of social anxiety or the inferiority complex by Adler. The study uses the psychological point of view in analyzing the problem since the literary works have closed relationship with the psychology. Psychology and literature are like two different faces but with the same hearts and together they touch the human problems.

Finding and Discussion

Laura Wingfield 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. This

condition makes her experience what is called as the inferiority complex.

Jim : You know what I judge to be the trouble with you? Inferiority complex! Know what this is? That's what they call it when someone low rates herself. A lack of confidence in yourself as a person. You don't have a proper faith in yourself (Williams, 1949; 31).

Actually this physical condition is hardly noticeable. She has only some slight difficulty and awkwardness to move. Her being crippled has affected her inner personality. Her inferiority complex makes 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.

Her personality is due to her inferior feeling caused by her crippled leg. And it affects her deep personality. She becomes lack of self-confidence and has no faith to face the world. It causes her become a very shy and oversensitive girl.

It is her shy and oversensitive nature that makes her failed to graduate from the high school. She thinks that all people notice her as crippled. Her crippled leg is a burden for her, and makes her think that every step she does sounds like a thunder since all people around her watching her.

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 (William, 1949; 15)

Her inferiority complex makes her unable to attend a business school. She drops out of the business school because she is so nervous before the typing test. She becomes ill and has to be carried out of the class. She does have any courage to tell her mother. She pretends to go to school, but instead she goes to the park or at the zoo. Her shyness or social anxiety is completed when her mother takes her to the church club to meet some other young men. She hopes Laura is able to communicate with the others, but she speaks to nobody and it makes her have no gentleman caller.

Amanda : I put her in business college – a dismal failure! Frightened her so it made her sick at the stomach. I took her to the Young People's League at the church.

Another fiasco. She spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play whose worn out records (William 1949; 15)

As a very sensitive girl, she is so different from the ordinary girl. She is so peculiar who lives in her own world. She cannot overcome her feeling of being crippled. 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. The glass ornaments for her is one of her escape mechanism from the reality. She has no ability and courage to face the bitter reality as a crippled girl. It makes her different from the ordinary girls and so peculiar.

Tom ; In the eyes of strangers she's terribly shy and lives in a world of her won and those things make her seem peculiar to people outside the house (Williams, 20).

Laura knows very much what her mother needs from her. She knows that her mother likes telling them her experience in her youth time when she had seventeen gentlemen callers. She knows that it will make her comfortable since she can remember her youth. She asks her brother, Tom to let her mother talk about her youth again and again.

As a sister of Tom's, Laura is the one who likes paying attention on her brother. She loves him and she knows what happens with Tom. She knows that Tom is not happy living in the family and working at the warehouse. She notices things around the family and she broods about them. She cries for Tom's unhappiness and frustration (Williams, 14).

Her crying can be her realization that it is her who makes the family lives uncomfortably. She knows that Tom always have a quarrel with her mother. She knows well that all the quarrels stem from her position in the family. She knows that she is only a burden for the family, especially for Tom.

Laura suffers very much caused not only by her physical problem but also by her position in the family and her mother's expectation and hope on her. Her mother hopes that she can develop the charm and vivacity. She refuses the fact Laura is crippled. She expects too much on Laura. She wants her to imitate her behavior and able to adapt in any different situation. She wants Laura get a good husband with a good position in the society without realizing what her daughter is like. She does not realize that she expects too much. Laura who has an inferior feeling, of course, fails to fulfill her

mother's expectation. She cannot overcome her feeling of being inferior, so it is impossible for her to fulfill her mother's hope.

Laura suffers some humiliation caused by her mother. When her mother takes her to the church to meet some young people, she cannot communicate with them and she cannot make friend either. It makes her talk to nobody, and nobody talks to her. Another humiliation on Laura is when her mother sends her to the business college. She cannot manage herself that makes her nervous and sick in her first day.

Actually Laura prefers staying at home more to facing the new environment. She likes staying at the glass menagerie. Unfortunately, her mother does not understand her. She sends her to a new environment that can humiliate her very much.

Laura is different very much from her mother, Amanda Wingfield. Amanda can adapt in various situations and conditions. She can develop her charm and vivacity to attract other people, but Laura's charm is different so far from Amanda's charm.

We can see her real charm when she has Jim O'Connor as her gentleman caller planned by her mother. She can make a warm

conversation with him. She even can forget her physical defect. She does not feel inferior in front of Jim. She can respond him since he responds her differently. She can build her self-confidence and become an ordinary girl as symbolized by the broken unicorn. The broken unicorn loses its horn and becomes an ordinary horse. But the self confidence that she has built is destroyed by the reality that Jim has been engaged with another girl.

Knowing that she has no expectation on Jim anymore that she will never be called again and have no date with him, she returns to her world that she never leaves it. She remains in her unique world with her glass menagerie.

The inferior feeling has prevented her from not only going out and involving herself in her society, but also from trying to talk to the opposite sex who attracts her attention. She prefers to avoid failure talking to an opposite sex when she sees a dressed girl talking to that man.

We also can see Laura's social anxiety when Laura's mother, Amanda, decides that she needs to ask Tom to search around for a potential future husband for her. So Tom invites Jim O'Connor from work over for dinner. Laura refuses to answer them when Tom and Jim ring the doorbell. She asks her

mother to answer it. And she has to beg her mother to do it until for seven times. Until she finally realizes that she has no choice. But when she opens the door and greets Jim, he mentions that Laura's hands are cold. Laura quickly goes to another room to avoid Jim. Her quickly moving to another room is an example of her avoidance. When the dinner time comes, Laura is so nervous and becomes ill. She excuses herself from sitting at the table. It is a common behavior of someone who has a social anxiety.

Conclusion

Laura Wingfield's inferiority complex is caused by her physical defect that one of her legs is crippled. Although not every people notice her leg, Laura thinks that people always notice her when she is walking in front of them. This inferiority complex makes her avoid to socialize in her environment. She withdraws herself from the society and has her own world. Her withdrawal from her society is her escape mechanism from the reality that she cannot face.

Her inferiority complex is also caused by her position in the family. She feels that she is a burden in the family, for both her brother, Tom, and her mother, Amanda. She also has to face the reality that her mother expects to

much on her that she cannot fulfill. That's why she has failed for several times in trying to face her society.

Tennessee Williams has made the character of Laura Wingfield a great literary example of a person who suffers from social anxiety disorder. Laura is the good example of someone who is lack of self-confidence. The term "inferiority complex" is a key element of the extreme shyness of Laura who experiences a social anxiety.

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