



Escapism Reflected in the Character of Tom Wingfield in Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative investigation of Tom Wingfield's escapism in Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*. The author employs a psychiatric perspective to examine Tom Wingfield, the main character's escapism. *The Glass Menagerie* was the primary source for this study, with additional information coming from books, journals of literature, and other sources on the internet. After the writer obtained the collected data, the analysis was carried out. To analyze this study, the writer used descriptive-analytic methodologies. The study concentrated on what makes Tom Wingfield an escapist and what causes him to disengage from his real environment. Tom's escapism is brought on by his boredom with life, his heavy responsibility as the family's oldest child, his lack of the freedom to shape his future, and his mother's dominance.

Keywords: Escapism, Glass Menagerie, illusion, boredom, great depression

INTRODUCTION

The goal of literature is to be read, loved, understood, and used for the benefit of society as a whole. It is a manifestation of a society that is symbolic of life. Human ideals, thoughts, feelings, difficulties, and conflicts are documented in the literature. Literature has a significant impact on readers' perspectives as members of a particular society, demonstrating the close relationship between literature and society. On the other hand, society can provide literature with ideas or inspiration. Literature can serve as a mirror of society, reflecting both its good and terrible aspects. According to Duhan in Fanani and Sumarsono (2021), literature has two different functions in its corrective function: first, it reflects the social ills of the society to help it recognize its errors and make amends, and second, it projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to aspire to others.

Reading literature can be enjoyable and can transport readers from the actual world to their dreams. Our sense of life is also deepened, expanded, and sharpened by good writing. Literature helps us grasp our problems in life and plunges us further into the actual world. Therefore, we can analyze facets of

human existence through a literary work, whether it be a play, poem, short story, or novel.

A drama, also referred to as a play, is a performance of written dialogue (either prose or poetry), on stage, screen, or radio, that depicts fictional or real-world events (Longley, 2019). One of the literary genres is drama, which is created to be performed on stage. The distinction of a drama is that, even after reading it, we are unable to fully comprehend what the play is about unless we try to picture how performers on stage would interpret the text. A drama serves as a stage for the depiction of life. Through conversation and action, it represents life and characters in addition to providing entertainment.

One of the best writers in America is Tennessee Williams, who is highly renowned for his works. He produced several contentious and shocking dramas. He has sensual tendencies and is prone to romantic catastrophe. To cope with the weight of living a life that had been disfigured by psychic confusion, he reshaped his life into art. His characters are all psychologically and spiritually broken, unable to deal with reality. To contrast reality with their world, they create an illusion (Sumarsono, 2019). Tennessee Williams first gained notoriety with "The Glass Menagerie," his most personal play, which offers in-depth insights into his life and familial relationships. Tennessee Williams later cemented his position as one of the most eminent playwrights of the 20th century with his works such as "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (Bermen, 2019).

The South, with characters from the South, is Tennessee Williams' preferred setting. Williams spent some of his most prosperous years in New Orleans, which Leverich notes he always regarded as his "soul home" (Lawler, 2013). The gruff, poker-playing traits that his father possessed can be seen in the character of Stanley Kowalski in his *Streetcar Named Desire*. We can see echoes of his mother and sister in *The Glass Menagerie*. Also visible are Tennessee Williams' challenges and goals.

The Glass Menagerie is set in the city of St. Louis during the Great Depression, a time when everyone struggled to endure the economic downturn brought on by the Great Depression, regardless of where they resided or what class they belonged to (Urban, 2007). In his memory drama *The Glass Menagerie*, William Carlos Williams sought to interpret his tumultuous adolescence and comprehend his family rebellion. The author of *The Glass Menagerie* wanted to capture the challenging circumstances and circumstances that the Americans were facing at the time. The Great Depression, as it is known, was the period in question. The Great Depression led to stock market crashes, mass layoffs, and job losses. People encounter challenges in their difficult life.

One of the first parts of this emotional autobiography is *The Glass Menagerie*, which depicts a hysteric's hauntedness and Tennessee Williams' artistic mastery of it (Lahr, 2013). The family in *The Glass Menagerie* is made up of Amanda Wingfield, the mother, Laura Wingfield, and Tom Wingfield, the son, and daughter. Williams' moving 1945 drama is about a domineering mother and her delicate daughter, a relationship that was influenced by his

mother and sister (Hetrick, 2013). The Glass Menagerie is essentially about how each escape from reality and their true world. All three of the characters have their means of delusion and escape, but Tom Wingfield's escapism is the subject of this research.

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams illustrates the 1930s escapist from the demanding social life. In Tennessee Williams's drama *The Glass Menagerie*, all of the characters—Amanda, Laura, and Tom Wingfield—strive to escape the drab and gloomy reality by withdrawing into their dreams, according to Kullman (2018). The primary topic of *The Glass Menagerie* is escapism, and each of the three main characters—Amanda, Laura, and Tom—finds their way out. Laura uses her glass menageries to tell stories of her former life in Blue Mountain, while Tom uses alcohol and movie-watching to relax (Hoyt, 2013).

Escapism is often viewed as an effort to avoid becoming conscious of one's identity, beliefs, or present reality, which is frequently unsettling in nature. The psychology of escapism considers a crucial factor: the desire to flee may be a reaction to a stimulus, such as stress, danger, or difficulty, but it also may be a planned reaction to emotional survival (Kalia, 2021). According to Seryczyska in Sumarsono, escapism is a way of avoiding reality, as symbolized by the adage about an ostrich burying its head in the sand (Sumarsono, 2021). Escapist is a term used to describe someone who engages in escape (Konzack, 2017). Escapists no longer actively live and actively avoid it in their daily lives. If not, they are attempting to create a version of reality for themselves that is very different from who they are (Happe, 2017).

Every human yearns to disengage from reality occasionally to reset and renew, therefore the desire to flee is natural. Escapism tactics' purpose is to help us cope with situations beyond our control, give people a way to let their imaginations and inspirations run free, inspire and revitalize, provide therapeutic amounts of mental rest to prevent burnout, and help lessen illnesses and anxiety disorders by diverting attention from current worries rather than allowing these issues to consume one's thoughts (Co, 2022). Escapism can be harmful if the person using it refuses to acknowledge the gravity of a situation and instead chooses to engage in denial. According to studies, escapist users frequently experience depression. We may be more likely to have more severe depressive symptoms if we ignore them and don't deal with our problems. Escapism's ultimate objective is the annihilation of the self (Reed, 2017).

According to Evans, there are four different kinds of escapism: avoiding, passive, active, and severe. Avoiding escapism is avoiding reality and challenges in everyday life. Escapism is categorized as passive when it involves activities that don't need effort, such as listening to music, watching TV or movies, etc. In contrast, active escapism refers to switching from the primary activity to an alternate one. The final sort of escape is extreme escapism, which can be hazardous due to drug or alcohol use, roof jumping, etc (Siricharoen, 2019). Tom Wingfield as the escapist in the drama *The Glass Menagerie* is stereotyped as a depressed son who avoids reality and withdraws himself to his world of being a movie audience, and he belongs to the kind of active escapist

since he actively tries to find a change of activity from the dull one in the shoe factory into poetry writing and movies going.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The authors read certain scholarly works to have a deeper comprehension of the play. *The Glass Menagerie*, according to Bahwar (2020), concentrates on something more frightful than social content in addition to societal difficulties. Williams demonstrates to the world that no one can escape reality by merely withdrawing into the world of illusion, and he also demonstrates that the characters' chosen escape mechanism turned into their annihilation. Because of her delusion, Amanda is unable to perceive and comprehend what her children's true dreams are. Laura lacks independence and confidence as a result of her disengagement from reality. Tom is trapped in a shoe factory by his delusion, and he conjures up adventures based on the movies he watches.

Ibrahim is the author of the second piece that the writers read. *The Glass Menagerie* is about freedom and imprisonment. He claims that Tennessee Williams reveals the feelings, suffering, and discomfort of his characters in *The Glass Menagerie* by using symbols, exaggeration, nightmares, and illusions in addition to memories. *The Glass Menagerie* was written by him to depict the horrible lives that individuals lead as a result of failure and anxiety brought on by the environment of the 1930s, during which people went through periods of despair and sadness (Ibrahim, 2018).

The third one is *The Glass Menagerie's* examination of masculinity. Nensia concludes that Tom has fulfilled his responsibility as a son, which requires him to comply with all his mother's commands. Tom must find a way out of his depressive state because of this ailment. Tom struggles to be an independent man as a result of her mother's severe dominance and superiority in controlling her children, especially Tom, which motivates him to leave his family and home for an adventure (Nensia, 2020).

METHOD

The qualitative approach of research, which was based on library research, was adopted by the author in this study. The study's main objective was to examine Tom Wingfield's use of escapism in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. The author also employs the psychological technique to gain a deeper grasp of the issue. One of the four types of escapism that psychology has identified is active escapism, which is what Tom Wingfield was engaging in. The analysis's focus was on Tom Wingfield's escapism and its repercussions on family life, as well as the circumstances that led to the character's particular behavior. The primary sources for the data were from William's *The Glass Menagerie*, while secondary ones came from online journals of English literature, essays, and other sites. To address the issues raised by the study, data were gathered, organized, evaluated, and discussed before being provided to the readers

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tom Wingfield, one of the leading characters in the play, is the son of Amanda Wingfield. He was left by his father when he was still a child. He has a dream to be a poet and an artist and have a lot of adventures. He is described as a frustrated young man who is trapped between two women, his mother, and his sister. He was forced by his mother to work in a shoe factory to earn his mother and sister's living because he is the only man in the family. Since he cannot get what he dreams, Tom becomes to live in his world, his poetry, his dreams, his adventures, his freedom, and his illusion. He is a frustrated man both at home and at work. He works at a disliked job in a shoe warehouse, a job that is different from his dream. He recognizes that he gets nothing from his work. He loses his friends and his creativity as an artist. He does not get any adventures there.

He has many conflicts with his mother, and he wants to be free from her. He does not either want or like to be dominated by his mother. He wants to be free to do whatever he wants to be. He wants to escape from her nagging and instructions in everything he does. He wants to free himself from his mother's domineering instructions such as how to eat, when and what to eat, how to improve his life, and even what to read. Tom, as a son, does not have the freedom to determine his future. He has to listen and obey what his mother wants him to do and to be. His work as a shoemaker at the shoe factory is not his dream. He does it to make his mother happy and to earn a family living.

Tom is a frustrated man who tries to escape from the real world. He lives in his world of illusion that one day he can have an adventure. He believes that once he holds the membership of Merchant Marine, he will be able to experience radical change and adventures in his life. He is going to the movies every night is the other way he lives in his illusion, but, he's going to the movies almost every night as just his escape mechanism from the problems that he faces as his emptiness of life and from his mother's naggings. He's going to the movies to search for adventures. His escapism is the way that allows him to tolerate his dominating mother and stay at home. He withdraws himself from his real world to the world of fantasies and imagination. Tom's going to the movies every night is his way to escape from the dull situations that he must face every day. It is also his separation from his family. Tom does not like his mother who pushes him to follow what she wants. He wants to have the freedom in directing his life and future. He is longing to have an adventure that he cannot do as a shoe worker.

Amanda: Why do you go to the movies so much, Tom?

Tom: I go to the movies because - I like adventure. Adventure is something I don't have much at work, so I go to the movies (Williams, IV, 14).

Tom realizes that he does not have any adventures at his work in the warehouse. He wants to get adventures in his life because he likes adventures very much. He uses his going to the movies as his type of adventure to compensate for his troubled life and his escape from her mother's instructions and commands. Tom realizes that he does not do any real adventures, he is just an audience who is watching the adventures done by the actors in the movies. He is only watching the adventures from the movies rather than living in them.

He realizes that he's going to the movies is only a momentary psychological escape. He never can overcome or solve that condition. He can forget his problems only when he is in the cinema, but after that comes again his problems.

Moreover, Tom cannot build his creative abilities, and his sensibility has been destroyed by his environment, such as his mother and sister, and his work at the warehouse that forbids him to create his creative abilities in writing poems. Tom finds the reality that neither his mother nor his sister seems to reach, that escapism is an obstacle to action. Tom cannot get his adventures if he remains a worker at the shoe factory and goes to the movies every night. He comes to know that he has to act quickly to save his creative abilities and his life. He realizes that if he does not act quickly, he will suffer regret, and unhappiness and his creative abilities are destroyed. He has to act quickly to get freedom and to get his dream.

Tom has the quality as his father possessed. For him, man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts he can get at the warehouse. That is why he goes to the movies in the search of adventures, his escapism. The qualities he has as the qualities of his father then drive him to leave his house and family as done by his father who went on adventures.

At last, Tom follows his father's steps to leave his family to find adventures. He knows from the start that he will leave his family. But his rejection of his mother and sister is not his selfish ego to escape from his trouble. His leaving the house is his escape to save himself. He does not want to be destroyed as a man and as an artist. Before he leaves his family, he invites a friend at work, Jim O'Connor, for dinner and introduces him to his sister, Laura with an expectation that Jim will take his place by marrying Laura, but Jim has been engaged. It shows that Tom still cares for his family, especially Laura. Though he leaves the house, as a normal man he cannot forget his life and especially his only sister, Laura.

Tom; Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes... O, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me but I am more faithful than I intended to be (Williams,)

Tom's escapism is caused mostly by his mother who tries to dominate him. His mother always directs all that he does. This condition makes him feel distressed and has no freedom to direct his own life. He tries to escape from his mother's domination by going to the movies to forget his problems and to see the adventures he always wants to have. His escapism is his way to withdraw himself from the reality that he must face, in which he cannot get what he wants and what he dreams. Going to the movies every night is not enough for his escape, since he does not do the adventures that he dreams of. His biggest escapism is his leaving his house and his family for a real adventure as his father did. His escapism is also caused by the boredom of life that he has. As a shoe worker, Tom cannot develop his creativity both as a poet and an adventurer. He wants to have adventures in his life. He wants to have the freedom to define his life and future without the interference of his mother.

The Glass Menagerie uses movies as the escapism of the character, Tom Wingfield because movies are one of the entertainments that people could get easily at that time. Movies seem to promise to bring real excitement to the audience, but what the movies can do is just temporary satisfaction. People who go to the movies can forget their problems and feel as if they had an adventure, but it is just a fake one, because after the movies are over, the problems are still there waiting to be solved.

Tom, like many Americans, found movies as their place to get excitement. Movies were one of the available entertainments that they could afford. Movies could provide them with various entertainments. By going to movies, they can get different varieties of entertainment that could help them forget their problems. Tom seeks relaxation from his dull life by escaping from reality. His escape from reality drives him apart from his mother and sister. In this case, the permanent separation of Tom from his mother and sister.

CONCLUSION

Tom's escapism is caused by some conditions, namely the boredom and difficult life that he must face, the emptiness and the depression caused by the difficult situation, and the oppression of his mother. Tom, who has his dreams, feels boredom with his life since he cannot achieve his dreams and lives life his way. His dreams are to be a poet and an adventurer, but he cannot make his dreams come true because he must work at the shoe factory as his mother wants to earn his mother and sister's living. The depression is caused by the reality that he is just a shoe worker, not a poet, and has no adventure, and the economic difficulties that he must face during the great depression make him try to find an escape. Tom's escapism is also caused by the oppression and domination of his mother which gives him no freedom to direct his own life and dreams. According to the theory of psychology, his escapism is classified as the active one, since he wants to find a change of activities from boredom in his shoe factory to the world of adventure by going to movies and writing poems.

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