



A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE : STUDY IN ABSURDISM

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Tennessee Williams' plays depict the pathos of human failure in modern age. He has concentrated on the inner/the psychological lives of characters impinged by harsher reality. The characters (Amanda, Blanche etc.) emerge as victims of absurd outward pressures of brutal social realism thereby disillusioning them and shattering them to pieces.

ISSN 2454-308X



The decadence of the Southern myth and its pristine glory rightly subjects its creatures to crushing discomfiture. Robbed of ideal world of illusion, the characters abide a complacent seclusion which leads them to neurosis, frustration etc. Hence Williams' play end on the irremediable plight of creatures of a moribund culture which had, to quote Margaret Mitchell, gone with the wind of the Northern invasion.

Keywords: Decadence, Neurosis, Illusion, Reality, Absurdism

Williams plays are an in-depth exploration of “the now” and “the then”, the bright past/illusion and the dismal present/reality. The central characters in Williams' plays are victims suffering from the insoluble conflict between the illusion and reality. Be it Amanda or Blanche, they find it helpless and difficult to come to terms with the present, the new social order of mass culture and therefore they have to retreat into the world of illusions and the past times. Naturally enough, Williams presents the striking clash between two worlds. Having lost the southern, mythical, illusory life of gentility and aristocracy in the past, the Williams characters appear to be completely misfits in the present scenario of modern, material civilization. The present paper is a critical endeavour to approach Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the light of absurdism. It is a kind of focus on the existential dilemma and sense of nothingness in life of modern humanity characterised by William's characters. The famous philosopher Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* describes the absurd condition of man so beautiful :

In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile... This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

(Camus, 18)

The Williams' characters (esp. heroines) are utterly fade up with the present world and hence they look back to the world of illusion. Sometimes Williams' heroines undergo mounting tension between their mythical aristocracy and natural instincts and this dis-integrates their personality. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a powerful study of the absurd condition of Southern American through the character of the heroine, Blanche Dubois. Appareled in the Southern myths which is “gone with the wind”, Blanche is now subjected to the world of

reality of the North (New Orleans) of Stanley and his friends' violence, theft, immorality, vulgarity, bestiality etc. No wonder, she tries to escape it. She returns to the telephone and calls desperately: "Western union? Yes! I want to – take down this message! 'In desperate, desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trip. Caught in' oh!" But then there is no escape from reality for this creature of myths/illusions. The brutal face of reality in terms of Stanley's intrusion is inevitable. The dramatist gives vivid expressionistic hints at this going-to-happen anarchy:

The bathroom door is thrown open and Stanley comes out in the brilliant silk pajamas. He grins at her as he knots the tassled sash about his waist..... (ASND, 129)

Her broken state of life is very-well depicted by the playwright in the beginning of the play where he talks about the nothingness of life of the heroine while referring to a few lines from the poem of Hart Crane:

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice. (Crane, 135)

The way Blanche is being ill-treated by her brother-in-law (Stanley) reminds us of the protagonist (Stanley) in Harold Pinter's famous absurd drama *The Birthday Party* in which the hero is brutally treated by two intruders claiming that they would give him "special treatment" and they declare: "If we hadn't come today we'd have come tomorrow." (Pinter, II, II)

The same unpredictability and inevitability mark the tragic plight and disaster of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stanley, the brother-in-law of the heroine appears to be a cruel force of nemesis and pronounces the fact that the ultimate doom and destruction of Blanche was predestined and unavoidable. The dramatist shows this supremely unavoidable tragedy so suggestively: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (ASND, 130)

Hence robbed of illusions, Blanche is shown as a disturbing victim of contemporary society. She seems to epitomize the existential crisis of an individual in a callous and unfeeling universe around. As with Hardy's character's (Tess, Jude, Henchard) and Shakespeare's Cordelia, so with William's Blanche "The President of Immortals," to quote Aeschylean phrase (Hardy, 350), seems to have finished his sport and the poor/helpless creatures are crushed by the heavy blows of fate, circumstances and designs of darkness expressed through the amorphous, monolithic and inhuman social system. The dramatist closes his play with profuse dramatic hints that the world of harsh reality of matter-of-fact life survives at the cost of the doom and destruction of illusory and refined souls.

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