

Chapter-I

THEATRE AND SOCIAL LIFE:

Tennessee Williams in Retrospect in Light of Crime and Punishment

Tennessee Williams (1911-83) is a master playwright and a well known personality in the contemporary American theatre. It was Williams who alongwith Arthur Miller, Elmer Rice, Eugene O'Neill and Sydney Kingsley gave a new and fresh life to American literature. Williams ruled the stage since World War II and had the dare to write about the shady areas of human desire which were not taken up by other playwrights. His plays '*A streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Glass Menagerie* are excellently written.

The years between the world wars were years of extremes playwrights like Elmer Rice, Irwin Shaw, Clifford Odest, Maxwell Anderson and Lillian Hellman played very pivotal role in American life nature during that period. Most of their plays dealt with the theme of criminal injustice that the contemporary society was facing. But, after 1945, their career became faint and they could not produce first rate plays. Playwrights like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams took up the mission to nourish the American drama. The quality of drama was taken to the next level.

Tennessee Williams is a great playwright, whose plays are concerned with several controversial subjects as Foster Hirsch wrote:

Nymphomania promiscuity, rape, greed, alcoholism, impotence, homosexuality, profligacy, frigidity, crib fetishism, pedophilia, blowtorch killing, castration, dope addiction, venereal disease, cannibalism, madness, panty fetishism, masturbation, coprophagy: gleefully listed by Playboy, these are the subjects that have preoccupied Tennessee Williams, ...²

He refused to change his method. It is interesting to record that he writes what he wants to write not what his critics want him to write. He is not convinced with criticism of critics. He lives up to his own convictions and beliefs. Those who like may follow him, those who do not care for his play may seek their entertainment elsewhere. To suspect his sincerity is a kind of injustice to his self-styled approach and method of play-writing.

The present study is a modest attempt to analyze the plays of Tennessee Williams through descriptive criticism, which incorporates the critical and the analytical study of the given theme in the representative plays of Tennessee Williams. The thesis analyses the several dimensions of the theme crime and punishment." Before coming on the topic, a retrospection of retroactions becomes essential to deal with. Though the theme of crime and punishment presented by Tennessee Williams is quite different from the authors, Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* attracts our attention first. A Ph.D. dissertation was submitted in Columbia University in 1970 by Nathalie Babel Brown entitled, "A Structural and Thematic Analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in Relation to Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*." The dissertation presents the structure and the thematic

study of two great writers. The point of difference stands that Hugo was writing 'a novel of social protest,' and Dostoevsky, "a psychological novel."³ "Modern German Drama: The Aesthetics of Guilt," another thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota, 1972, by Robert Alexander Bays Jr. shows that twenty two plays written by thirteen West German dramatists between 1958 and 1970 reflect "the preoccupation with the theme of guilt and moral responsibility for the rise of Nazism."⁴ These plays have supplied West German readers the indispensable materials for removing the black shadows of Nazi atrocities and for their concerns with future.

"Guilt and Death: A Thematic Study of Original Sin in Selected Existentialist Literature," a Ph.D. thesis submitted to Indiana University, 1973 by Bernard Joseph Brown presents the analysis of "unspecified guilt-- that is, a guilt which lacks any content, cause, or determinants."⁵ "Some Aspects of Crime and Law in Modern European Literature," a dissertation by Montjoye, Irene, Indiana University, 1975 deals with 19th and 20th century novels and plays which are concerned with crime and punishment and social attitude toward law and sinners. The dissertation also presents psychological tensions and obsessions against the backdrop of social order. The concluding chapter "dealing with crime is related to the underlying assumption that crime is a manifestation of vitality, strength and a superior intellect permitting the individual to escape from the confines of unfulfilling reality."⁶

"Most Miraculous Organ: The Nature of Guilt in Shakespeare," a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1976 by

Cravatts, Richard Louis, examines some of the traits of Shakespeare's " guilty creatures." Basically, the study explores and analyses unconscious elements of the Psychology of Guilt into a manner by which "both conscious and unconscious aspects of Shakespeare's art-- related to guilt and guilty behaviour-- can be understood."⁷ Fabe, Marilyn Michele's Ph.D. thesis entitled "Successful Failures: Guilt and Morality in the Novels of Bernard Malamud," submitted to the University of California, Berkeley, 1976 is a study of psychological undercurrents that destroy the moral surface of Malamud's novels. Thesis also argues that his protagonists are self-renouncing victims of guilt. "The average Malamud here is a chronically dissatisfied, love-hungry individual... Only through expiatory suffering and self-sacrifice can he resolve psychological dilemma."⁸

"The Ritual of Self-Assassination in the Drama of Tennessee Williams," a thesis submitted to Columbia University, 1974 by Matthew, David Charles Cameron is a prominent work on the line. The self-sacrifice is one of the most powerful rituals found in theatre, it may be seen equivalent to suicide. It is one of the most ancient rituals in the world. "In addition, the Christian doctrine of Messianic Salvation through the death of the god is congruent with the pattern of this ritual."⁹ Matthew investigates the psychological bases of ritual, utilizing the research of Jung and Sachs. According to him the heroes of Williams's plays are systematically described as searching artists. "Williams' divine artists have three ways of assassinating themselves in response of this awareness of their slackening powers. They

may cause their own physical deaths, usually invoking fatal violent attack at the hands of others. They may choose the alter of sexual surrender, which is according to some cultures, considered "a fate worse than death". These sexual suicides may become promiscuous or they may marry an obvious inferior. The third method of withdrawal from reality is self-sacrifice on the altar of drugs."¹⁰ In Williams stories and plays "sex' has been of vital significance. Characters have been presented as its victims. "Desire and the Black Masseur," a story by Williams itself presents "very graphically the basic attitude evident in most of Williams' work: that sexual desire is a terribly destructive force."¹¹

Williams's plays have been dealing with number of interesting themes, but the idea of "sex" has been of vital significance in them. In his ideal, sex becomes symbol of freedom and only synonym of life. After the success of *The Glass Menagerie*; he continued to maintain his popular appeal. In some of his plays like *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Rose Tattoo*, a man defeats the force of sterility and frigidity in the woman who has been retired from the life, and awakens her to new life. Rejection of life is a crime and those guilty of it are visited by one kind of punishment and it is presented by the dramatist in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Camino Real*, *Orpheus Descending* and *Sweet Bird of Youth* are a group of the plays, which are centered on the story of innocent wanderers who are really corrupt. "Sexual Roles in the Works of Tennessee Williams."¹² "Tennessee Williams' Women: Illusion and Reality, and

Love,"¹³ "Wanderer Plays (1957-59)¹⁴ and "Tennessee Williams: A Desperate Morality" are also the underlined essays on the line. In the last essay the author critically but briefly divides the plays of Williams on the theme of crime and punishment.

But the present study ventures to highlight the full-length study of crime and punishment as a thematic study of the plays of Tennessee Williams. It is still unexplored area which has attracted me to take up for my degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The purpose of the study is to determine and analyse the change and development in the view of Williams's vision and also to explore and review his theme of crime and punishment. The words "through descriptive criticism" has been added after it which suitably clarifies and erases the methodological ineptitude.

A writer is a child of the time he belongs, and his creation mirrors his contemporary society. It highlights the socioeconomic, moral, spiritual and other prominent traits of the contemporary society which had influenced the dramatic life of the author.

The economic conditions determine the social designs of the period. The first quarter of the century witnessed the prosperity and the collapse of the stock market. The second quarter began with the Great Depression and ended with the great horror of the World War II. The paradoxical events of prosperity and destruction ad profound effect on the American society. There prevailed social and religious unrest which dominated the cotemporary

scenario. Loss of religious faith and moral values spoke the decline of man in society.

Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) with a new discovery of science and emergence of new thoughts played a vital role and it was held responsible for the birth of new theories as opposed to the old religious faiths during the Victorian Age. We can witness the same spirit of enquiry and religious uncertainty, spiritual struggle and unrest which was seen during the half of the century. Man was no longer considered as a child of God, but as a biological baby. Rise of communism in Russia also played a vital role in this field and contributed to the unrest which questioned faith. The new explorations of the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud and the significance of his psychology can also not be undermined which helped to shatter the importance of conception of man. These new doctrines opened the devil of the human mind and revealed the concept to cast away the pious humanity and to accept the sexual and animal instinct of civilization. These were the major influences which accentuated the attitude of writers of the century.

Such factors changed the social relationship and personal behaviour of the people. The young American generation started to follow the Epicurean philosophy of-- eating, drinking and merry making. Modern American society turned into the more demoralized values of deteriorating marriage and physical relationship as Merle Curti described:

The divorce of sex from love and from the large meaning it could have for life and for human destiny seemed to indicate a sick society. Sex had pushed the other values into the background.¹⁶

The rapid industrial growth brought enormous wealth to America and it also brought with itself the unprecedented ills like illegal sexual relations, abortions, homosexuality, late marriage, increased divorces and other similar misdeeds. Women also became industrious, families became smaller, servants became the parents of the children and their childhood was plundered. Increasing independence of women and developing economic condition made them rival of men and battle between sexes made their lives alienated, monotonous, depressing and miserable. Thus, the physical harmony of husband and wife was also shattered. As a result, the people started blaming Marx, Darwin and Freud for their tragedies.

Tennessee Williams is now known as one of the most autobiographical dramatists of the American literature. He is concerned with self and his plays bear his own distinct marks as he confesses:

If the writing is honest it cannot be separated from the man wrote it. Further, he is a dramatist, who wrote anything, knowing it clearly. His presentation is also a part of his own experiences. He accepts that he has not written anything without knowing it very well:

I can't expose a human weakness on the stage unless I know it through having it myself. I have exposed a good many human weaknesses and brutalities and consequently I have them.¹⁸

Above statements clearly signify the importance of the study of his biography in order to understand his plays in better way.

He was born on 26th March, 1911 to Edwina and Charles Cornelius Williams, in the Episcopal rectory of his grandfather in Columbus, Mississippi and was christened as Thomas Lanier Williams. His father was a travelling salesman in a telephone company and mother was the daughter of a Church minister. His father was unsophisticated but his mother was a decent lady of fine behaviour. She was "... a small, bird-like, beautiful young woman, composed and proper to the point of puritanism....."¹⁹

He was the second child of his parents, the first; a sister Rose and the third; a brother Dakin. The marriage of his parents was a failure because his father was busy in his company's work and his mother, being a puritan, proved a difficult pair to reconcile his father. His mother Edwina, therefore, with her two children shifted to her parents. Tom and his elder sister Rose started to grow up in the peaceful atmosphere of spacious rectories with their maternal grand-parents. But the atmosphere around them was sophisticated and good mannered in which they could not adjust themselves. Denied from the normal life, the both children became introverts during their childhood. They found solace in each other; only Ozzie, a black servant, was always at hand to take care of these growing children.

Since their early childhood, the children grew up under the love and care of their mother and grandmother and their father's sudden presence always frightened them. Charles Cornelius Williams saw the effect of his absence on his children; and felt himself as an outsider in his own family. He found a gulf between him and his children. As a result, he started to visit home frequently, but could not fill up the gap and repair the damage already done. The children had turned more affectionate towards their mother than that of their father as Nancy M. Tischler wrote:

Since the Williams children spent most of their time with their mother, it was natural for them to take her side in an intense partisan attached to her.²⁰

In this way Tom's affinity not only with his mother but with the feminine continued to grow with the three generations of the females- his sister, mother and grandmother.

His world became increasingly feminine, and he became negatively sensitized to masculine crudities.²¹

At the age of five, Tom suffered an almost fatal attack of diphtheria, which left him weak, partially paralysed and ended his happy and carefree infancy. He was confined to bed for almost a year. The confinement made him weaker and he became unable to walk even a few steps. During his period of confinement to bed, Williams had company of his sister, mother, grand-parents and Ozzie and the seeds of literary taste emerged in his tender

heart. The grand-parents used to tell him the Biblical stories, mother sang him ballads and Ozzie told the tales from African folklore, which germinated into the soil of his heart at their proper time.

As he recovered his health, he started to go out with his grandfather on visits to countrysides. During these visits he also witnessed the human problems and once met a lady named Laura Young. They grew intimate to each other. Williams later on used her name in his first successful play *The Glass Menagerie*. In this way, we see his plays are the records of those individual struggles which he encountered in his life. Nancy M. Tischler recorded:

The biographical element discloses how intensely personal Williams' art is. Writing for him, is a means of objectifying and universalizing the subjective, individual experience. Out of his milieu-- the contemporary South-- he constructs a microcosm, crystallizing all human experience; he projects his life as a pattern from the frustrations and satisfactions of modern man.²²

In 1918, the family was shifted to St. Louis, when his father was promoted to the post of the sales manager with the International Shoe Company. Williams's younger brother, Dakin was born there in 1919. Sudden change of the place and Charles Cornelius's crude behaviour deeply affected the children's psyche:

From the moment of their arrival, the relocation had a devastating effect on the children, whose gentle, ordered parochial life was at once replaced by a cruder, noisier industrial atmosphere ill-suited both Miss Edwina's social aspirations and to her children's physical frailty.²³

At St. Louis the life of the family was marked with tensions and separateness and Charles Cornelius Williams also appeared as a villain in the family. He had become a person who was drunken, gambled and indulged with women and had lost both time and money. Such kind of father's constant presence in unpredictable behaviour had spoiled the whole atmosphere of the family. Dakin Williams, the younger brother of Williams, describes about the home:

Life at home was terrible, just terrible. By the later 1920s, mother and father were in open warfare, and both were good combatants.²⁴

As a result, Rose and Tom suffered psychologically and turned more and more to each other. The bond between sister and brother became stronger. Rose had also become a fragile and a sensitive girl. They made a collection of glass animals to pay and pass their time. Both of them became the ideal playmates for each other.

The intimacy came to an end when Rose started to learn music led her to join Rubicam Business College to learn stenography till then she attained puberty. Both could not understand each other. Rose thereafter lived in her

despair like Laura of *The Glass Menagerie* and Tom made himself busy in reading books as he described:

At the age of fourteen I discovered writing as an escape from the world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable. It immediately became my place of retreat, my cave, my refuse.²⁵

He used to type his essays, stories and poems himself on the typewriter gifted by his mother on his eleventh birthday. He also won several prizes for his efforts. He won his first prize of thirty-five dollars for his short story, "The Vengeance of Nitrocris," published in the July or August issue of *Weird Tales* in the year 1928, which dealt with the lurid story of legendary Egyptian Queen Nitrocris, when he was only sixteen.

He was forced to drop out after his third year examination and went to work as a clerk-cum-typist at International Shoe Company, where his father was a manager. Though he was not contented with his job, yet he served there for three years. This period was fruitful for Williams in the sense that he had the ample time to read and write and utilize it in a better way. He utilized his time and continued writing all day and in the night. In 1932 he escaped from the shoe factory bungling a big order and passed sometimes with his grandparents at Memphis.

After recovering his health once again, he joined the Washington University, St. Louis in 1937; and completed his graduation from the University of Iowa in 1938. Meanwhile, his second play *The Magic Tower*

was performed by a theatre group at Webster Groves, St. Louis in 1946. At the same year he became associated with 'The Mummers', a small theatrical group of talented artists under the direction of Willard Holland; and began the real life of a playwright. Some of the plays of this apprenticeship period are- *Hear Lines*, a one-actor and *Candles in the Sun*, *Fugitive Kind*, *Headlines*, *Me*, *Vashya!* etc.

Williams passed a little time at New Orleans, and it was a time of his leisure and relaxation. It was also a time of crucial experience as he came in contact of a variety of people with a multidimensional experience like prostitutes, pimps, homosexuals, sailors and tramps who lived in loneliness and despair. Williams connected himself also one of them. He experienced a new world which emerged in his mind and became the prominent part of his creative career that he explained:

I found the kind of freedom I had always needed. And the shock of it against the puritanism of my nature has given me a subject, a theme, which I have never ceased exploiting.²⁶

By the time, Williams had become a well-known personality in the theatrical circles and adopted the name, Tennessee. Perhaps his ancestors who were most prominent during the pioneer days in East Tennessee incited him to adopt this name or he did so to pay them respect and honour. In the same year, he was given a special award for his one-actors called *American Blues*, sponsored by the Group Theatre of New York. The judges were Harold Clurman, Irwin Shaw and Molly Day Thacher. The result of the

Group Theatre Prize was that he found an agent Audrey Wood who worked hard for him. He also won Rockefeller Fellowship of US dollars 1,000 in 1940, which was sufficient enough to work comfortably, to rewrite *Battle of Angels* and enabled him to continue his writing. On 30th December, 1940 the play was produced in Boston by Theatre Guild, but was closed without making its distinctive mark. His short plays even continued to perform well. *The Long Good Bye* was performed by the students at the New School and got the place in the Kozlenko Volume. It was also included in the Margaret Mayorga collections of *The Best Short Plays*, in the publications of 1940, 1941, 1942, 1944 and 1945. Meanwhile he served as an operator of communication machines in the Southern branch of the US Corps of Engineers but was dismissed for bungling messages. But the production of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) brought fame and glory to him and since then he never looked behind.

The Glass Menagerie opened in Chicago on 26th December, 1944 and in New York on 31st March, 1945 which continued for more than one year and his career flowered as he wrote at least one play every two years. *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *The Night of Iguana* (1961) proved to be his most successful plays as Gerald Weals wrote:

These plays not only had longest runs, but the all received the Drama Critics Circle Award and two of them (*Streetcar* and *Cat*) were given the Pulitzer Prize.²⁷

Williams was fascinated towards feminine nature and during his formative years, six females influenced him most. His grandmother, whom he addressed as "Grand" was the first lady among them. She helped him financially during the childhood days and the days of struggle. The second was mother Edwina, a Puritan from the Southern Aristocracy, who was never satisfied in her life. Sister Rose's influence on the dramatist was also indispensable because most of his childhood times were passed with her. The black maid servant of the family who nursed the author during his infancy widened his power of imagination by listening her folk tales. The fifth among them was Hazel Kramer, a school mate at St. Louis. She was the best friend of Tom after his sister. Though both adored each other yet she denied the author's love. Esmeralda Mayes was the prominent female character during his college days and the author used her to write poetry.

The horrors of the childhood experiences were still present in the mind of the author. Williams's early anxieties and despairs proved a real treasure of his experiences of society which became the part of his literature. The most of the characters presented in his plays had been very close to his own life; only their names have been altered; their actions and behaviours stood unchanged. Amanda and Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*; Mrs. Venable and her niece Catharine in *Suddenly Last Summer* are models of mother Edwina and sister Rose; Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* represents his father; Nono in *Night of Iguana* is same as his maternal grandfather; and Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* stands quite

intimate to the author himself. Some of his intimate friends, relatives and prominent personalities like great writers, actors and actresses also participated in his plays. Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* is same like his aunt Bele; Hannah Jelkes in *The Night of Iguana* as Carson McCullers, Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* as Lady Maria St. Just, Princes Kosmonopolis in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Flora Goforth in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* are the modelled actresses' like--- Laurette Taylor, Helen Hayes, Tallulah Bankhead and Diana Barrymore. Esmeralda Mayess's name is given to the heroine of *Camino Real*. Williams himself suffered and struggled like Alma, the heroine of *Summer and Smoke* and his plays are thus autobiographical in vein:

Like Alma, Williams grew up in the rarefied atmosphere of a country rectory which both sheltered and stifled him; and like Alma, he left it for something racier- bohemian life in New Orleans.²⁸

Williams is a sort of writer who makes his intimates the devices to present his feelings and frustrations:

Williams makes constant use of the people he know, the places he loves, the conflicts he feels.²⁹

It is noteworthy that Williams is concerned most with himself and he is always anxious to produce the better plays. Though his characters are the

creations of his auto biographical experiences, yet he gave them a cosmic face.

Williams has utilized his creative power for creating the emotionally complex plays in which he placed his characters with a universal appeal. For example, sex is never simply sex in his drama *Suddenly Last Summer* where "Sebastian Venable's sexual appetite symbolizes cosmic rapacity; his greed, his urge to devour, is but the each of God's relation to man."³⁰

Williams's sexual life was not satisfactory. Most of the ladies who came in his contact either denied his love or were ill-matched. He confessed his sexual affair satisfactory with a girl named Bette only when he was at the University of Iowa. During sixties, he passed a few years with Marion Black Vacarro, a widow, whose husband had expired in 1950. She was five years older than the playwright and travelled with him to Havana and Europe. But sexual relationship with her is not confirmed. Williams's unsatisfied sexual attitude and complicated sexuality is to be seen in his various plays. Like him, Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo* is the great worshipper of sex while Blanche DuBois in *The streetcar Named Desire* is fearful of it. After 1970, Williams openly disclosed his homosexuality with Frank Merlo, whom he had met in New Orleans at a New Year's Eve party, when he had crossed just 28. Both liked each other. He was a decent and an intelligent young chap who was devoted to him. He died of cancer in 1962 which made Williams more desperate. At the last phase of his literary career, Williams wrote a novel *Moise and the World Reason*, which was published in 1975, and it deals with

his sexual confessions. In most of his plays sex has been presented as a medium of private joy, great liberator for the people who pass their lives in isolation. He also mixes sex, death and salvation in his plays that Foster Hirsch observed:

He is a guilty sex singer, an unliberated bohemian, a hip puritan who nourishes his art with his own tangled sexual preoccupations. Like many of his characters, the playwright wants to escape from the burdens of the flesh, and the horror that taunts him is that the flesh may be an inadequate means to deliverance and transcendence.³¹

Some of the writers have deeply influenced Williams and it is pertinent describe them. D.H. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Cracia Lorca, Rimbaud, Rilke, Melville are the foremost writers whose marks can clearly be traced on the works of Williams as he studied them intensively during his Washington years. Other great writers were equally prominent who influenced him during his college days like-- Anton Chekhov, Wilde, Stephen Crane, Dylan Thomas, Irwin Shaw, August Strindberg, E.E. Cummings, Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner, Lillian Hellman, Eugene O'Neill, Henrick Ibsen and Thornton Wilder. The other influences of Thomas Hart Benton, Jean Genet, Poe, Hawthorne and Fitzgerald are also the most formative influences which shaped the intellectual insight of the playwright's mind and spirit.

It is noteworthy to record the principal influences of leading personalities of time upon the playwright. Hart Crane, a poet of the late 19th

century also influenced Williams by his poetic thought. *The White Tower*, a collection of his poems, was the most exciting and influencing for the author; and the volume was always kept by him. Most of the Crane's poetry is symbolical and Williams learnt to use symbols and allegory with great efficiency from him. Williams's use of names for the particular characters and purpose also bears his influence. Hart Crane was a Bohemian artist. He rebelled against his father and left the home town when he was forced to work for him. He travelled aimlessly through various countries but continued his writing. Perhaps their early lives were quite similar. Williams was not only influenced by him in his literary life but he was also fascinated by his homosexual life. "His homosexuality, like Crane's, came to stand for him as an image of a revolutionary contradiction."³² He paid his tribute to Crane by using a stanza from his poem "The Broken Tower," that we could trace as the epigraph in his famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

August Strindberg, the Swedish dramatist, is widely accepted as the father of modern psychological drama who had passed an unhappy life and had witnessed human suffering. Strindberg's characters are facing internal conflicts within them. His plays are concerned with such fundamental notions of sufferings. Williams also stands very close to him and learnt from him to use personal experiences as dramatic materials in his plays. He also learnt the real presentation of music, lighting and sexual conflict from Strindberg. Both accept man as a victim of conflicts and desires. Tischler rightly writes in this context:

Williams and Strindberg see man as a victim of conflicting desires. Although he is driven to the act of sex by nature, he hates himself and his partner for the compulsion.³³

Understanding for the supernatural elements and rebellious attitude also cultivated in the author under Strindberg's influences that Kataria observed, "Strindberg's plays influenced him in everything he wrote but the effect is more clearly felt in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where he is dramatised sexual antagonism, class conflict couched in tense dialogues."³⁴

Richard Vowles' comparative study makes it clear that Williams was influenced by Strindberg in at least three ways:

Williams does write in the Strindberg tradition. In at least three fundamental ways-- in philosophy, dramatic action, and theatrical effect-- he perpetuates and ingeniously elaborates the genius of Strindberg.³⁵

Russian dramatist, Anton Chekhov, was Williams's favourite dramatist and his literary influences were most effective on him. Williams's presentation of society is very close to Chekhov. His presentation of the dying aristocracy of feudal Russia is quite similar to Williams's antebellum South. Bigsby truly found, "Williams pictures a society on the turn. Not for nothing was Chekhov his favourite playwright."³⁶ Williams also admitted Chekhov's use of symbols and art of characterization. Chekhov created psychologically motivated characters, the characters of weak will and

incapable of action, who always suffered in their lives and never had tasted the victory in their lives.

Chekhov had been quite different from the other dramatists of the nineteenth century and twentieth century. He was always conscious of the existential loneliness of the human condition. Central theme of his plays is incompetence of the human being. "He was conscious of man's helplessness before the overpowering forces of circumstance; he was aware of man's littleness, his insignificance in a gigantic and impersonal universe;..."³⁷ Williams learnt all this from Chekhov and used in their plays very nicely. His memorable characters like Laura, Blanche DuBois, Alma and some others are very sensitive and come very close to the characters to *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

In his stories Chekhov has been an optimistic person. Though characters in his stories are pathetic, trying hard to change their destiny. In his study of Chekhov, Williams found a corresponding sympathy for the downtrodden characters. His humanistic approaches left the indelible impression as on the young author. Chekhov has thus been a trustworthy adviser to the author and he has considered him as his "dramaturgic-mentor."³⁸

The influences of D.H. Lawrence have been profoundly deep upon Tennessee Williams and his impact on the life and works of the Williams can clearly be seen. William's plays show Lawrence's concern for liberation of the suppressed sexuality from the societal prohibitions. Rightful significance

of sex in man's life is one of the major concerns of the both writers. Though they did not concentrate on sensuality or animal instincts at the cost of spirituality, yet they neglected spirituality. They have the theme of sex as a common factor. William J. Smith truly remarks, "Tom's great God was D.H. Lawrence."³⁹

Williams has followed not only the theme of the sexuality of Lawrence but also used his art of symbols in his plays in order to expose meanings hidden behind it. We find noticeable similarity in their fathers were equally anti-puritanical while their mothers were highly puritanical and aristocratic. Both writers were quite intimate with their mothers and had common hatred for their fathers; and both the writers are highly autobiographical in their creative motifs.

Williams plays-- *I Rise in Flame*, *Cried the Phoenix* and *You Touched Me!* are dedicated to D.H. Lawrence. When *A Streetcar Named Desire* was first staged; it was understood as a "familiar enough from *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, then still a banned book..."⁴⁰ in which sexuality was the core of the lives of the principal characters. Williams always had feelings of respect and sympathy for Lawrence and had visited his wife Frieda in Mexico after his death.

Rainer Maria Rilke, a German writer, had also been a source of inspiration for the playwright during his college days. He had studied Rilke and found the writer's creative influences to deal with human problems, which the dramatist had shared and experienced during his early days of life.

Henrick Ibsen, a dramatist of Norway, is another author who had dealt with several controversial subjects and Williams stands quite close to him. He was very much fascinated with his drama, *Ghosts*. Williams found his relatives, as the real characters of social struggle and it became the social setting of his dramas.

We can witness the emotional attachment of the author towards Scott Fitzgerald that Williams has displayed in *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980), a play of his last phase of life. Williams found Fitzgerald's image as his own face and personality.

William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams stand very close in presenting the characters from the contemporary society and culture. Laura Wingfield is accepted as the part of the same culture.

It was the full-blossomed period of Eugene O'Neill, when Williams entered the American dramatic scene. Naturally, the playwright lived through experiences and influences of the greatest dramatist of the country and his characters are close to those who suffer and destroy themselves that Heilman witnessed:

Their chief common ground is the portrayal of men and women who suffer disaster, who destroy themselves or move toward self-destruction,..41

Both the dramatists are very similar in dealing with their major themes for they select suffering, frustration and disintegration of personality as their

favourite concerns. But O'Neill's dealing of the subject is universal while Williams is personal and individual. Though Williams learnt expressionistic technique from O'Neill yet he surpasses him in using symbolic presentation and poetic touch. O'Neill influences are clearly seen on the plays like- *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Cat on Hot Tin Roof*, *Camino Real* etc. in his treatment of themes and dramatic art.

The sexual hysteria is the great concern of Jean Genet that Williams has followed in the tradition of Southern Gothic. IN his several plays Williams presents isolation, alienation, of Gothic setting and horror. Foster Hirsch has truly written, "Mixing sex, death and salvation in beguiling contradiction, Williams is something of a Southern version of Jean Genet."⁴²

Another Southern Gothic writer, a friend and contemporary of Williams was Carson McCullers whose influences could not be overlooked. In his language and dramatizing Southern society, history and romantic characters, Williams's approach is quite similar to McCullers. When Williams read *The Member of the Wedding*, a novel written by Miss McCullers first time, became very curious to meet its author. Though she was married, yet had passed the unsatisfied life. His meeting with McCullers cultivated another frustrated experience as they were not only intimate to each other but were also a critic of each other's works. Williams not only dedicated his *Summer and Smoke* to her but also extended his affections and every support to her during her days of psychic suffering caused by over alcoholism.

Williams accepted her 'sister-woman' image and she remained in author's mind forever, though she died in 1967.

Another Southern Gothic woman whom Williams liked, was Diana Barrymore. Williams found her a fragile personality like his sister Rose and also like himself. He found himself a wounded man like her. In social life she was an actress and had worked in his *Suddenly last Summer* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Princess Kosmonopolis, a character in *Sweet Bird of Youth* is modelled after her.

Marion Black Vacarro was a lady who came in contact with Williams in 1940, when he was just awarded Rockefeller Fellowship and was working on his *Battle of Angels*. Williams hired her cottage and she assisted him while he was writing the play. He dedicated his *Orpheus Descending* as a token of love and involvement to her.

The writers and the relatives as discussed earlier have definitely contributed to Williams's creative career and shaped his sensuality. They decidedly changed and coloured his view of life and behaviour. But he is widely known as the disciple of Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, D.H. Lawrence, Eugene O'Neill and Hart Crane who rebelled against social, political and moral standards of their contemporary society and culture and who experimented new themes and techniques in their works.

Apart from it, Williams is a regional playwright who has incorporated the traditions of Southern "Renaissance" and he follows the form and content

of William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom that they have established in American drama. His use of Southern history and myth is highly sentimental. According to Foster Hirsch:

A major influence on Williams as a creative artist has been precisely his attraction to Southern "style" -- to that world of languor and refinement and sensual indulgence which for him are synonymous with the antebellum South. Brass beds, overhead fans, family mansions, suffocating heat, tropical plants-- these aspects of the Southern scene permeate the plays, giving the dramas the exotic texture and lush sense of place for which they are famous.⁴³

Williams is regarded for his distinguished merit in American dramatic scene after Eugene O'Neill, but he is equally criticised for diverting his talent for popular success, and preoccupation with sex and violence. But, he is neither the first writer who has used violence and sexual perversion in his works nor these are new for the literature. These materials have existed in literature since the birth of the drama in Greece. But Williams is a writer who has made sex as the symbol of freedom, the great liberator, the only valid manifestation of religion and of love, and the only synonym with life. His display of sex and violence, drug and alcohol addicts, abnormal and disagreeable characters as well as love and sacrifice are the serious viewpoints of the contemporary American society, culture and its ultra-modern code.

Williams has been a realist about human beings and his emotional sentiments. As a result, his plays have affected the audience and a forceful emotional experience to be remembered. He focused on every significant area of human experience and behaviour but did not write the psychological drama in the conventional sense. He is psychologically sound in his choice of characters and their speeches. Gerald Weals writes, "That I suppose is a way of saying that he can create character when he wants to, can put real frogs in his imaginary gardens."⁴⁴

Williams's imaginative faculty and shaping of experiences are closely related to the romantics. He uses the symbols and the images in the manner of romantic poets, especially to express the fading beauty of a young woman." He is also fond of drugs and self-destruction like romantics as Bigsby writes, "Williams had the romantic's fascination with extreme situations, with the imagination's power to challenge facticity, with the capacity of language to reshape experience, with the self's ability to people the world with vision of itself."⁴⁵

His plays are the portrayals of the characters living in deteriorating circumstances, and with records of ill-fated people, crushed by the cruel society. The characters whom he puts before us are people in trouble, without hope of helping themselves and unhelped by others. Their circumstances and antecedents drive them to take right or wrong paths. Benjamin Nelson writes, "if there is tragedy in Williams' work, it is the tragedy of circumstance rather than character."⁴⁶

In presentation of helpless individuals, he is closely associated with the Greek tragedians who displays role of fate as an important phenomena for the downfall of the hero. While dealing with Aristotle's *Poetics*, R.A. Scott James writes, "Tragedy demands for Aristotle... at least some fateful hinge of fact and circumstances on which the action moves."⁴⁷ In Williams's plays the "necessity' becomes the source of tragedy for helpless characters which compels them to commit sins or guilts.

As a dramatist, Williams has had a sharp eye to select his theme and characters. He is a famous dramatist for working on a variety of interesting themes. His success of *The Glass Menagerie*, instigated him to use the brilliant card of sexual excitement and his works, therefore can be viewed as the windows of rape, castration, cannibalism and other bizarre activities. The characters presented in the plays are lonely, forgotten, poverty-stricken and misunderstood.

In his plays, Williams has a universe of man's transgression from physical mutilation to spiritual realisation. Naturally, the transgression is sexual and the punishment caused by it is more severe than the transgression. It is human nature to be corrupt and he gets punishment for the acts of his corruption. In his plays Williams characters are fighting against the worldly forces and are being defeated. Blanche is destroyed by the sexual transgressions of her past; Val Xavier, Lady Torrance and Carol Cutrere, by their involvements with the sensuality; Brick Pollitt's catastrophe is rooted in his suspicion of his own inadequacy and the inadequacy of his best friend

Skipper; and Alma Winemiller is victim of her incompleteness. Continually in Williams, the characters struggle to transcend their courage, beauty, and gallantry, but in vain.

The playwright has mirrored the world in his plays and his characters are creations of their moral stands and considerations of life which govern their actions. The circumstances, environment, antecedents weaken their defences and their culpability. Williams is also a typical moralist whose virtues are governed virtuously by allegiance to the sexual impulse. Life-force is one of the vital and significant themes in his plays and its rejection becomes a kind of crime. The wanderers who appear to be innocent also deserve punishment in his plays because they are homosexuals, heterosexual and spread an aura of guilt.

The great dramatic star, not of only America but of whole World, disappeared from the literary sky on the night of 24th February, 1983. The playwright also eclipsed but left liquor, cocaine and other intoxicated capsules on earth to lament. According to the pathological report, the overdose of soothing drugs choked his throat and he died of suffocation. It is a case of suicidal defeat of man in world of guilt and punishment. He himself is Satan, hero of his hell.

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