

Intellectual Investigation of Illusion-Reality in Selected Works of Tennessee Williams

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REVIEW ARTICLE

A frequently recurring theme in Williams' plays relates to illusion-reality. Illusion and reality are the two poles on which his plays often turn. Francis Donahue says, "Behind Williams' outer dramatic world of sex, violence, neuroticism, homosexuality and personal frustration, lie such basic themes as the conflict between reality and illusion, the destruction of sensitive by the insensitive and the human corrosion wrought by time" (Preface).

'Dialectic' is derived from Greek root *dialektike*, which in its etymological sense means logical disputation or an argument pertaining to discourse. The origin of term dialectic can be traced back to ancient Greek thought. Socrates' conception of dialectic was the use of argument in order to make the opponent contradict himself, with the result that Socrates would resolve the contradiction and be able to move to a true definition of concept. In *The Republic*, Plato considers dialectic as the highest level of knowledge, a stage in which opposition and contradictions have been overcome. Hegel has presented the most detailed theory of dialectics. According to Hegel, dialectics is the synthesis of opposites. Every concept, as we think about it, begins to show us its limitations, and passes over into opposite, into the very negation of itself. Hegel labels the first concept as 'thesis' and the second concept as 'antithesis'. When we think through this conflict, there emerges the thought of a new concept, which will resolve the conflict, retain what is true and valuable in each of them. This third concept he calls 'synthesis'. The process of dialectic has three stages. The process moves from first stage (thesis) to a second stage, which opposes and contradicts the first (the antithesis) and the opposition is overcome by a third stage, in which a new concept (the synthesis) emerges as the higher truth. Synthesis cancels the conflict between thesis and antithesis. It preserves the element of truth within thesis and antithesis. It transcends the opposition and sublimates the conflict into a higher truth. The generating of contradictions

and their synthesis is the very nature of the rational thought and thus of reality itself. Dialectic is both an essential character of reality itself and the method of understanding reality.

The word illusion refers to deception and delusion. It is seeing of something that does not really exist. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines illusion as, "The action or an act of deceiving the bodily or the mental eye by what is unreal or false, deception, delusion, befooling. (b) The fact or condition of being deceived by false appearance, a false conception or idea, a deception, delusion and fancy."

It defines reality as, "The quality of being real or having an actual existence."

In illusion, the person deceives himself by believing what suits his convenience and which is removed from reality. Collin's Concise Dictionary defines illusion as "a false appearance or deceptive impression of reality, a false or misleading perception or belief, delusion. Psychology: a perception that is not true to reality, having been attired subjectively in the mind of perceiver."

And defines reality as "The state of things as they are or appear to be, rather than as one might wish them to be."

So illusion is an opinion based on what we think is true or should, rather than on what is or will be.

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, defines illusions as, "Illusions are terms formulated to describe subjective (perceptual) experiences that contradict objective 'reality' as it is defined by general agreement among people. Such experiences are not necessarily signs of psychiatric disturbances; they are or have been regularly and consistently reported by virtually everyone." Illusions occur when percipient is deceived in identifying the object perceived. It can be due to the psychological processes that underlie the perception.

After illusion, we would like to see the word 'reality' as conceptualised by Plato. Plato opines that reality is dualistic in nature. There is the reality of physical objects in space and time, which are objects of senses and which are in flux, growing, decaying and changing, as Heraclitus' river. There is another kind of reality, the reality of concepts, ideas, forms or essences which are objects of thought, like the idea of a triangle and are not in space and time. The property that its internal angles add up to 180 degrees is universally true and unchanging. This can be known by reason. This is the truth which Parmenides claimed, that reality is permanent and unchanging. This is the other aspect of reality. One is that which is perceived by the senses and other is that of ideas which are knowable by reason.

In philosophy, Plato illustrates his dualistic theory of reality with the help of famous allegory of the Cave, at the beginning of Book VII of *The Republic*. Plato's allegory, which is about the nature of reality and man's relationship to it, describes the human condition as analogous to that of a group of prisoners chained to a wall in a cave right from their childhood. They have never seen the light of the day or the sun outside the cave. As Plato says in *The Republic*:

Their legs and necks in chains, so that they stay where they are and look only in front of them, as the chain prevents their turning their head around. Some way off, and higher up, a fire is burning behind them and between fire and prisoners is a road on higher ground. Imagine a wall built along this road, like the screen, which showmen have in front of the audience, over which they show the puppets (207).

Along the wall people walk carrying all sorts of things, which they hold so that these project above the wall-statues of men, animals, trees. The prisoners, facing the inside wall, cannot see one another, or the wall behind them on which the objects are being carried- all they can see are the shadows of these objects cast on the wall of the cave. The prisoners live all their lives seeing only shadows of reality, and the voices they hear are only echoes from the wall. But the prisoners cling to the familiar shadows and to their passions and prejudices and if they were freed and able to turn around and see the realities which produce the shadows, they would be blinded by the light of the fire. And they would become angry and would prefer to regain their shadow world.

But if one of the prisoners were freed and allowed to see, in the light of the fire, the cave and his fellow prisoners and the roadway, and if he were then dragged up and out of the cave into the light of the

sun, he would see the things of the world as they truly are and finally he would see the sun itself. What would this person think now of the life in the cave and what people there know of reality? And if he were to descend back into the cave, would he not have great difficulty in accustoming himself to the darkness, so that he could not compete with those who had never left the cave? How he would resist the notion that what he had experienced in the cave was not the substance but merely the shadow, not reality but only illusion.

The people in the cave are living their lives in semidarkness, chained by their necks and legs, never knowing that what they see before them on the wall of the cave are only shadows. They are ignorant of reality. It is an allegory of our time as it emphasizes the need to be born again, to emerge from the darkness of corruption into the light of truth and morality.

Similarly, some of the characters of Tennessee Williams fashion an idealistic fiction to replace the frustrating reality. The playwright wants to hammer home the fact that human life is full of illusions and it is rather difficult to free it from all illusions. Illusions, though hazardous, provide a shelter from the hard facts of life. Illusions are saving graces and these provide soothing balm to the injuries inflicted by reality. Without illusion, life will appear to be exacting and excruciating forcing the individual to undesirable extremes. But one cannot shut one's eyes to the reality.

As Bigsby says, "The real world exists. Indeed, Williams's characters are neurotically sensitive to their surroundings. They display an almost Keatsian sensibility. The world presses on them but they react with a nervous gesture, a lie, a dream, anything that can hold the real at bay" (Critical 54).

O'Neill's plays also deal with the tension between illusion and reality and again and again, these plays emphasize the fact that romantic illusions are destructive. In his plays like *Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christie*, *The Iceman Cometh* and others, his characters are carried away by same 'romantic ideal' which in the long run destroys them. He shows the destructive possibilities of the romantic ideal. O'Neill's main focus was on what happens to the individual soul when it is lost between the realms of reality and illusion. So his characters live in the divided world, the one of reality and the other of imagination. They are torn by their illusions and the grim reality of the surroundings.

After O'Neill, Williams and Miller dominated the American theatre in the post War phase. As Bigsby says, " Miller and Williams both locate their characters

in the same no-man's land, stranded between the real and the imagined, the spiritual and the material, a discordant present and a lyric nostalgia" (Critical 45).

Their characters cannot adjust themselves in the modern world. They fail to adapt themselves to the surroundings of their environment. Both Miller and Williams, as Bigsby says:

Write about failed adjustments. They both run the risk of sentimentalizing the misfit. The individual who cannot adjust to the new materialism is celebrated and deplored simultaneously. He or she is associated with a simpler, and indeed, as both writers admit, even a simplistic model of society. Theirs is thus a tainted lyricism. Indeed such characters are often seen as verging on the psychotic. The fault lies not only with the system which destroys them but also with the individual who clings to myths and dreams discarded by history. Thus what is wrong with society, in Miller's view, is not that capitalism has betrayed some organic relationship between people or between the individual and his setting, but that capitalism has betrayed its own principles. (Critical 11).

The modern materialism was grinding the people with blind fury. The people were groaning under the effects of urbanization and industrialization. Tennessee Williams' characters suffer the same fate and find themselves marginalised. To quote Bigsby, "They are romantics in an unromantic age. Their strength lies in their imaginative power at a time when the imagination is itself under assault by rationalism and by materialism" (Critical 31).

The advancement of the science had led to the alienation of man. The commercialized, industrialised, mechanized and urbanized age was leading to the spiritual decay and disintegration of the man. The people were caught between the two worlds. The old order had not died yet completely and new world had not taken its roots deeply. The people harboured the illusion of the past in their minds and faced the reality of the present. So they were caught in the dual existence of the past illusion and the present reality.

Tennessee Williams himself was living in the dual world of illusion and reality. Man's work is a necessary part of his personality. It is an extension of his ego. Tennessee Williams has drawn heavily on his personal experiences. Not only the experiences that have gone into the making of these plays are real but even the characters and situations are real. His parents, his sister, his friends and his own self are the prototypes of the characters in his plays and they are moving across the canvas of his plays. His characters, like him

are divided between the world of reality and illusion.

Tennessee Williams himself believed in illusions as his English teacher found him "not socially inclined towards the group... his grades were average, there was no evidence of brilliance in his work, I fear he was not well adjusted. Tommy belonged to another world" (qtd. in Donahue 5). The other world was that of illusions and not of realities. "At the age of fourteen", Williams relates, "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 refuge" (qtd. in Donahue 6).

Now we shall take up two plays, *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Rose Tattoo* to discuss the dialectics of illusion and reality, because the characters of these plays oscillate and vacillate between illusion and reality.

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play. All the characters of this play cherish illusions in their lives. The characters in the play are: Amanda Wingfield, the mother abandoned by her husband, daughter Laura who is physically and mentally crippled, son Tom, a young man with dreams and a gentlemen caller named Jim O' Connor. The drama takes place in the mind of Tom who is both actor and narrator of the play.

In the play, Tom Wingfield nostalgically and wistfully recollects his past before the outbreak of the World War-II. He lived in St. Louis with his sister Laura and mother Amanda. His father, who worked with a telephone company, deserted the family leaving Amanda to fend for herself and the children. The single incident in the play is that Tom brings home his friend Jim O' Connor to meet his sister Laura and unfortunately Jim is already engaged to someone else. This drama of illusion begins with Tom's opening words: "Yes, I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeve. But I am opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in pleasant disguise of illusion." (Glass 234)

In this play, all the characters indulge in illusions. As Bigsby says, "In *The Glass Menagerie*... the fragile and the vulnerable are seen to be as much victims of their own dreams as of the implacable force of the real and the unforgiving rhythm of modernity" (Critical 52).

Amanda cherishes the illusion of golden days of her youth. As she exclaims to Tom and Laura, "One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain – your mother received- seventeen!- gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to

accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the parish house". (Glass 237)

Amanda thinks that she was sought after by the gentlemen as Ben Brantley says that she considers herself as "the beau besieged belle of her girlhood" ('A Menagerie' E1+). Amanda's mind is there in the traditional South with the Mississippi Delta planters but her body is in St. Louis. There is duality of body and mind as conceptualised by Descartes.

She makes forays into the past. Her obsessive and compulsive fixation on her past, comes into play time and again. Amanda thinks of the vanished golden age and her past. These gentlemen callers were, "some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta- planters and sons of planters". (Glass 238)

Past casts its shadow on the present and future. She tries to recover and recapture her lost past. She makes repeated excursions into her past. She looks wistfully to the past that has been sweetened in her memory. She recalls her comfortable and luxurious days, when she was leading an aristocratic life of the plantation. Later she tells Jim O' Connor, " Well in the South we had so many servants Gone, gone, gone. All vestige of gracious living! Gone completely! I wasn't prepared for what the future brought me". (Glass 285)

It proves that she is nostalgically addicted to the past and is not ready to face the reality of her St. Louis tenement. She thinks: 'I am what I was'.

As Bigsby says, "So, Amanda's present, in which she exists on the margins of society, surviving by pandering to those whose support she needs, is contrasted to a past in which, at least on the level of memory and imagination, she was at the center of attention" (Modern 40).

Amanda weaves a cocoon of delusions in order to survive. If she accepts the reality of alley apartment with all its dreariness and absence of hope, she will perish. So, she deludes herself with her conquests of the past. Constant references to the past are meant to compensate the indignities of the present. This is her defence mechanism.

Williams describes Amanda as, "A little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place... Amanda having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions." (Glass 228)

Though Amanda lives in illusion yet she does not

ignore the realities of life. She can never overlook the dingy reality of St. Louis. She is the only person who is trying to keep the family together after her husband's desertion. As Tischler says, "The mother, Amanda Wingfield is trying to hold the family together and steer her children into more practical paths than those she has followed herself, for she is a disillusioned romantic turned evangelical realist" (Rebellious Puritan 94).

She believes in existential philosophy. To quote Lavine, "Existential philosophic stand point...gives priority to Existence over Essence" (328). It signifies that man does not have a nature that determines his modes of being and acting but that, rather, these modes are possibilities from which he may choose and on the basis of which he can project himself. There is infinity of his aspirations and finitude of his possibilities. As possibility, human existence is anticipation, the expectation, the projection of the future. The future is fundamental temporal dimension to which, the present and the past are subordinate. Existence is always stretched towards the future. As Rita Colanzi says, "Williams' drama is existential in its presentation of humanity as alienated beings trapped in meaningless universe"(451).

She has to face the hard and harsh reality of the world by selling magazines to her friends. For paying Laura's business college fees, she has to work in a department store. To quote Bigsby, "Williams, like William Faulkner, acknowledges the seductive yet destructive power of a past reconstituted as myth. At the same time she knows that compromise is necessary. Survival has its price and Amanda is one of Williams's survivors. She survives, ironically, by selling romantic myths, in the form of romance magazines, to other women" (Entering The Glass Menagerie 38).

Amanda is making all out efforts to make Laura settle in her life. She is trying to give her the best possible education. Amanda cautions her daughter that she has seen, "such pitiful cases in the south-barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife! Stuck away in some little mousetrap of a room!—encouraged by one in-law to visit another-like birdlike women without any nest-eating the crust of humility all their life". (Glass 245)

When Laura says that she is crippled, Amanda advises her not to worry about the physical defect. It's not noticed by others. It's her psychological problem and it is her own illusion and she encourages her by saying:

Laura, I have told you never, never to use that word. Why, you are not crippled, you just have a little defect—hardly noticeable, even! When people have some slight

disadvantage like that, they cultivate other things to make up for it— develop charm— and vivacity— and charm! That's all you have to do! She turns again to the photograph. One thing your father had plenty of — was charm. (Glass 247)

She may be having the gravitational pull of the past but she is worried about the future of her children. She makes 'plans and provisions' that result in laying a trap for the gentleman caller by arranging a dinner for Jim. When Jim confesses that he is soon to marry a young girl, he has courted for some time, all her plans end in a smoke. Amanda tells Tom:

That's right now that you've had us make such fools of ourselves , the effort, the preparation , all the expense! The new floor lamp, the rug, the clothes of Laura! All for what? To entertain some other girl's fiancé! Go to movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go to the movies...Go then! Then go to the moon...you selfish dreamer. (Glass 312)

She is not only worried about Laura but she is worried about Tom also. As Fambrough Preston remarks, "She labors grotesquely to mold the lives of her children into American success stories through nagging and moralizing" (100). In the beginning of the play she lectures Tom on table manners, then she does not allow him to read D.H. Lawrence's book because she considers that immoral. She confiscates Tom's books and when he protests, she replies, " I took that horrible novel back to the library-Yes! The hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence—I can not control the output of the diseased minds or people who cater to them. — BUT I WON'T ALLOW SUCH FILTH BROUGHT IN TO MY HOUSE: NO,-NO,-NO,-NO,-NO". (Glass 250)

She is worried about her son and when he gulps hot coffee, she gives a very practical piece of advice to her son, "I know, but it is not good for you. We have to do all that we can to build ourselves up. In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is — each other." (Glass 258)

She may be defeated but she is not destroyed. So Amanda vacillates between the world of illusion — when she was young- and the world of reality- which is her present. The past is her refuge from present — it is her romance in the rough and tough reality.

Delma E. Presley is of the opinion that all the characters are caught up in illusions of their making and build up their lives on insubstantial promises of deception. It is Amanda "who always seem to reap the

bitter consequences of deception by her husband, by Laura (in going to the zoo instead of business school), by Tom (in using the light bill money to join the merchant seaman) and even, unwittingly, by the gentleman caller" (qtd. in Griffin 26).

Tennessee Williams says in the production notes, "Amanda, having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions, but Laura's situation is even graver". (Glass 228) Laura is completely illusion-ridden character in the beginning of the play. She comes in contact with reality for a short while and again she surrenders to the illusions.

She lives in a world of her own making. The world appears cold and cruel to her, as that is the way her mind has made the world appear. The perceiver determines the object of perception. It seems that she is the follower of Kant's philosophy where the mind gives its own laws to nature...its own laws in the form of its own necessary concept which organises all the sensory materials and not the other way round, where nature gives its laws to human mind as advocated by Hume, in his theory of sense impressions. In Kant's philosophy, the object is always the creation of the subject. In this, what counts is the way our minds interpret the things and not the way the things are in themselves.

Laura, girl in glass, moth like girl is a tender and shy girl. She lives in a world of her own, away from the real world. Her world is the world of fragile glass animals and worn out phonograph records. Though she is beautiful yet she is fragile. Alvin Klein calls her, "emotionally and physically fragile" (In a Daunting Role CN6). She is a girl with a limp and suffers from an inferiority complex. She tries to protect herself from harsh and hard real world by retreating into her own world of illusions. She cannot participate into the real world of human relationships. She had to drop out of high school because she failed in the test and could not summon up enough courage to take the test again. She was so shy in the school that she could not speak to anyone, not even to her best friend Jim O' Connor, who called her 'Blue Roses'. Blue roses are not found in nature. Like them, Laura could not exist in a real world.

After her school, she was admitted in Rubicam's Business college. On the first day, while taking test, she vomited. She could not face the real world. So, instead of attending the business college, she started whiling away her time in the park, zoo and museum. She told a lie to her mother because she could not afford to face the awful suffering look on her mother's face.

As Bigsby says, "Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie* stands as paradigm of the culture of which she is a part. The world of modernity, the dance hall and the typewriter, is outside of her experience. Vulnerable, she chooses instead a world of myth, symbolised by the glass unicorn" (Modern 32).

She was out of place in the real world because of her shyness and sensitivity. Her world is the world of phonograph records and glass animals, who are fragile like her. Laura goes to phonographs to find escape from the pressure of earning a living in the commercialized world. As James Reynolds says, "Technology" "succeeds" in providing escape from the hard realities of life rather than easing the economic, political and social problems of the time" (525). Like the prisoners in Plato's cave allegory, who see only the shadows, Laura sees only her glass animals and phonograph records. She is unaware of the real world like the prisoners in the cave. She indulges in illusions about Jim also. When Jim comes as a gentleman caller to her house, she is shy to open the door even. She cannot talk to Jim and is upset to eat dinner with him.

For a short while, she comes into contact with reality in the last scene when she comes out of the shell of her illusions with the help of Jim. When Jim observes that Laura's main problem is her lack of confidence in herself, he tries to instill confidence in her by telling her to think of herself as superior in some way.

David Rooney comments, "Jim's attention towards Laura should prompt a surge of hope of this forlorn broken woman locked in her make believe world of glass animals" (*The Glass Menagerie* 48). Then he asks Laura to dance and during the dance, unicorn is knocked to the floor, she says that it doesn't matter but earlier in the play, when something was broken from glass menagerie, she felt wounded. This is the change which has been wrought by the touch of reality. Losing the horn of unicorn Laura thinks it to be a 'blessing in disguise' because it makes unicorn more like other horses. The gentleman caller says, "The different people are not like other people, but being different is nothing to be ashamed of. Because other people are not such wonderful people. They're one hundred times one thousand. You're one times one! They walk all over the earth, you just stay here. They are common as-weeds, but-you-well, you're Blue Roses!" (*Glass* 304) Jim is trying to encourage her and uplift her spirits by saying that she is unique. As Tischler comments:

Laura contrasts with the normal, middle class, realistic Jim with whom she dreamily falls in love. Their views show their complete diversity. For example, when they discuss her favorite animal, the unicorn, Laura thinks

of him as intrinsically different from his companions, while Jim sees him simply as a horse with a horn. In the same way, Jim sees the defect in Laura's leg as only unfortunately incidental to her normal body while Laura feels that flaw transforms her whole being (*Rebellious Puritan* 100).

After that he sweeps her up in his arms and kisses her gently but then he realizes his mistake. But Laura is transformed. She looks up smilingly. Her looks grow brighter even. This is her touch with reality and then Jim explains about his fiancée Betty. Again there is look of desolation on her face. She hands over the broken unicorn to him as 'A Souvenir'. Griffin has rightly remarked:

Williams conveys the desolation that such a shock would wreak up on a fragile mind by giving Laura only three more words of dialogue in the final scene, she places the unicorn in his hand as 'A Souvenir'... and utters "Yes", when Amanda wishes the hastily departing Jim good luck. Laura's reversion to an even greater withdrawal is indicated by her posture, visibly shrinking from the hurtful reality toward which she will never again venture (32).

Laura exists in existential vacuum in which a person doubts that life has any meaning. This neurosis is characterized by loss of interest and lack of initiative. Hence she sees her own life as meaningless and falls into existential vacuum and feels the inner void.

Laura is out of tune with the modern times like her mother. As Boxill says, "Amanda and Laura Wingfield, mother and daughter, one an anachronism and other a recluse, are only two of the many incarnations of the faded belles which are Williams' hallmark, colourful butterflies transformed by cruel time into grey moths" (34-35). Both Amanda and Laura are misfits in the modern realistic and materialistic society. They cannot keep pace with the time. They are anachronism in the modern American world. After her bitter experience with reality Laura again surrenders herself to illusions. As John Gassner says, "Williams grants these unfortunates the shelter of illusions as it pains him to know that the world is less tender" (*Dramatist of Frustration* 2).

Tom has a dual role in *The Glass Menagerie*. He is the narrator as well as the actor. As narrator he speaks at length about reality and illusion. Tom, as a character, is also illusion ridden. He is a romantic trapped by reality. His job and his family responsibilities have clipped the wings of his romanticism and adventure. Jim calls him Shakespeare, because he is fond of writing poems even in his office.

Right from the beginning of the play, Tom is trying to escape the reality of life. He pushes away from the dining table because Amanda is lecturing on table manners. Amanda has no sympathy for his "creative labour", i.e. his writing and reading. What he has to do is the reality of his life and what he intends to do is his dream and fantasy. He tells his mother, "I am leading a double life, a simple honest warehouse worker by day, by night a dynamic tsar of the underworld". (Glass 252)

He feels that he can't realize his potential as an artist until he escapes the warehouse job. He is not accepted by the fellow workers because he wrote poetry on the shoeboxes. At this, Amanda says, "What right have you got to jeopardize your job?" To which Tom replies:

You think I'm in love with the continental shoemakers?... Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains... than go back mornings! I go! Every time you come in yelling that God damn! *Rise and Shine !Rise and Shine!*. I say to myself, How *lucky dead* people are! But I get up... I give up all that...I dream of doing and being ever! (Glass 251-52)

When gentleman caller arrives, there is light failure because Tom has paid his Union of Merchant Seamen dues with the light bill money. So for the sake of his illusion, he has denied the reality of life. When Amanda criticises Tom for not being aware of the gentleman caller's engagement with some other girl, Tom replies, "The warehouse is where I work, not where I know things about the people." To this Amanda retorts, "You don't know things anywhere! You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions." (Glass 311) After that Tom smashes the glass and goes to the illusory world of movies.

He thinks that he will be able to discover himself in the world of adventure and travel. As Gordon Rogoff says, "Williams, on the other hand moves his characters almost ceaselessly because he has to. Perpetual motion, in his case, is also an attitude" (87). He harbours the illusion that by joining Merchant Marine and sailing to all parts of the world, he would be able to realize himself. To develop as an individual, he has to break away from the family responsibilities.

But he loves his family. He cannot afford to shatter the illusions of mother and sister. They have great expectations of him. Tom tries to go for the door and throws off his coat which shatters the glass animal and Laura cries as if wounded. Tom comes back to the room to comfort Laura. It shows that he can't escape

without shattering Laura. His body acts on the dictates of his mind as described by Spinoza in the concept of duality and he leaves the home.

Tom brings Jim O'Connor as gentleman caller for his sister after Amanda agrees that he is free to go, if there is somebody to take his place. But this too proves to be a fiasco as Jim deserts Laura. At the end of the play, Tom escapes both the confines of his warehouse job and the responsibilities of his family. He deserts his family. But he could not escape completely from the bonds of the family. As a narrator he says, "I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!" (Glass 313) His sense of guilt at his desertion of family, pursues him like Orestes' Furies as he travels the world. As a narrator Tom says:

The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly colored but torn away from the branches. I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something.... Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass... I passed the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. (Glass 313)

The memory of the sister is still haunting him as Brian Parker comments, "Laura's retreat to a private world of glass reflected in Tom's theatrical obsession with the past and his conscious cruelty of abandonment mirrored in the guilt, she returns to him... as two aspects of the 'comforter-betrayer' syndrome" (420). In the end, he realises that he has betrayed his sister who was in need of him. But ultimately that responsibility is the source of accomplishment and anguish for him. As Bigsby says:

His became a dark world which could no longer be lit up by the clear light of political commitment or an assertive moral passion, but only by the brief sparks of imagination or the reflective glow of a past which he chose to invest with an energy and radiant truth in which, in other moods, he could not bring himself to believe (Critical 47).

His sister's touch is the touch of reality that brings back an escapist dreamer and adventurous person from the world of his airy, fairy high flown illusions. His illusions are like the waves of ocean which when strike against the rock of reality are shattered. Tom learns that there is no escape from reality. As Donahue says, "Ultimately there is emotional shipwreck of three sensitive people" (26).

Jim O' Connor is described by Tom as, "The most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from." (Glass 235) His illusion is the American Dream, which is Horatio Alger myth: any person with average intelligence and proper training can achieve anything. It is the 'rags to riches' path of the nineteenth century America. Jim has this illusion. He thinks in terms of money and power. His ambitions and aspirations are very lofty. To realize his ambitions and aspirations, he attends night school and course in public speaking to be eligible for an executive position. He is a believer in 'the cycle democracy is built on'. He thinks that all men are created equal, everyone is just like any one else, only better. "Why, man alive, Laura! Just look about you a little. What do you see? A world full of common people! All of'em born and all of'em going to die! Which of them has one-tenth of your good points! Or mine! Or anyone else's, as far as that goes-gosh!" (Glass 299)

Jim O' Connor appears to be a character from the allegory of the cave of Plato. He is unaware that he is living with illusions and superficial knowledge. His life is dominated by shadow play on the walls of his cave made by newspaper headlines and endlessly moving shadows on the television screen, by echoing voices of the opinion makers. He takes for truth whatever is known by the senses. He is unaware that he too is living in illusions. Jim is futuristic and he focuses his life on the future, always attempting to become more, to learn more, to experience more of life. He acts and thinks while looking forward.

He is harbouring the illusion of American dream that he can be anything in his life. He also labours under the delusion that by taking course in radio engineering, he would be able to get in to the television industry and go to the top. Brett Ashley Crawford remarks, "Jim, a good natured aspiring capitalist, accepted the end of his past high school glory as he looked forward to his future in radio" (309). But, in reality, he has to do the job in the warehouse. As Rita Colanzi says, "Tom Wingfield's introduction and accompanying screen legends – 'The High School Hero', 'The Clerk' – make us mindful that gentleman caller too has gone beyond his youthful glory" (457). Like Wingfields, he must be protected by illusion from a harsh world that prevents the individual fulfillment.

So all the four characters are vacillating between illusion and reality like the Western philosophers of dualism who are alternating between dualism and monism. Human life is full of illusions and it is difficult to free it from illusions. Illusions provide a shelter from the hard and harsh, rough and tough realities of life for a short span. Amanda, Laura and Tom fail in their

lives.

There is a fifth character, who is the father of Tom and Laura. He does not appear on the scene except in his larger than life photograph over the mantel. Tom says about him, "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town....The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words. "Hello-Good –bye!" and no address". (Glass 235)

So father too was illusion ridden, he deserted the family without realizing the responsibilities of the family. For the sake of his adventure and for the love of long distances, he left the family in lurch to fend for itself. He was so afraid of the reality that he did not even leave his address to his nearest and dearest ones. This genetic defect was transferred to Tom in inheritance who following the footsteps of his father fell in love with the long distances. As Bigsby says:

His image dominates the room but he has long since escaped. And so, too, have those he left behind, except that what he has achieved in space they have sought in time, turning, like Amanda, to the past or, like Laura, to the timeless world of the imagination. So, too, has Tom, who, as a putative writer, perhaps scarcely needs the physical escape which leaves him with the sense of guilt that makes him reconstruct the events which constitute the play (Critical 41).

The difference between the father and the son was that father could break the bonds of his family without any guilt but Tom could not shatter the shackles of the family. To quote Bigsby:

But all of Williams' characters are crippled in one sense or another emotionally, spiritually... and out of that imperfection there comes a need, which generates the illusions with which they fill their world, the art which they set up against reality. Like Laura's glass animals, however, those illusions and that art prove fragile (Critical 48).

The other play, in which the central character, grows out of illusion to face the reality is *The Rose Tattoo*, which is a tragic comedy about a Sicilian- American woman Serafina, who is a seamstress. The word Serafina comes from fine nights and Williams had actual saint Seraphina in mind when he named his heroine. She is a woman passionately devoted to her husband, Rosario. As the play opens, she is waiting for her husband. Just before dawn, the priest and black shawled women gather before Serafina's house to tell

her that Rosario is dead. Against the customs of Roman Catholic Church, she wants Rosario's body to be cremated and not buried. For the next three years, she keeps a flame burning at the marble urn containing Rosario's ashes. She remains faithful to him even after his death. But she learns that her husband had an affair with a woman Estelle and had been unfaithful to her. After confirming the truth, she seizes the marble urn and hurls it violently into the farthest corner of the room. She yields herself to a truck driver named Alvaro. He has the body like her husband but his face is like that of a clown. Serafina tells Alvaro that her husband had a Rose tattoo on his chest and on the night when she conceived, she saw a rose tattoo on her breast. When called for dinner, Alvaro comes with a rose tattoo on his chest to win over Serafina and his trick works and she submits herself to him physically. Her own daughter, Rosa to whom she has been sermonising on sex gets disgusted and rushes out of the house.

After the death of her husband, Serafina Delle Rose, the heroine of the play, lives in a world of illusion that her husband, Rosario was faithful to her. She fondly recalls, "My husband was a Sicilian. We had love together every night of the week, we never skipped one, from the night we was married till the night he was killed in his fruit truck on that road there!". (Rose 155) To the priest Father De Leo she described the pure relationship she had with husband Rosario Delle Rose, "I give him the glory. To me the big bed was beautiful like a religion". (Rose 173) She considered Rosario's love making as a sacrament, "I am satisfied to remember the love of a man that was mine- only mine. Never touched by the hand of nobody. Nobody but me! Just- me!" (Rose 156-57)

She was so much in love with her husband that when she conceived, she saw a rose tattoo on her breast which her husband had on his chest. She is cherishing illusion about rose tattoo also as she says, "That night I woke up with a burning pain on me, here, on my left breast! A pain like a needle, quick, quick, hot little stitches. I turned on the light, I uncovered my breast...On it I saw the rose tattoo of my husband!". (Rose 137) When she learns that her husband has been killed in an accident while delivering narcotics hidden under bananas, she is shocked.

In spite of the instructions of her priest Father De Leo, Serafina gets her husband cremated so that she can preserve his ashes in the marble urn with her forever. She spent three years worshipping those ashes under the illusion that her husband was faithful to her. Even her daughter makes fun of the illusions of her mother. Rosa says:

Mama! -I'm so ashamed I could die. This is the way she goes around all the time. She hasn't put on clothes since my father was killed. For three years she sits at the sewing machine and never puts a dress on or goes out of the house, and now she has locked my clothes up so I can't go out. She wants me to be like her, a freak of the neighbourhood, the way she is! Next time, next time, I won't cut my wrist but my throat! I don't want to live locked up with a bottle of ashes! (Rose 148-49)

This was wife's piety for her husband. As Ben Brantley says, "Serafina the stormy Sicilian seamstress sequesters herself from life in a haze of memories of her husband's sexual prowess" (Upbeat C11+). In scene 5 of Act 1 she tells the man crazy Bessie and Flora of her love for Rosario, "I count up the nights, I held him all night in my arms, and I can tell you how many. Each night for twelve years. Four thousand-three hundred- and eighty. The number of nights I held him all night in my arms. Sometimes I didn't sleep just held him all night in my arm. And I am satisfied with it. I grieve for him". (Rose 156) But soon the reality shows its face. Her dreams are destroyed and her illusions are shattered when she learns from Flora and Bessie, two female clowns of middle years and juvenile temperament who have come to take their polka dot blouse which Serafina was sewing for them, about the infidelity of her dead husband. These women were going to the American Legion convention "Where they drop paper sacks out of hotel windows on girls and the Legionnaires even caught a girl on canal street! They tore the clothes off her and sent her home in a taxi." (Rose 154).

Serafina can not contain herself and says, "You two ladies watch how you talk in there. You are sitting in the same room with our Lady and with the blessed ashes of my husband". (Rose 154) And asks them to get out on the streets. Retorting, they tell her that Rosario was a thief and an adulterer. His affair with Estelle was not one night affair but it was a romance as Flora says, "It was a romance, not just a fly-by-night thing, but a steady affair that went on for more than a year". (Rose 157) It came as a bolt from blue for Serafina. Flora further says that Estelle was so gone on him that, she went down to Bourbon street and had a rose tattoo put on her chest.

Serafina rushes at the two with broom but they run away. Not willing to believe their story, she turns to her statue of the Virgin and asks for a sign. Unable to face the reality, she goes to Father de Lio who admits reluctantly about Estelle and refuses to reveal Rosario's confessions. Taking the hint from Father de-Leo, Serafina in her desperation attacks him with her

fists. The neighbourhood women pull her away. She admits her fear before Alvaro that her husband had not been faithful to her. Alvaro suggests to call Estelle Hohengarten directly which she does and learns the real truth. The reality finally dawns upon her. After this, she allows her daughter Rosa to go for a picnic with her boy friend Jack. But before allowing them, she forces Jack to swear before the shrine of the Virgin and asks Jack to respect Rosa's innocence.

Serafina indulges in day dreaming and her reverie is interrupted by Alvaro, a truck driver who has come to her house after a scuffle with a salesman. As Bryer and Hartig say, "Alvaro is an anti-romantic suitor, reminiscent of clownish bumbling lovers in the plays of Russian dramatist Anton Chekov" (405). Serafina notes that he has the body and appearance of her husband with the head of a clown. Serafina offers to mend his torn jacket while he washes up. When she learns that he too drives a banana truck, like Rosario, she believes that he is the sign she prayed for. By the evening there is a complete change in Serafina. As Serafina says to Alvaro, "[In a strident whisper.] You make out like you are going. You drive the truck out of sight where the witch can't see it. Then you come back and I leave the back door open for you to come in. Now, tell me goodbye so all the neighbours can hear you!". (Rose 202) It is with the implied consent of Serafina that Alvaro comes back again to have physical relations with her.

As Tischler remarks, "Serafina, with her dream blasted, is left without any reason for pride or purity. She sends Alvaro out the front door noisily and welcomes him in the back door secretly, turns out the lights and relaxes for the first time in three years" (Rebellious Puritan 172). To withdraw herself from life and live like hermit in the four walls of the house, worshipping the ashes of her husband was her illusion. To yield and submit physically to Alvaro is her reality. As Bigsby says, "Thus, Serafina is freed of her obsession with death (in the form of ashes of her dead husband Rosario) by a man whose sexual directness has none of the destructive overtones of Stanley Kowalski's" (Critical 73).

With the hope of love again, she casts away her illusion and is ready to face the reality of life and is ready to make love. As Kolin remarks, "Serafina graduates by throwing off the bonds of the past, which enshackled her in buffoonery, and accepts the love and promise of the future" (226). Illusion about her husband's fidelity leads her to psychotic withdrawal. Reality about his infidelity brings her closer to life and she discovers herself. As Griffin says, "Serafina rejects death for life, abstinence for love, isolation for

community and barrenness for pregnancy" (113). Serafina cherishes the illusion that she married a baron. In conversation with Alvaro she says:

SERAFINA. I was a peasant, but I married a baron!- No, I still don't believe it! I married a baron when I did n't have shoes!

ALVARO. Excuse me for asking- but where is the Baron, now?----

SERAFINA. Them' re his ashes in that marble urn. (Rose 181)

But the reality is that Rosario was a thief who used to smuggle narcotics hidden under bananas. Even her friends make fun of her illusion regarding the Baron in scene IV, when she does not open the door, Peppina tells to call her "Baronessa" and she will answer the door. She lives in the illusion of past. Rosario's uncle was a Baron; she is a Baronessa. She loves this lie because it sustains her illusion of the beautiful past.

Serafina harbours the illusion about 'Rose' also. Rose is considered to be a love producing object. It often draws a lover to a beloved, but Williams, has reversed the roles here. In *The Rose Tattoo*, it draws woman to the man, for Williams the rose is a symbol of love and this symbol is there in the play throughout. Serafina's husband Rosario had a rose tattoo on his chest. Serafina tells Alvaro that the night she conceived, she saw the rose tattoo on her breast. That was her illusion and Alvaro taking advantage of her fondness for the rose tattoo, goes and has a rose tattooed on his chest in reality to win over Serafina. Rose for Serafina was emblematic representation of both sex and spirituality. He tries to exploit her illusion of rose tattoo to his advantage in reality because he wants the economic security in the household of an older physically developed woman like Serafina and in the love of the woman. Again Serafina feels the burning of the rose on her breast and thinks that she has conceived.

Folklore associates sexual power with roses. By eating a rose a woman can conceive. In the play, under the illusion of rose, Serafina conceives twice in reality, once by Rosario and second time by Alvaro. Both the times, once in the beginning and the second time at the end of the play, she had the illusion of rose on her breast, when she conceived.

She has the illusion of protecting her daughter Rosa from sexual abuse. She does not like the love affair of her daughter with Jack, a young sailor. She does not allow the lovers to meet. In order to ensure their separation, she conceals Rosa's clothes so that she

may not go out to meet her friend and is confined to four walls of the house. This confinement in the house does not allow her to take her final exams at the school too. As Serafina says:

You know what they do at this high school? They ruin the girls there! They give the spring dance because the girls are man-crazy. And there at the dance my daughter goes with a sailor that has in his ear a gold ring! And pants so tight that a woman ought not to look at him! This morning, this morning she cuts with a knife her wrist if I don't let her go!-Now all of them gone to some island, they call it a picnic, all of them, gone in a boat. (Rose 173)

Her teacher comes to the house and tells her that she has been allowed to graduate because of previous good record. While going for graduation, Rosa tells Serafina that she looks disgusting. These words compel her to introspect.

When Rosa brings Jack to meet her mother and to ask for permission for their picnic with the graduating class, Serafina forces Jack to his knees before the shrine of Virgin and makes him swear to respect her daughter's innocence before allowing them for picnic.

But in reality, she learns that she has been cuckolded by Rosario. She herself sets up the shrine of her husband and advises her daughter not to trust the boy. Rosa and Jack come back early in morning. Rosa made it difficult for Jack to keep his promise, he had made before the shrine. After the departure of Jack, Rosa sleeps on the couch.

Alvaro stumbles into the living room and finds Rosa. Rosa cries in fear, which brings Serafina in the room. Belittled and ashamed before Rosa, Serafina tries to prove that Alvaro is a housebreaker, but she can't fool Rosa. Now Rosa is bent upon joining Jack to fulfill her love before he leaves. Alvaro too goes out of the house from the front gate, disclosing his love affair.

Rosa's attempt to run away with Jack Hunter is successful because Serafina has come out of the illusion. She no longer creates hindrances for Rosa and Jack. Philip C.Kolin has rightly remarked:

Although Serafina lives in her own world, a victim of her dreams, the affinity with Williams' earlier female characters is tenuous. Serafina is much more adaptable than, say, Blanche Dubois. Serafina throws off deception in time to marry Alvaro. But it is too late for Blanche and her Alvaro (Mitch) whom she loses too soon and wants too late (227-28).

In Serafina's case, existence is taking precedence over essence. She is free to make her choice and is responsible for her act. She resolves the duality of body and mind. Spinoza has maintained that both body and soul constantly interact and influence each other. She steps out of the cloistered existence after realizing the truth about her husband's infidelity and her body responds to the dictates of the mind by physically yielding to Alvaro.

Serafina extricates herself out of illusion to accept the reality and adapts herself for the future. So this play is a comedy in praise of sex and song of Earth. Though in the initial stages, Serafina was seeking refuge in the illusion but ultimately she comes out of her illusions to face the reality of life. She realizes that you can't lead a life on the basis of a memory. The life has to move. She comes out of her self-imposed cloistered existence and starts living her life like a normal person.

The theme of illusion and reality is found not only in the above mentioned plays but in other plays also. Blanche in *A Street Car Named Desire*, like Laura and Amanda cannot face the reality and tries to live in the world of illusion. She is a sensitive and cultured woman from a decaying Southern family. She has lost the family estate Belle Reve that is a French word, which means 'Beautiful Dream'. She has a false sense of gentility. She has come to her sister's place, which is two room lower class flat. Her illusions and airs of superiority about a the Southern gentility are punctured by her brother-in-law Stanley when he probes into her past and asks her whether she knows somebody by the name of Shaw and whether she has been visiting the Flamingo Hotel. After that he exposes her chequered past. Blanche has been visiting the hotels with men who wanted only night's pleasure. Then the hotel management stopped her entry into the hotel because she became 'a town character'. She was dismissed from the school because she was involved with a seventeen-year-old boy of her school at Laurel. Blanche was physically exploited by the soldiers who were getting their training in the army camp near Laurel. She also kissed the newspaper boy who had come to the house for the fund collection and called him a Prince out of *The Arabian Nights*. Blanche seeks relationship with the boys because she feels guilty about the death of her young husband, Allan Grey. Blanche's moment of crisis occurred when she came to know about the homosexuality of her husband and in a moment of disgust she drove him to suicide. She cannot face the reality of the role, which she played in the suicide of her husband. She herself confesses to her sister Stella that because of the financial constraints, she had been running from one man to another for the last two years. It was not possible for

her to lead a blameless life because men tried to take advantage of her.

Stanley not only exposed Blanche's past to her sister Stella but also to his friend Mitch with whom she was dreaming of marriage. After learning about her promiscuous past, Mitch is no longer interested in marrying her but is ready to spend the night with her. This she takes as an insult and turns him out of the house. Stanley thinks that she feels herself superior to him and considers him as an animal, savage and sub human. To make her realize that she is the same being, a sexual animal, he rapes her, which wrecks her life.

Unlike her sister Blanche, Stella is a realistic woman. For her, 'self' is supreme. She does not think of Belle Reve, like her sister. She is totally committed to her husband. She tells Blanche on the day of her arrival that she can't stand it when Stanley is away from home even for one night, and that when he is away for a week, she nearly goes wild. When Blanche expresses her disgust with Stella over Stella's quick reconciliation with her husband after the fight, Stella replies that there are things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark- that sort of things make everything else seem unimportant.

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